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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL SHEET

This Honor's thesis entitled

"A Rethinking of the Social Gospel and its Implications
for the Church in Modern America"

written by

Kyle M. Wiggins

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for completion of the

Carl Goodson Honors Program

meets the criteria for acceptance

and has been approved by the undersigned readers

April 15, 1994

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SENIOR THESIS COMMITTEE

Dr. Terry Carter, first reader

Dr. Jeff Pounders, second reader

Dr. Bill Ellis, third reader

**This Senior Thesis
is dedicated in memory of
Dr. Jim Berryman,
1935-1993.**

that strange thing and the social
conditions that cripple them is a
spiritually unfulfilled religion
awaiting burial."

Martin Luther King, Jr., 1966

“Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them and the social conditions that cripple them is a spiritually moribund religion awaiting burial.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr., 1960

A Rethinking of the Social Gospel and its
Implications for the Church in Modern America

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INTRODUCTION

Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) wrote in *Christianity and the Social Crisis* that the

Church has a tremendous stake in the social crisis. It may try to maintain an attitude of neutrality, but neither side will permit it. If it is quiescent, it thereby throws its influence on the side of things as they are, and the class which aspires to a fitter place in the organization of society will feel the great spiritual force of the Church as a dead weight against it. If it loses the loyalty and trust of the working class, it loses the very class in which it originated, to which its founders belonged, and which has lifted it to power. *If it becomes a religion of the upper classes, it condemns itself to a slow and comfortable death.* (330. Italics added.)

Those prophetic words were written at the turn of the century, at the height of the Industrial Revolution in the United States. However, the words continue to haunt the Church almost a century later. Once again, the United States faces a social crisis similar to the one about which Rauschenbusch wrote in 1907. The Church in America is at a turning point in her history. This author believes, like Rauschenbusch, that the future health of the Church in the United States depends primarily on how it responds to the growing sense of class consciousness in the United States, the dichotomy between “them” and “us,” the “poor and lazy” and the “thrifty and productive.”

Churches are responding in a number of ways. Politically conservative churches have chosen to limit their focus to a few scattered social causes, namely abortion, homosexuals, and prayer in schools. They generally take the traditional position that the United States is a great land of opportunity, where all have an

equal chance at success. Thus, those who do not succeed are either “unmotivated” or “lazy.” To them, society is functioning well. The social problems that do exist are neither the result nor the fault of the system and its institutions. Therefore, the blame lies with the individual, and thus the primary focus of the church should be on the individual.

Then, of course, there is the Prosperity movement within Christendom which sees material wealth and success as a byproduct of individual holiness and rightness with God. The poor are somehow spiritually inferior and therefore do not receive the same blessings from on high as do the chosen.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are the more liberal churches which tend to take the blame off the individual and place it on society. Therefore, when confronting the issues of AIDS, homosexuality, or teenage sexuality, the focus is not on individual behavior, but on how society responds to those individuals. Thus, homosexuality is no longer viewed as an unnatural lifestyle. The problem is how society views and treats the homosexuals. Teenagers are no longer encouraged to abstain from sex; now they are encouraged to protect themselves.

This senior thesis is reactionary in nature, both against the extreme emphasis on the individual and the extreme “de-emphasis,” if you will, on the individual. Like the Greek philosophers of old, the author seeks to find the Golden Mean somewhere between the extremes. The author has found that mean in the historical Christian movement known as the Social Gospel, a movement that was both biblical and social in nature. The Social Gospel recognized a healthy balance between the individual and his/her society. Evil and the potential

for good were recognized in both. The Social Gospel attempts to eradicate the evil and bring out the good, not only on the level of individual redemption but also on the level of societal regeneration.

This thesis will attempt to do many things in a small amount of space. First of all, the Social Gospel will be examined, focusing on the writings of many adherents, but especially the “Father of the Social Gospel” in the United States, Walter Rauschenbusch. This section will include a brief biography of Rauschenbusch, as well as an examination of his theology and selected writings, and a brief history of the Social Gospel in the United States.

The next section will deal with selected urban ills to which the Social Gospel responded at the turn of the century, as well as some of those concrete responses. Then, in the final section, selected contemporary urban problems will be examined, along with how the Church can respond today, using the framework provided by the Social Gospelers a century ago.

WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH

According to Walter Rauschenbusch, the individualistic gospel that so characterized American Protestantism throughout the 19th century

has not given us an adequate understanding of the sinfulness of the social order and its share in the sins of all individuals within it. It has not evoked faith in the will and power of God to redeem the permanent institutions of human society from their inherited guilt of oppression and extortion. Both our sense of sin and our faith in salvation have fallen short of the realities under its teaching. (*A Theology for the Social Gospel* 105)

These words contain the essence of theology for Walter Rauschenbusch, the

“Father of the Social Gospel.” Rauschenbusch earned this reputation for several reasons, the primary being the fact that he was the first to give the movement a written systematic theology, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*. This, his last book, was written before his death in 1918 so that young Christian reformers at the turn of the century could ground their thought “more fully on the foundations of the Christian faith” (Minus 186). For Rauschenbusch, the most sacred of foundations was the Bible, for he was “more of a biblical theologian than he is given credit for having been” (Stackhouse 45). It was, of course, his method of biblical *interpretation* which alienated and continues to alienate him from many within Christendom. Rauschenbusch was a proponent of historical criticism, in which interpreters understood the Bible only as much as they understood the “historical and social conditions from which it emerged” (Johnson 135). For Rauschenbusch, the “more historical the analysis of Jesus, the more social the gospel of Jesus became” (135). Rauschenbusch found historical-criticism methodology indispensable. Through this method, personalities of the Bible could be seen as they really were. In describing the life of Jesus, Rauschenbusch said that

He had stood like one of his pictures in Byzantine art, splendid against its background of gold, but unreal and unhuman. Slowly and still with many uncertainties in detail, His figure is coming out of the past to meet us. He has begun to talk to us as He did to His Galilean friends, and the better we know Jesus the more social do His thoughts and aims become. (*Christianity and the Social Crisis* 46)

Thus it was the Bible which produced principle concepts for Rauschen-

busch, such as the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Evil, and social solidarity, which included other concepts such as societal transmission of right and wrong (Marney 15-16). It is important that we understand the central concepts of Rauschenbusch's theology, for these will provide a foundation for this author's work. As we examine his theology and the societal problems he encountered, historical analogies can be drawn to our own urban problems in the 1990's. Then these Social Gospel principles can be applied to our own modern experience.

The Life of Rauschenbusch

Born on October 4, 1861 in Rochester, New York, to August and Caroline Rauschenbusch, Walter became the only surviving male born to the couple, and his father wrote that he hoped "God will make a Christian and a preacher out of him, a Rauschenbusch and a man of deeds" (Minus 2). August Rauschenbusch had served as a missionary to German immigrants in Missouri, and in 1858 became a professor in the German Department at Rochester Theological Seminary.

It was from his family that Walter gained a "profound personal piety, a love of learning, and a sympathy for the oppressed and a sense of mission" (Stackhouse 76). Although his parents had been German Lutherans, they converted to the Baptist faith upon their arrival in the United States. From his parents Walter learned a deep love for the Baptist faith, as well as German thought and culture. Walter decided to become a minister in 1879, and in 1883 he entered Rochester Seminary. During summer vacations, he worked as interim

pastor in a small German Baptist church in Louisville, Kentucky.

During his years at seminary, Rauschenbusch became intrigued with higher criticism. One of his favorite professors was William Arnold Stevens, who taught New Testament at Rochester. Stevens approached the Bible from the same perspective as he would classical Greek literature (Minus 39). During this time Rauschenbusch went through what he called “the travail of religious unsettlement” (40). Eventually, the resolution of this unsettlement, a conflict between his old “common evangelicalism” and his new critical thinking, was an alignment with a growing number of liberal thinkers at Rochester, whose thought and works were labeled by their critics as the New Theology (40). Upon graduation, Rauschenbusch was one of the six students chosen to deliver addresses.

Rochester’s president, Augustus Strong, and other professors expressed their concern that Walter had moved out from under Rochester’s traditionally conservative wings. Still, they were also proud of him, for he was articulate, intelligent, and a servant of Christ. Within two years, they would invite him back to teach German in the German Department at Rochester (48).

In the meantime, however, Rauschenbusch began his ministry at the Second German Baptist Church on New York city’s West Side, near the edge of “Hell’s Kitchen.” Boatloads of immigrants had swelled New York’s population to 1.5 million, making it the world’s second largest city. Four-hundred thousand of these were German immigrants. Still, only five percent of the entire population belonged to one of the city’s four-hundred Protestant churches. There were five German Baptist churches in the city, and the congregation that called Rauschen-

busch numbered around 125. With an annual salary of around \$600 and a \$300 annual rental allowance, Rauschenbusch, in near poverty, was able to live out his deepest convictions of self-denial and minister like Christ to the poor and abused (50).

During this time of serving a working class congregation of German immigrants, Rauschenbusch felt himself unprepared by his classical theological education for dealing with the social problems that confronted him in one of New York's worst slums. While at Second Church, Walter was ordained and married Pauline. His congregation had also swollen to around 350 Sunday school members. Also during this time, Rauschenbusch and five other like-minded Baptists formed the Brotherhood of the Kingdom, a "gathering of kindred souls who offered to each other the encouragement and the exchange of ideas on current social and religious issues" (Johnson 132). For a short time, that group published a small journal entitled *For the Right*.

After celebrating ten years at Second Church, Rauschenbusch felt compelled to return to the faculty at Rochester. He remained on the faculty there from 1897 until his death in 1918. During his first decade at Rochester, Rauschenbusch dedicated himself to the basics of teaching and publishing articles. In 1902, he moved from the German Department to the English Department, where he became professor of church history.

Rauschenbusch's Writings and Theology

In 1907, with the publication of *Christianity and the Social Crisis*,

Rauschenbusch's standing in the scholarly community changed dramatically. *Christianity and the Social Crisis* was reprinted several times, was translated into foreign languages, and finally sold over fifty thousand copies. Westminster Press printed another edition in 1991. Johnson writes that "this work accounts for the sudden and dramatic acclaim afforded (him)" (133).

According to Minus, the "chief force of *Christianity and the Social Crisis* lay in the cogency of Rauschenbusch's plea for Christians to undertake the task of creating a new social order" (159). He built his case upon three arguments. The first of these was an attempt to persuade Christians to rethink their understanding of the Christian faith. Here, like so many times before, he returned to the life and teachings of Jesus. Rauschenbusch saw Jesus as following in the same vein as the ancient Hebrew prophets, whose purpose was to "raise the collective life of their people into the paths of justice and mercy willed by God" (159). Jesus was a totally new type of human being. His was an effort to live out the Kingdom of God in which love triumphs over all obstacles. He also calls on us down through history to struggle like him for the realization of Kingdom principles in this world.

A second part of Rauschenbusch's case was that significant rewards would follow for the world and for the church if it recovered its social mission. To Rauschenbusch, the western world had come to be dominated by an economic system that victimized everyone that it touched. Workers, while losing their dignity, received less, and owners, taking more than they deserved, suffered the loss of their own dignity which makes life so human. For Rauschenbusch, the

only way to prevent a collapse of western society was for the people to realize how immense the crisis had become and that a united effort must be undertaken to create a just and humane society (160). The church will benefit from such a renewal of social concern. For years, the poor had been increasingly alienated from the mainline "establishment" churches, for the clergy had increasingly softened the message of Christ to make it appealing to the affluent. Upton Sinclair painted a vivid picture of how calloused the clergy had become to the needs of the poor when he wrote in *The Jungle* that

the evangelist was preaching "sin and redemption," the infinite grace of God and His pardon for human frailty. He was very much in earnest, and he meant well, but Jurgis, as he listened, found his soul filled with hatred. What did he know about sin and suffering-his smooth, black coat and his neatly starched collar, his body warm, and his belly full, and money in his pocket-and lecturing men who were struggling for their lives, men at the death grapple with the demon powers of hunger and cold!-This, of course, was unfair; but Jurgis felt that these men were out of touch with the life they discussed, that they were unfitted to solve its problems; ney, they themselves were part of the problem-they were part of the order established that was crushing men down and beating them! They were of the triumphant and insolent possessors-they had a hall, and a fire, and food and clothing and money, and so they might preach to hungry men, and the hungry men must be humble and listen! They were trying to save their souls-and who but a fool could fail to see that all that was the matter with their souls was that they had not been able to get a decent existence for their bodies? (229)

The final part of his argument in this his first book was to convince Christians that corrective measures were indeed within reach. He focused much attention on the growing number of professional and business people who made up much of the membership of the churches. For Rauschenbusch, nothing short

of a spiritual revival among Christians was needed. Christians must wake up to “their own complicity in the sins of society and to a commitment of social reform” (161).

In his next work, *Christianizing the Social Order*, published in 1912, Rauschenbusch offered a wide array of actual reforms that could be undertaken to reform society. Underlying the practical elements was a two-fold theological foundation: first, that God has made every person a being of divine worth; and second, that God has linked all people in a single web of humanity, so that whatever pits one against another is sinful. For him, the American economic system should be evaluated in terms of justice, liberty, and fraternity. In his eyes, the system had failed at all three, for it pitted a lower class of hard workers against an upper class of speculators, extortionists, monopolists, and autocrats. The evils of unrestrained capitalism were also spreading to other areas of life, for example, the school system training people for jobs rather than to think, or pieces of what should have been public land being destroyed for the sake of corporate profit (Minus 170). He even encouraged cooperation with American socialists, though he rejected Marxism because of its two-fold foundation of atheism and materialism (Johnson 141).

One of the most relevant sections in this work is his treatment of the government. Rauschenbusch believed that Christians must quit believing that the state was the tool of the devil. Instead, they should view it as a credible vehicle for promoting the welfare of the entire community. The state must break up monopolies, regulate safety in industries, assume ownership of vital public

services, guarantee rights of labor unions, and provide aid for the disadvantaged (Minus 171). The Progressive Movement embodied in men like Robert Lafollete, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and later Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal attests to the awareness in the society at large of many of the reforms that Rauschenbusch advocated.

In his last work, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, Rauschenbusch set forth a systematic theology, dealing with everything from the doctrine of baptism and the Lord's Supper to eschatology. For the sake of space, three concepts will be dealt with: the Kingdom of Evil, the transmission of sin, and the Kingdom of God. These are the most relevant concepts as they relate to the Social Gospel.

The Kingdom of God, Transmission of Sin, and the Kingdom of God

In considering the Kingdom of Evil, Rauschenbusch said that the "evils of one generation are caused by the wrongs of the generations that preceded, and will in turn condition the sufferings and temptations of those who come after" (79). He went on to write that

our theological conception of sin is but fragmentary unless we see all men in their natural groups bound together in a solidarity of all times and places, bearing the yoke of evil and suffering. This is the explanation of the amazing regularity of social statistics. A nation registers so and so many suicides, criminal assaults, bankruptcies, and divorces per 100,000 of the population. If the proportion changes seriously, we search for the disturbing social causes, just as we reach for the physical causes if the rhythm of our pulse-beat runs away from the normal. The statistics of social morality are the pulse-beat of the social organism. The apparently free and unrelated acts of individuals are also the acts of the social group. When the social group is evil,

evil is over all. (81)

In describing the world's contemporary situation, Rauschenbusch said that "stupid dynasties go on reigning by right of the long time they have reigned...Superstitions which originated in the third century are still faithfully cultivated by great churches, compressing the minds of the young with fear" (79). For Rauschenbusch, as we shall see in our treatment of the transmission of sin, there existed a domain of sin that transcended the individual, and that characterized the social organism as a whole. At a lecture in 1915, he stated that "we must understand that sin becomes durable and really malignant when it is institutionalized and made profitable" (Johnson 143).

Directly opposed to the Kingdom of Evil is the Kingdom of God. This concept was so central for Rauschenbusch that he wrote in *A Theology for the Social Gospel* that "(theology) must not only make room for the doctrine of the Kingdom of God, but give it a central place and *revise all other doctrines so that they will articulate organically with it*" (italics added) (131). The Kingdom of God was a basic theme for Jesus during his ministry on earth. However, after his death, the Kingdom was pushed aside for the "institutional church," only a partial realization of the Kingdom. When this happened, according to Rauschenbusch, theology was affected in several ways. First of all, theology lost contact with the thought of Jesus, and with that, his distinctive ethical principles. Rauschenbusch said that "only those church bodies which have been in opposition to organized society and have looked for a better city with its foundations in heaven, have taken the Sermon on the Mount seriously" (*Theology for the Social Gospel* 134).

He would include groups like the Anabaptists in this category. Next, the church had done just those things that Jesus and the prophets cried out against, namely the emphasis on sacraments and priestly importance. The Kingdom concept also contained the revolutionary force of Christianity. He stated that "if the kingdom of God had remained part of the theological and Christian consciousness, the Church could not, down to our times, have been salaried by autocratic class governments to keep the democratic and economic impulses of the people under check" (136). Even the Protestant Reformation had not gone far enough in restoring the Kingdom of God as the central tenet of Christian theology. Rauschenbusch was calling for, in effect, a new Revolution in Christianity which would seek to institute God's Kingdom on earth in all aspects of human society, even on an institutional level.

The Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God concept was so central for Rauschenbusch that it becomes necessary to delineate a little further what he meant by this concept. In *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, Rauschenbusch offered eight suggestions for the theological formulation of the doctrine of the Kingdom. First, the Kingdom was initiated by Jesus Christ, sustained by the Holy Spirit, and will be brought to fulfillment by the power of God through the actions of humanity. "The establishment of a community of righteousness in mankind is just as much a saving act of God as the salvation of an individual from his natural selfishness and inability" (140). Second, the Kingdom is God's supreme purpose. It makes theology

dynamic, and it is constantly in conflict with organized sin in the world. Third, the Kingdom is both present and future. It is, like God, eternal. It is “always coming, always pressing, and always inviting immediate action” (141). Fourth, Jesus liberated the Kingdom from its earlier nationalistic tendencies, making it world-wide and spiritual. Fifth, the Kingdom is humanity organized according to the will of God. “This involves the redemption of social life from the cramping influence of religious bigotry, from the repression of self-assertion in the relation of upper and lower classes, and from all forms of slavery with which humans... are treated as a mere means to serve the ends of others” (142). For Rauschenbusch, this involved the freeing or releasing of natural resources of the earth from private property, and from any condition in industry that makes monopoly profitable. The Kingdom seeks the “progressive unity of mankind” (143). Sixth, the Church must exist for the purpose of creating the Kingdom of God. Seventh, all problems of personal salvation must be considered from the point of view of the Kingdom. Finally, the Kingdom is not confined to the Church and its activities. The Church is but one social institution along with the family, the industrial organization, and the state. The Kingdom of God is in all of these, and all must work together to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth. In summary, the Kingdom of God on earth had a two-fold aim:

the regeneration of every individual to divine sonship and eternal life, and the victory of the spirit of Christ over the spirit of this world in every form of human society and a corresponding alteration in all the institutions formed by human society. These two are simultaneous aims. Every success in the one is a means for a new success in the other. (*The Righteousness of the Kingdom* 110)

For Rauschenbusch, the Kingdom of God meant the progressive transformation of all human affairs, including the social organism, by the thought and spirit of Christ. And, a full salvation:

also includes the economic life, for it involves the opportunity for every man to realize the full humanity which God has put into him as a promise and a call; it means a clean, rich, just, and brotherly life between him and his fellows... we must change our economic system in order to preserve our conscience and our religious faith. (*Christianizing the Social Order* 459)

This preservation of faith would remain Rauschenbusch's central goal and undertaking for the rest of his life.

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

The Social Gospel for which Rauschenbusch provided a systematic theology had been developing in the United States since the 1870's. The Social Gospel was, in part, an effort on the part of "a minority of influential Protestant clergymen and laymen [who] refused to go along with the dominant trends within the church and sought to adapt Protestantism to the needs of the new age" (Fine 169). The trends that had dominated Protestantism had little concern for the problems created by urbanization and industrialization in the years after the Civil War. The focus of these traditional Protestants continued to be revivals, tent meetings, evangelistic crusades, and a continued focus on the salvation of the individual. The adherents and practitioners of the Social Gospel were reacting in part against the "excessive individualism of traditional Protestantism and the belief that individual regeneration was in itself a sufficient goal of church endeavor" (170).

The new focus of these theologians however was on the family, the nation, the social and the commercial life “as fields of the manifestation of God and the operation of the Spirit” (170).

Many trends within and without the religious community came together to characterize this period of progressivism. An interest in German scholarship, political and social reforms, intellectual revolutions in the social sciences, and the rise of Christian Socialism in Europe all affected the thought and theology of the Social Gospellers (King 59). Leaders like Washington Gladden, Richard Ely, Francis Greenwood Peabody, and Walter Rauschenbusch gained national prominence as outspoken critics of both the church and the system. Buttressed in the secular arena by figures such as Upton Sinclair, Woodrow Wilson, and Theodore Roosevelt, the progressive thinkers within the church made great strides in alleviating many social problems of the day, as well as shaping an entire generation of Protestant thought.

Of particular importance to the Social Gospellers in their critique of the system was the unbridled practice of laissez faire economics. Along with the urbanization, immigration, and industrialization between the Civil War and World War I came vast social problems and a general attitude of condemnation by the Social Gospellers toward the prevalent economic system of the day (Fine 172). Sidney Fine pointed out seven main criticisms of the system that the leaders of social Christianity denounced as “selfish,” “inhumane,” “unchristian,” “unethical,” “immoral,” and “barbaric” (172).

The first characteristic of the dominant system which came under attack

was that of competition. Men like Josiah Strong saw competition within the economic system as antisocial and unchristian, "as a species of warfare in which the strongest win and the weakest are crushed, in which the few are enriched and the many pauperized" (173). For Strong, the economic system should be built on cooperation and brotherhood rather than competition.

The second characteristic criticized by the Social Gospel adherents was that of self-interest. They regarded self-interest as an inadequate and barbarous basis for human activity. Instead, human interaction even within the economic system should be built on a regard for the welfare of others. For these Social Gospellers, "when a society relies chiefly on the selfish impulses, material and intellectual growth are arrested, for it requires higher motives than self-interest to sustain progress" (174).

The third principle which received great condemnation was the practice of "unbridled individualism." George Boardman, a Binghamton, New York minister, said that individualism was a "segregating, selfish, centrifugal force that dissipates society" (175). Strong was greatly disturbed by the "individualists' disregard of the principle that duties are coextensive with rights" (175). Finally, the Lutheran minister J. H. W. Stuckenberg believed that "individualism unduly exalted the individual at the expense of society and made the members of society 'leeches which fatten on one another'" (175).

A fourth area of concern was the relation between capital and labor. The classical economists assumed that labor was nothing more than a commodity to be "bought in the cheapest market and sold in the dearest" (175). To the Social

Gospelers, the laborer was still a human being, not to be measured in terms of monetary value. Henry Potter advised that the employer must remember in dealing with one's employees that one is dealing not with merchandise from which one is to make a profit but with children of God, whose welfare must be of constant concern (175).

The wage-system also bore the scrutiny of the Social Gospelers. Washington Gladden was among those who felt that the adjustment of wages as a result of competition between employer and employee was "fundamentally wrong" (175). Establishing competition as the regulator of the relation between capital and labor was "to declare war between employer and employee, and in this war, labor, which is weaker than capital, will always go down to defeat" (176). The solution to this fault in the system was the establishment of minimum wage laws, industrial partnership, profit sharing, and cooperation (176).

A sixth and very controversial characteristic of the economic system was that of social-Darwinism, or survival of the fittest in the economic system. Social Gospelers denounced this principle as belonging only in the natural world and animal kingdom, not in the relationship between human beings. To exterminate the weak might indeed lead to material progress, but "it would give us a cruel society in which the elements of kindness and compassion would be absent" (177).

The final part of the economic system that Fine listed as coming under attack was that of social determinism, which relates very closely to social-Darwinism. The theory of social determinism saw social evolution as the product of natural forces alone. To the Social Gospelers, as argued by Franklin Sprague,

the main elements in societal progress were not “blind evolution, competition, and survival of the fittest, but Christian churches, schools, governments, ethics, and economics.” He went on to say that “the social organism is the creation of man. Its evolution is the product of human intelligence and volition” (177).

A separate principle from those above which came under attack by some Social Gospellers was that of philanthropy. Although Rauschenbusch carried on a close relationship with and received money from the Rockefeller family, many social Christians still viewed philanthropy on the part of the wealthy as only an “auxiliary to established, regularly working institutions” in serving the cause of social reform (178). Or, as Fine explained

Philanthropic effort, he (Ely) argued, is in itself unable to deal adequately with such problems as poverty, education, sanitation, and housing. A single sanitary law, for example, can accomplish more for tenement-house dwellers than “all the achievements of private philanthropy in a generation. (178)

Professor William J. Tucker of Andover Theological Seminary also questioned the good done by philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie. He saw writings and efforts on the part of men like Carnegie as arguments simply justifying the existence of so much wealth in the hands of so few people. The people should not “entrust the improvement of society to the charity of the few under the assumption that the rich can do more for the community than the community can do for itself” (178). The only end result would be the deterioration of self-respect and public spirit, as more and more people wait for hand-outs from the wealthy.

The Life of Jesus as a Theological Base

Underlying these criticisms of the economic system was, as William King delineates, a theological base built on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. King sees the constant return to the life of the historical Jesus as one of the main common threads throughout the Social Gospel movement (62). For the liberal theologians at the turn of the century, the historical Jesus became the norm for biblical revelation (62). According to King, “the historical Christ thus becomes the theological hinge by which liberalism retains its Christian integrity and identity” (62).

King delineates what he sees as three different views dominant in the Social Gospel movement of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the social problems of his day. Shailer Mathews, Francis Peabody, and Rauschenbusch each saw Jesus in relation to his historical and cultural-social atmosphere in a slightly different manner. For Mathews, Jesus was the transformer of culture, and the kingdom could only be realized on earth through the missionary and evangelistic activity of the church in a social mode (73). The progress of the kingdom relies upon the expansion of Christian culture and the “gradual assimilation of the total environment to it” (73). The society is transformed as individuals are transformed. These transformed individuals then become socially minded and their individual influence transforms the surrounding culture. For Mathews, Jesus’s attack was not on the accumulation of wealth, but the wrong attitude toward wealth. He saw social classes as inevitable and expected no radical alteration of the social order (74).

For Peabody, Jesus was the scientific philanthropist. Peabody had less faith in the church, and much more appreciation for the role social institutions play in the life of the individuals. He also had a stronger belief “in the conflicts within the human will and of the ways in which ‘social sin’ hinders people from the healthy development of their personalities” (74). For Peabody, spiritual forces must be undergirded by the proper environmental forces. Many Christians within the infant social work and social services professions found much to like about Peabody. For those within the social-services who tended to focus on the power of the environment over the individual, “the elimination of unjust poverty was to be achieved by legislative restrictions on business practices and by ‘preventive’ philanthropy, which sought the eradication of the *causes* of poverty” (75).

Walter Rauschenbusch, according to King, was much more radical than either Mathews or Peabody. While evangelism and social service were also important to Rauschenbusch, he still believed that all institutions and systems must be called into question by Jesus’s ethic (75). For Rauschenbusch, “Jesus was neither a dreamer nor a reformer but a revolutionary, and his ethical teachings were radical attacks on the social system of his time” (75). Rauschenbusch went so far as to say that “if a man wants to be a Christian, he must stand over against things as they are and condemn them in the name of that higher conception of life which Jesus revealed. If a man is satisfied with things as they are, he belongs to the other side” (*Christianity and the Social Crisis* 87).

Rauschenbusch diverged greatly from Mathews and Peabody in his

treatment of the accumulation of wealth. To Rauschenbusch, the parable of the rich young ruler in the Gospels was not simply a lesson on stewardship, but the embodiment of Jesus' message that the Kingdom of God always creates a "great reversal of values" (84). Jesus words and example as an advocate for the poor and oppressed provides the modern world with a manifesto: "Humanity is waiting for a revolutionary Christianity which will call the world evil and change it. We do not want 'to blow all existing institutions to atoms,' but we do want to remold every one of them" (91). King advises that "Rauschenbusch's formulation must not be dismissed as rhetorical excess, for his writings on Jesus influenced an entire generation of Social Gospel radicals who dedicated themselves to prophetic action after the debacle of World War I" (76).

Selected Urban Ills faced by the Social Gospelers

Rauschenbusch was greatly critical of the new period in world history known as the Industrial Revolution. This was a time period when, in his words, "the wealthy and enterprising and ruthless seized the new opening, turned out a rapid flow of products, and of necessity underbid the others in marketing their goods" (*Christianity and the Social Crisis* 215). In this drive for wealth, the machine began to replace the worker, thereby "(sweeping) the bread from men's tables and the pride from their hearts" (215). Because of this new revolution, the "old independence" and the "equality of the old life" disappeared. The old masters now became mastered by the machines and their owners. And the ones who owned the machines made the laws, or at least pulled the strings of those

who did. In this new period, "a man could not even be sure of the bare wages which he received for his toil" (215). Compounding this problem was the fact that the machine required not strength, but deftness. Thus,

the slender fingers of women and children sufficed for it, and they were cheaper than men. So men were forced out of work by the competition of their own wives and children, and saw their loved ones wilt and die under the relentless drag of the machine. (217)

The machine was also the creator of the modern city. "It piled the poor together in crowded tenements at night and in unsanitary factories during the day, and intensified all the diseases that come through crowding" (217). Immigration from Europe and migration from rural areas only intensified the problems as America's major cities, controlled by the corrupt political machines, failed to respond effectively to the effects of rapid urbanization. The jobs for which these people flocked to the cities were rare. However, this surplus population ensured that the company bosses would always have a cheap labor force, and the slum landlords would always have new tenants for their overcrowded, run-down apartments. When people could find jobs, they were guaranteed no certain amount of wages, no amount of minimal safety, and no job guarantee. Often men, women, and children worked sixteen to twenty-hour days in unsanitary conditions with no adjustments for climate control. This Industrial Revolution was for Rauschenbusch the paradox of modern life: "The instrument by which all humanity could rise from want and the fear of want actually submerged a large part of the people in perpetual fear and want" (217).

Rauschenbusch saw this as an inability for the moral forces of humanity to keep up with intellectual and economic development: “Men learned to make wealth much faster than they learned to distribute it justly” (217).

However, Rauschenbusch had hope for the United States. He looked to the mitigation in Europe of many of the evil effects of the Industrial Revolution as providing an example for this nation to follow. The organization of workers, the interposition of the state, and an awakened conscience of the people had helped alleviate much of the suffering of the 19th century. Still, Rauschenbusch cautioned that such a mitigation of forces was not automatic. Rauschenbusch warned in 1910 that

we are now running the rapids faster than any other nation. We do everything more strenuously and recklessly than others. Our machinery is speeded faster; our capital centralizes faster; we use up human life more carelessly; we are less hampered by custom and prejudice. *If we are once headed toward a social catastrophe, we shall get there ahead of scheduled time.* (219. Italics added.)

Rauschenbusch was of the firm conviction that a crisis existed. In *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, he delineated “with a few rapid strokes” the present conditions in society which were creating this moral crisis. His first criticism was directed at the recent development of the view that land was private property to be used for profit and not the property of the community. The community, by its labor and needs, creates the value of the land in the inner city. However, the law gave this valued land to individuals. Rauschenbusch wrote that “Our cities are poor, unclean, always pressing against the limits of indebtedness, and laying heavy burdens of taxation on the producing classes. At the same time

these enormous values pass to individuals who have only contributed a fractional part to their creation" (219). The moral problem for Rauschenbusch was "how to safeguard the rights of the individual holder of the land who has increased its value by his labor and intelligence, and yet to extract for the community the value which the community creates" (229).

A second area of criticism was that of work and wages. Rauschenbusch saw the bulk of the increase in wealth brought on by the Industrial Revolution had gone to a small class strong enough to take it. As proof, Rauschenbusch cited a report by the Interstate Commerce Commission of June, 1902, which stated that from 1896 to 1902, the average annual wages and salaries of the 1,200,000 railway employees had increased five percent, from \$550 to \$580. However, during that same period, the earnings of the owners had increased sixty-two percent, from \$377,000,000 to \$610,000,000 (233). Rauschenbusch did not deny that the laborer had indeed profited; however, the wealth and security of the average working person had actually declined, for the purchasing power of the wage had declined due to injustice in the system.

Along with this criticism of the wage system and the use of property, Rauschenbusch also criticized the use of cheap child and female labor, the lack of job security on the part of the laborer, the decline of the physical health of the laborers, and the political machines which supported the economic inequality of the urban centers (234-257).

The last, and one of the most interesting of Rauschenbusch's considerations, was that of the urban family. Rauschenbusch saw as alarming the large number

of unmarried people living in the city. The primary cause of this “involuntary celibacy” lay in the fear on the part of the working class that they could not “maintain a family in the standard of comfort which they deem necessary for their life” (273). Rauschenbusch wrote that many women were entering the work force not because “progress had made so many professions open to them,” but because “grim necessity drives women into new ways of getting bread and clothing....Our industrial machine has drawn them into its hopper because female labor is unorganized and cheap labor” (277). A report by J. N. Yates, the Secretary of State of New York, in 1900 concerning laws for relief and settlement of the poor, stated that in New York state there were 8,753 poor children under 14 years of age, most of whom had little or not education, and were in great need of care and attention. The result of inattention, as stated by Yates, would be a “mass of pauperism (which) will form a fruitful nursery for crime” (34). Nearly 1/4 of all the permanent poor were in New York City (Meissner 4).

Response by the Social Gospellers

The adherents of the Social Gospel sought to meet the challenges posed by urbanization and industrialization in several ways. Their efforts lay behind much of the legislative and social reforms that characterized what has come to be known as the Progressive Era. John Commons, an economist, advocated such reforms as the regulation of corporations, municipal ownership of public utilities, factory legislation, sanitary regulations, and the improvement of tenement-house conditions (Fine 181). Richard Ely, also an economist, stated that “God works through the State in carrying out His purposes more universally than through any

other institution” (180). Factory acts, educational laws, and laws which ensured justice for all classes should be actively pursued by the church. The church should also be involved in other problems such as “child, female, and Sunday labor, housing, provision of urban recreational facilities, corruption in government, the distribution of wealth, charities and corrections, and societal settlements” (181).

R. Heber Newton, an Episcopalian minister, called for reform in the areas of the “postal savings banks, factory laws, a national bureau of labor to serve the working man, government aid to cope with unemployment, tenement legislation, regulation of the railroads, public ownership of all newly discovered mineral resources, and the use of [inheritance] taxes to limit private fortunes” (183).

Washington Gladden recommended “compulsory public education, suppression of speculation, abolition of the saloon, government regulation of property in land, prohibition of Sunday labor, passage of child-labor laws, and the limitation of hours in certain occupations” (187). He went on to advocate “sanitary inspections of factories, workshops, and mines, provision of work for the unemployed by public authorities, arbitration between labor and management, rigid control of trusts, a heavy inheritance tax, and a progressive income tax” (187-188). Gladden advocated all of this in addition to the regeneration of the individual. What was needed was “not only a better world, but better men to live in it” (188).

Lyman Abbott, who generally emphasized individual regeneration over societal reform, advocated in 1889 several reforms for the system, including

“federal ownership of the telegraph and the telephone, regulation of railroads, prohibition of child labor, regulation of the working conditions of women, legal recognition of labor unions, national forest conservation laws, and federal money for public education” (183).

What all of these Social Gospelers had in common was their willingness to use the State for the common good. “Government, they argued, is not a necessary evil, but a potential force for good” (184). Contrary to the theories of John Locke, government exists not only to protect life but also to make it more than tolerable. Democratic government should work for justice and seek to promote the general welfare. “When government partakes of this nature, its goal and that of religion are one and the same” (184).

Another group of more radical Social Gospelers founded their message on Christian Socialism, not so much of the Marxist stripe, but more along the lines of the teachings of Jesus. Because it was based on economic individualism and not the teachings of Jesus, the existing capitalist order had resulted in the evils of “mammonism, overcrowding, intemperance, prostitution, and crime” (190). The goal of the Christian Socialists, therefore, was a reconstructed social order based on Christian principles of cooperation and sharing and “fraternal combination” (190). More specifically, the Christian Socialists advocated, among other things, “the eight hour work day, provision of a midday meal for students, direct legislation, emancipation of women, public employment of the unemployed, free technical education, and municipal public housing” (192). These Christian Socialists relied heavily upon the State to institute these reforms.

Rauschenbusch's Efforts

Walter Rauschenbusch, in responding to the social problems of his day, was somewhere between the "middle-of-the-roaders" who simply sought reform of the current system and the Socialists who wanted an all out remaking of the social structure. Rauschenbusch was realistic in his efforts, realizing that progress was not guaranteed. Rauschenbusch also sought throughout his life to balance the need for individual regeneration as well as societal reform.

As a pastor in Hell's Kitchen, Rauschenbusch fought for "children's playgrounds with fresh sandpiles, fresh-air centers, better sanitation facilities in the tenements" and other sanitary inspections (Armstrong 223). He was also a vigorous foe of the alcohol industry, for he saw its effects upon his members and his own father (227). Rauschenbusch did proclaim himself a "Christian Socialist," for "religion is the only power which can make socialism succeed if it is established. It cannot work in an irreligious country" (231).

According to Rauschenbusch's concept of socialism, the public should own the gas, water, electric light and power, telegraph and telephone lines, and roads. Education, libraries, museums, parks, and playgrounds were to be provided by the state for the welfare of the people. He also worked for legislations which would "shorten the working time and improve conditions for skilled and unskilled laborers, to prevent child labor, and to restrict labor for women" (232). He later teamed up with Jacob Riis and others to start movements which came to fruition in municipal, state, and national legislation. Accordingly, Rauschenbusch considered himself a Republican along the same lines of Teddy Roosevelt (231).

Rauschenbusch derided as wrong in *Christianity and the Social Crisis* the commonly held beliefs of his day that “the poor are poor through their own fault,” or “rent profits are the just dues of foresight and ability,” or that the “immigrants are the cause of corruption in our city politics” (350).

The great and consistent theme of Rauschenbusch’s writing and conviction was his emphasis on individual *and* institutional regeneration. He wrote that “there are two great entities in human life--the human soul and the human race--and religion is to save both. The soul is to seek righteousness and eternal life; the race is to seek righteousness and the kingdom of God” (367). He went on to write that the “human soul with its guilt and longing for holiness and deathless life is a permanent fact in religion, and no social perfection will quench its hunger for the living God” (366). Because of this consistency, Rauschenbusch could say with credibility that “it has always been recognized that the creation of regenerate personalities, pledged to righteousness, is one of the most important services which the Church can render to social progress” (Armstrong 220), as well as speak that “our business is to make over an antiquated and immoral economic system; to get rid of laws, customs, maxims, and philosophies inherited from an evil and despotic past; and thus to lay a social foundation on which modern men individually can live and work” (220). Rauschenbusch was reared in the pietistic tradition, and it was this tradition which he passed to others. However, he also wanted a society based on Christian principles which would make individual righteousness easier within the broader context of societal regeneration.

In Rauschenbusch's world view, there was not room for a dichotomy between the secular and the sacred. The two could not be separated; there was a great overlapping. For Rauschenbusch, the sacred, namely the Kingdom of God, was to pervade and regenerate the secular. Thus, he wrote in *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, "if it is religious to advocate rebuilding a church, why is it non-religious to advocate tearing down and rebuilding slum districts? If it is religious to encourage the church to recarpet the aisles for the feet of the worshipers, why is it non-religious to speak for playgrounds for young feet?" (365).

Social Gospel Successes

Many of the reforms the Social Gospelers advocated did indeed become reality throughout the Progressive Period in the late 1800's and the early part of the 20th century, as well as on into Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal during the Depression. Many of these reforms are taken for granted today as natural roles and services of the government. For example, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 "outlawed the employment of people under sixteen years of age in some industrial settings, and it has been amended numerous times to prohibit child labor in many other circumstances, especially hazardous occupations" (Sullivan and Thompson 276). The first mothers' pension law was passed in Illinois in 1911, and eighteen other states had done so by 1913. Three states had passed old age pension laws by 1923, and four others had done the same by 1927. Ohio became the first state to authorize pensions for the blind in 1898; many other states joined suit after 1925 (Popple and Leighninger 237). The first workman's

compensation law was passed in Maryland in 1902, and fifteen new state railroad commissions were created between 1905 and 1907 (237).

In President Theodore Roosevelt the Progressives had an advocate in the White House. Roosevelt's most enduring legacy was administrative government as a cure for social ills. He supported various regulatory boards and commissions to make sure the "blind business magnates" would moderate and ameliorate their previously unbridled capitalism (Link and McCormick 36). As President, Roosevelt urged and got the creation of the Bureau of Corporations to publicize corporate wrongdoing. During his two terms, the Justice Department filed forty-three cases under the Sherman Antitrust Act in order to restrain or dissolve monopolistic business combinations--including the Beef Trust, the Northern Securities Company, the Standard Oil Company, and the American Tobacco Company (37). During his second term, Roosevelt gave the Interstate Commerce Commission power to control the railroads. In 1906, he won several regulatory measures from Congress, including the Hepburn Act, which gave the ICC the power to set maximum railroad rates, the Pure Food and Drug Act, and a Meat Inspection Act (38). Federal Progressive reforms continued under Woodrow Wilson with the creation of a permanent Federal Trade Commission, the passage of the Federal Reserve Act, the creation of the Federal Reserve Board, as well as federal child-labor laws, a workman's compensation law, and women's suffrage. Between 1905 and 1907, 2/3 of the states had passed some sort of child labor legislation, in large part due to the progressive group the National Child Labor Committee, established in 1904. Beginning in 1912, many states

adopted minimum wage laws for women (Link and McCormick 82).

CONTEMPORARY URBAN PROBLEMS

The deluge of contemporary inner city problems is not uncommon to the ordinary citizen. Asked to name some of the problems facing urban America, anyone could recite those problems which have become all too common: crime, gangs, pollution, poverty, homelessness, welfare dependency, unwed mothers, bad schools, drug pushers, and prostitutes, etc. Many of these problems are not unlike those faced by the Social Gospellers at the turn of the century. With the election of an activist Democrat to the White House, the nation has once again focused on the causes of these problems and their subsequent solutions.

By treating the two issues of housing and employment through the lens of economics, this author will attempt to show how the economic climate and neglect of the inner city is a *primary cause of these social problems*. Then, to conclude, numerous examples of local church action to stop this economic decline will be cited, as well as suggestions for those churches in transitional communities that are struggling with the future prospects of their congregations. Some of these actions will include cooperation with government and non-religious charitable and business institutions; others will be suggestions for the church alone. Just as Rauschenbusch believed that any and all institutions are capable of evil, so too are all institutions capable of reform and participation in that reform.

Most importantly, the proposed solutions will be built on Social Gospel assumptions, including the belief in the State as a credible vehicle for social

action, the smothering nature of institutional evil, the ability for societal reform, and the assumption that if individuals are given a climate conducive to success, they will more likely be successful.

Housing Issues

In dealing with the issue of housing, two problems emerge. The first is the issue of homelessness, which affects anywhere from 350,000 (government estimate) to 3 million (homeless advocacy groups) people in the United States. Closely related to, and sometimes overlapping, the issue of homelessness is the matter of affordable housing for inner-city residents.

In studies cited by Philip Poppo and Leslie Leighninger in *Social Work, Social Services, and American Society*, it was shown that in 1970, the national median percentage of income paid for rent was 20 percent. By 1987, the figure had risen to 29 percent. Moreover, low-income families who rented were paying, on average, 66 percent of their income on housing. A 1987 study found that 42 percent of all renters were "shelter poor"--in other words, they paid so much for housing that they did not have enough left for basic needs (479).

Over the last ten years, many low-income housing units have been lost and not replaced. One type of unit that has served low-income single people has been the "single room only" residential hotel, or SRO. Between 1977 and 1987, Chicago lost nearly 2/3 of its SRO's. Some studies show that nationwide, up to 500,000 low-income units for families have disappeared annually due to demolition, arson, abandonment, or conversion to condominiums. In New York

City, between 1981 and 1987, the number of apartments renting under \$200 a month decreased by 60 percent and the number of those renting for under \$300 decreased by 56 percent. However, in 1987, the poorest 2/5 of the city's population could not afford to pay more than \$250 a month (479).

Most of these low-income housing units are not being replaced, either by the government or private industry. In 1987, apartments renting for less than \$350 accounted for only 5 percent of all new privately financed apartment construction (479). Under Presidents Ford and Carter (6 1/2 years), 500,000 low-cost housing units were built. However, under President Reagan (8 years), that figure dropped to 17,000. In 1988, less than 10,000 were under construction. In 1987, 12,000 people were on the public housing waiting list in Washington, D.C. In 1989, approximately 900,000 families were on waiting lists for the 1.4 million occupied units in the United States (479).

Other housing statistics fill in other parts of the picture. For example, over 3 million families now share housing, double what it was in 1980. Race also plays a role in the housing crisis. The median value of a home owned by an African-American in 1989 was about \$24,000 less than the median value of all homes (483). Also, 16 percent of all units rented by blacks lacked complete plumbing, compared to the 3.4 percent for those rented by whites (483).

Federal spending on housing dropped from \$25 billion in 1981 to \$8 billion in 1987. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had a budget equal to 7.4 percent of the total federal budget in 1978. Ten years later, that figure had fallen to under 1 percent. The amount of federal money spent

on housing increased only slightly during the George Bush administration (484).

Several other factors have also contributed to the number of homeless and the number of those who cannot afford housing. For instance, the 1960's and 1970's saw an increase in the number of deinstitutionalized mentally ill, many of whom had no family or home to return to. Also, recent influxes of immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and East Asia have added to those looking for affordable housing (486).

Many blame the homeless for their plight. Some even say that the homeless choose and actually enjoy the homeless lifestyle. Walter Rauschenbusch and other Social Gospel advocates would recognize that much of our current housing problems are not individual in nature--they are structural. The problem is not that people do not want homes or do not want to pay for homes. The problem is that there are not enough houses in the first place, or that less and less people can afford those houses that do exist.

David Claerbaut, in his book *Urban Ministry*, echoes these Social Gospel beliefs in outlining several institutional practices that have led to the inner city housing crisis. The first is *blockbusting*, which involves the buying of housing cheaply by realtors, who, after preying on the fears and anxieties of anxious transitional neighborhood dwellers, turn around and sell the property at a huge profit. A second practice, this time by bankers, is called *redlining*. This begins when bank officials outline an area of predicted decline over a time period of usually 20 years. Then, the financial institution chooses not to lend money to anyone wishing to purchase land in the redlined area. While land is available,

people can't get loans to build, and current owners cannot sell and make a profit. The prediction of decline becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as banks have practiced this illegal but common method of protection. To further complicate the problem, banks do not locate in these redlined areas. Thus, for instance, 300,000 African-American residents live in Chicago's west-side areas without a single bank to serve them. Chicago's South Shore residents had in 1983 \$31 million in deposits in two major Chicago banks. However, only \$76,000 in the form of loans had been received by these residents to put back into their communities (36-38).

Some fundamental shifts in the American economy have also led to the crisis in urban housing. Just as Walter Rauschenbusch responded to the change from an agrarian to an industrial economy at the turn of the century, so too the church must face a second revolution in the American economy. This second revolution, as pointed to by sociologist William Julius Wilson, is the fundamental structural change from a product-based economy to that of an information-based service economy (Sullivan and Thompson 180). The capacity of the inner city school to teach children effectively has declined as verbal talent and educational qualifications have become more important than physical brawn and manual labor (180). As factories have closed down in the inner cities, these jobs have been replaced with low-wage service jobs, which offer no career ladder or upward mobility (Drier and Appelbaum 37). The result has been a hidden blessing for many urban families. Many of these service jobs are barely above the poverty level, while the minimum wage and Aid for Dependent Children levels have

failed to keep up with the rate of inflation over the last decade (37). The 1990 U.S. Conference of Mayors reported that almost 1/4 of America's homeless work, but those wages are too low to afford permanent housing. While those on the lower end of the services industry have suffered, those on the upper end, the management and professional workers, have benefited. The share of national income going to the wealthiest 20 percent of the population is the highest since World War II. However, the share going to the poorest 40 percent is at an all time low for the same period (39).

Those who have benefited from the restructured economy, both black and white middle-class citizens, are leaving the inner city at a rapid rate. Wilson further argues that the exodus of a stable and working class of African Americans from the inner city has left an "underclass" of families and individuals outside of the occupational mainstream. Included in this group are

individuals who lack training and skills and either experience long-term unemployment or are not members of the labor force, individuals who are engaged in street crime..., and families that experience long-term spells of poverty and/or welfare dependency. (Poppo and Leighninger 134)

The primary barrier that this underclass faces is the lack of appropriate job related skills (Sullivan and Thompson 221). Wilson attributes several other behaviors to this development as well, what he terms "social isolation." Because 85 percent of the poor live in communities dominated by poverty, they are cut off from the dominant society, and thus, they do not enjoy the variety of influences and opportunities the rest of society enjoys (Poppo and Leighninger 213). For

instance, high rates of male joblessness in the ghetto directly prohibits economically stable families with a male head (Stockwell 14). For Wilson, the “combination of unattractive jobs and lack of community norms to reinforce work increases the likelihood that individuals will turn to either underground illegal activity or idleness or both” (Popple and Leighninger 213).

Rauschenbusch would have easily recognized one problem in the area of housing--profits. Everyone involved in housing is trying to maximize profits, including the land developers, the materials manufacturer, the constructors, the financiers, and the realtors. For instance, the average price of a residential lot has increased from \$5,200 to \$42,000 in the last 20 years, and increase of 813 percent. Housing is no longer a basic right of every citizen, but a commodity to be bought and sold so that a maximum profit is realized. In fact, roughly two out of three housing dollars goes to pay the mortgage for those buying their homes. And the figure is usually higher for those who rent, but pay the mortgage indirectly (Dreier and Appelbaum 38). Rauschenbusch would be highly critical of the Social Darwinism that dominates our *laissez faire* attitude toward housing and the inner city, an attitude that applauds those with wealth and power who can make the profit and succeed at all costs.

Roots of Urban Decay

F.K. Plous, Jr., claims that 85 percent of all urban decline can be traced back to three pieces of legislation (Claerbaut 33). The first was the Homeowner Loan Act of June 13, 1933, which replaced the five-year renewable mortgages

with fifteen- to thirty-year mortgages. Though designed to help the housing industry during the Depression, the new law actually had a suburban bias in that it sponsored the building of owner-occupied dwellings, not multiple-family rental housing. The result was the beginning of the suburbanization of the outskirts of the city, where most available land existed. The second law was the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944. This "GI Bill" guaranteed money lent by banks to servicemen for housing starts, most of which were in the suburbs. No comparable program involving owning or renting existed for the cities. The third piece of legislation was the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, which led to the funding of the 42,500 mile Interstate Highway System. Valuable land was lifted from the inner city tax rolls, while easy transportation into the city was provided for the suburbanites who held city jobs. A by-product was the stifling of the mass transit system, a key to urban health. With suburban growth and urban decline, Plous writes that the "middle class, smelling the meat acookin's elsewhere, wisely left, and refugees from rural poverty and Southern discrimination flowed in to occupy what was already abandoned territory" (34).

Rauschenbusch would have recognized these legislative initiatives as examples of the systemic causes of urban decay. While each of these pieces of legislation was intended to benefit a certain group, other groups were impaired. What became a blessing for the suburbanites was a curse for the inner city. And that trend continues today, as businesses and middle-class taxpayers flee the suburbs, thus eroding the cities' tax base.

Accompanying this trend was the Reagan Revolution of the 1980's, the goal

of which was to make the cities and states more self-reliant and less reliant on federal tax dollars. However, the cities could not retain a strong tax base. Thus the cities lost money when the federal government cut off aid and when the taxpayers left the cities. Currently, many suburbanites still earn their income in the glass and metal towers of downtown, driving in on city streets paid for with city taxes, drinking city water, flushing city toilets, and walking on city pavements. However, they pay taxes in suburban satellite communities and spend paychecks in suburban malls. In a way, these honest and respectable suburbanites could actually be viewed as leeches hanging on the outside of the city, preying on their victim and destroying the inner city community (33). Rauschenbusch would call this the sin of acquiescence, for these suburbanites bear part of the blame for the inner city decline. However, many are not willing to admit their part in the crisis. Rauschenbusch would call for repentance on the part of the suburbanites, a repentance that leads them to support efforts which would make the system more equitable and fair.

Inner City Unemployment

Other than the restructuring of the urban economy from production to service, there exists also the trend of industries locating outside of the inner city. While many settle in to minimum wage service jobs in the city, many others can find no work at all. Poppo and Leighninger report that in the 1950's and 1960's, the nation-wide unemployment rate rarely crept above 5 percent and was at times below 3 percent. In the 1970's, the unemployment rate rarely went below 5

percent and sometimes went over 8 percent. In the 1980's, the rate rose at times to 10 percent and rarely went below 7 percent. In fact, over the last decade, the unemployment rate for African-Americans has fluctuated between 12 and 19 percent. These statistics point to an economy in transition, as jobs are lost due to restructuring, shutdowns, layoffs, and increased international competition.

The rate of unemployment has continued to rise for several reasons, including the number of women in the workforce. Now, a larger number of people than before are filing for unemployment benefits. One of the more common causes of unemployment is the rise of structural unemployment, as opposed to frictional unemployment. Frictional unemployment exists when workers are temporarily out of a job because they are in a transitional state and, thus, have not been made aware of existing job opportunities. The number of those frictionally unemployed ranges anywhere from 3 to 5 percent. However, structural unemployment exists when the skills possessed by potential employees do not match those required by potential employers. "The United States has been experiencing a good deal of structural unemployment in recent years because of what has been termed the 'post-industrial revolution,'" a phenomenon described earlier in this thesis (Poppo and Leighninger 450).

The solution to structural unemployment is twofold; first, jobs must be made available in the inner city, and second, the skills of the potential employees must be improved through continued job training and education. President Clinton announced in March of 1994 the Reemployment Act of 1994, an ambitious plan to retrain the unemployed so that their skills match the jobs

available. This is an excellent example of the type of institutional reform in the form of legislation that Walter Rauschenbusch would have advocated.

RESPONSES BY THE CHURCH

Throughout the preceding discussion of contemporary urban problems, little has been written about the *individual's* responsibility for these social problems. That has been intentional. Much has already been said, preached, and written in conservative evangelicalism about individual responsibility. This author does not seek to diminish the importance of focusing on the individual. Like Rauschenbusch, the Church must continue to call individuals to repentance, regeneration, and personal holiness. However, the author has chosen to focus on the institutional and structural causes of these social problems. Thus, while Rauschenbusch spoke and wrote of the need for individual regeneration, his passion was for institutional redemption, the area in which his conservative brethren were least attentive. That has been the passion of this author as well. And the church must play a role in the structural regeneration of the inner city.

A trend that has accompanied the "white flight" and suburbanization of the last thirty years has been the development of inner-city white Protestant churches in transitional, predominantly minority neighborhoods. These churches have been faced with a dilemma of sorts: stay and minister in the community and, in some instances reflect the community; or, pack up and leave. Carl Dudley claimed in 1979 that 10 percent of all mainline Protestant denominations were in transition, with another 10 percent to confront it in the eighties (Claerbaut 41).

One church that chose to leave the inner city was Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, one of the largest Southern Baptist churches. Completed in 1989, the new church building, which cost approximately \$34 million, is located off Interstate 40 in Cordova, Tennessee, about 10 miles from its original downtown location. Bellevue, which Pastor Adrian Rogers boasts has 22,000 members, voted almost unanimously in 1983 to relocate to be closer to approximately 65 percent of the church's membership. In an interview with Randall Balmer, Rogers said "It's been a joy. It's been the delight of my life to move out here. We moved to our constituency" (*Bellevue* 488). When Balmer asked Rogers if Bellevue was able to maintain a presence in the old neighborhood, Rogers became "uncharacteristically quiet" and "restrained," saying vaguely, "We minister to the whole city," adding that a portion of the church's budget went to buy food and clothing and to pay for some medical care (488). In concluding his article on Bellevue, Balmer wrote of walking around the vicinity of the old church building downtown, "searching for someone to tell me about the neighborhood and perhaps, if I was lucky, offer come recollections of Bellevue Baptist Church. But the area was deserted. I found no one" (488).

David Claerbaut points out that churches in the city have had to respond to the decline of the city and the emergence of the inner city. He cites Carl Dudley in stating that churches respond to their changing communities in stages, usually ending in the relocating or closing of that church. Other churches, however, have "sought ways to revitalize the community by dealing with conditions of inadequate housing, fiscal dysfunction, and government control" (40). These

churches “have become frustrated with providing solutions to only the *symptoms* of economic problems, such as shelter for the homeless, and are eagerly seeking programs that attack homelessness’s root *causes*, such as advocating affordable housing or a housing trust fund” (Zalent 26). These churches which have made that decision to stay in the inner city will be the focus of this section, for they are the ones “on the front lines” that can serve as models for those contemplating “flight” as a response to their neighborhoods in transition.

Rauschenbusch would have certainly advocated churches staying and ministering in their communities. He would feel very strongly about those churches which ignore or run away from the problems. In fact, he would place much of the blame for the problems on these Christians who have not taken seriously enough Christ’s call to daily take up their cross and follow him.

The church can respond in many ways, including cooperation with state and local governments, partnerships with community businesses, acting alone, and working with other churches and non-profit organizations, both religious and secular in nature. Sometimes the nature of that cooperation may be surprising. For instance, many in our conservative churches would be shocked to know that back in the 1960’s, the Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, California, met immediately with the Black Panther Party when that group moved into the neighborhood. After many hours of sometimes heated debate, the two groups decided to work together to make Oakland a much better place to live and work. The two groups decided to do this by initiating such projects as prison ministries and ministries to the families of prisoners, the promotion of clean-up campaigns,

working to end racism within the Oakland police department, and opening the church for voter registration programs (Driggers 83).

More often than not, however, church and community cooperation will not involve as diverse a group as the Black Panthers and a Baptist church. The cooperation will usually exist between secular groups such as the Department of Human Services, businesses, and other community organizations, whose end goal is the same as that of the churches in those neighborhoods, namely to provide a better quality of life for all involved.

Claerbaut provides several suggestions for those pastors and congregations which choose to remain in their transitional neighborhoods. First, an awareness is needed, both of what Scripture says about the oppressed and then by what those who live day in and day out under the yoke of institutional oppression have to say. He says that “no one can really listen to those who profess to be oppressed without returning with a new awareness of the pervasiveness of institutionalized evil” (156). Rauschenbusch clearly lived out this principle during his own ministry in New York city, not only by sympathizing with his congregants, but also living among and identifying with those under this yoke of “institutionalized evil.” Next, attitudes must be dealt with. Paternalism, patronizing treatment, and many other subtle forms of insincerity can be seen easily by those being ministered to . Ministry in these communities is not a matter of arbitrary distribution, but a matter of sharing (157). The pastor and people who choose to minister in these neighborhoods must also learn to identify with the people of the community, as well as learn to communicate effectively in the language and

culture of the minority population, all the while being flexible, genuine, honest, and forthright. Because of the universality of the Gospel, it can be made “supra-cultural” and “stripped of its ethnocentricity” (159). Effective ministry is to be characterized as being credible, serving, desirous of learning, and actively in support of the minority culture and its worthy causes (161).

Albuquerque First Baptist Church began like many churches with a hunger ministry that met the needs of a handful of individuals. The ministry at that church, however, has grown to include a \$1 million facility, which provides noon meals four days-a-week, showers, hygiene products, laundry facilities, clothing, and other assistance for the homeless in that city. Begun in 1981, the ministry now feeds thousands per month and has gained national prominence and recognition doing so. The church has even added a staff position to minister to and coordinate the delivery of assistance to the homeless. The ministry emphasizes a program known as workfare, in which assistance of up to \$100 is offered in return for 16 hours of volunteer work in the ministry. The ministry also helps those on the verge of homelessness by utilizing the same workfare practice. Louis Moore adds that “the church also....connects them with other area churches willing to set them up in an apartment with utilities for a month and help them find employment to pay the next month’s rent and utilities” (3).

Likewise, First United Methodist Church in Orlando, Florida, began in the early 1980s to respond to the wave of homelessness that hit that city. The church was the first to open a shelter in 1986, which has since been taken over by the local Coalition for the Homeless. First Methodist plays an active and important

part in the Coalition. Around 150 people a night took advantage of the opening up of the church courtyard for those needing a place to sleep, as well to migrants and others who were poor or unemployed (Balmer *Orlando* 267).

Rauschenbusch would applaud the efforts of both of these churches. However, he would be critical of both for not taking their efforts one step further, to the institutional level. Not only must temporary shelter be provided for the homeless, but more low-income housing must also be built. Job training must also be provided, and the churches should seek to lure new businesses into the community. Institutional evil is viewed by many as too difficult to solve. Thus, some churches, like Bellevue, simply leave the inner city. Other churches continue to focus solely on the individuals' problems caused by these issues. While this latter type of ministry is desperately needed and appreciated gladly by those it serves, it is not complete. The systemic causes of these problems must also be addressed by the church.

Kim Zalent, acting executive director in 1989 of the Community Workshop on Economic Development of Chicago, outlines a concept known as community economic development (CED), which tries to deal with the problems affecting the community that are "systemically based" and thus seem to many insurmountable. However, these churches that have entered into CEDs are working to curb economic decline and promote the economy in their neighborhoods. Zalent states that "the church is the sole remaining institution in some urban neighborhoods. Therefore, it may be the only group that still cares about the community and its residents, and the only one that is likely to take action" (25). Thus, CEDs attack

the root causes of such problems as homelessness by advocating affordable housing or a housing trust fund.

The church may not have the resources to respond unilaterally to the community's problems, thus compelling them to join in partnerships with other community congregations and organizations. These churches are turning old convents into low income housing, depositing money in community credit unions, thereby making more educational, home repair, and mortgage loans available. Local congregations and businesses are promoted by specially published community yellow pages. One CED sponsored a weatherization day in order to improve the energy efficiency of local homes. Early warning approaches to plant closings, worker-owned business ventures, recycling and exchange programs, community loan funds and credit unions, or tenant-managed public housing are also examples of how churches can help in partnership with other organizations (27). Many churches realize that the problem is not always the lack of money flowing into a community, but the large amount of money flowing out of community--into the hands of the absentee landlord, the downtown bank, or even uninsulated roofs (27).

T. Vaughn Walker, Assistant Professor at the Carver School of Social Work at Southern Seminary in Louisville, and pastor of an African-American church in that city, states that as part of the glorious gospel, the church must see its ministry as encompassing all of humanity's needs in a holistic mission. He then goes on to outline some of the key areas for the engaged church. He feels the church must be involved in local schools in curriculum development, special needs programs,

personnel selection, equity, healthy learning environments, tutorial and scholarship support, as well as adequate funding for education (21). Proper medical care for the elderly and the poor are also relevant issues for the church, as well as good health advocacy. He also sees the need for economic development and assistance and full employment, as well as adequate housing, as needs for the church to address. Walker states that "in addition to providing some economic assistance which is often needed, the church's ministry should involve job search assistance, resume development, interviewing workshops, job fairs, work skill directories and referrals, and credit unions" (21). He also sees affordable daycare, appropriate recreational outlets, and after school care as some other needs of the local community in which the church can be involved, needs similar to the ones to which Walter Rauschenbusch responded.

In his book on social ministry, Dieter Hessel outlines some practical models of church-based social services. These include the use of the building and facilities for community recreation, adult education, and cooperative gardening. The church can also provide the education and technical services to help senior citizens create shared, intergenerational housing as an alternative to age-segregated retirement homes (149). Some churches participate in sponsoring refugee families, programs of prison visitation, and activities for retarded persons or those in group homes. Many churches are already participating in such programs as a food co-op or a used clothing center, whether these be unilateral on the part of the church or with a group of churches in a given area. Some churches have decided to establish community-based youth homes for

juvenile offenders, as well as preschool programs, older persons' clubs, youth recreation programs, and other community development efforts. Some churches have initiated cooperatively owned thrift shops, health centers, music programs, and housing redevelopment programs (150).

In the area of housing, discussed at length earlier, several efforts have been initiated by governments, businesses, and charities to resettle the cities. Advocated by Former HUD secretary Jack Kemp, urban homesteading, under which houses in certain neighborhoods were sold for little or no cost, was a popular approach during the 1980's. Kemp also urged privatization of public, low-income housing, letting the poor purchase their own apartments, and letting them manage their own complexes. Restoring the tax base, restoring the neighborhood, and enhancing neighborhood businesses have been the goals of those who advocate the process of gentrification, by which affluent families restore usually historic homes in downtown area. Enterprise zones and urban free-enterprise zones have been a very popular approach advocated by many recently to solve the cities' woes. Businesses which locate in certain zones with high levels of unemployment, poverty, etc. are given tax breaks or looser regulation in return. The goal is to allow those who live in the neighborhoods to open up their own businesses. This builds pride in one's business and one's community. It also helps keep those who would exploit the neighborhood out. Many see this type of approach as the free-market cure to urban woes in the future (Sullivan 444).

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of chapter five in *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, Walter Rauschenbusch told a wonderful and prophetic tale. In his parable, the Nineteenth Century died and went to the “vaulted chamber of the past, where the Spirits of the dead Centuries sit on granite thrones together” (211). When the new Century entered, the Eighteenth Century asked what was accomplished over the last hundred years. The Nineteenth Century begins telling all of the achievements of the “Wonderful Century.” He tells of how knowledge had unlocked the mines of wealth, the thoughts of man had been freed, and the “chains of bigotry and despotism” had been broken. He concludes by proclaiming “they are rich. They are wise. They are free” (221). Slowly, the other Centuries began questioning the Nineteenth Century about the progress that was made:

You have made men rich. Tell us, is none in pain for tomorrow? Do all children grow up fair of limb and trained for thought and action? Do none die before their time? Has the mastery of nature made men free to enjoy their lives and loves, and to live the higher life of the mind?

You have made men wise. Are they wise or cunning? Have they learned to restrain their bodily passions? Have they learned to deal with their fellows in justice and love?

You have set them free. Are there none, then, who toil for others against their will? Are all men free to do the work they love best?

You have made men one. Are there no barriers of class to keep man and maid apart? Does none rejoice in the cause that makes the many moan? Do men no longer spill the blood of men for their ambition and the sweat of men for their greed? (212)

After listening to the questions posed to him, the Nineteenth Century bowed his head slowly and answered, “Your shame is already upon me. My great cities are

as yours were. My millions live from hand to mouth. Those who toil longest have least. My thousands sink exhausted before their days are half spent. Class faces class in sullen distrust” (212). He then concludes his response by saying, “Their freedom and knowledge has only made men keener to suffer. Give me a seat among you, and let me think why it has been so” (213).

As humankind stands on the brink of another century, one has to wonder about the great strides made in our own century. Since the time of Walter Rauschenbusch, humanity has learned to span vast continents in seconds, first with flight and now with satellites and fiber-optic communication; we have put to death many of the plagues and diseases that once haunted all of humanity; modern technology has brought on the motion picture, the home video, the cellular phone, the compact disc and the personal computer; medical technology has progressed so that average life spans have almost doubled in this century alone. One can imagine the Twentieth Century joining all the others in the “chamber of the Past,” content to tell and retell of her successes and triumphs. However, the conversation would be nearly the same.

Medical technology has extended our life spans, but we now have the capacity to destroy all of humanity and the world hundreds of times over with nuclear weapons; we have eradicated many diseases of the past, but we have failed to find a cure for or put a stop to AIDS, and in many parts of the world, men, women, and children are dying from preventable diseases caused by malnutrition; the United Nations serves as a forum for most of the world’s nations, but tyrants are still invading small neighbors and ethnic strife threatens

human life in all corners of the world.

As the Century comes to a close, it is obvious that humankind is still searching for the cure for human ills. Some look to technology, some to nationalism, some to communism, capitalism, or any other human system. It becomes clear, though, that the solutions to humanity's problems lie in the simple yet profound principles set forth almost two millennia ago. Jesus stares down through the centuries, pleading with humankind to try his simple teachings--love for neighbors and enemies, giving up material pursuits, humility, cooperation, brotherhood, and peace. In short, Jesus was calling for humanity to institute God's Kingdom here on earth.

Walter Rauschenbusch, like Jesus and the Hebrew prophets, calls out over a century to those who would listen. His was a Gospel that concerned itself with the entire human being--spiritual, social, mental, intellectual, and physical. He called for humankind to give up its selfish pursuits and join each other in brotherhood and love. Many have answered; too many have not.

The Church, for its own sake and the sake of the United States, must return once again to a Social Gospel. Retreating into her four walls has never solved any of society's great problems. Individuals must be called to repentance. But, our social institutions must be called to regeneration as well. All have contributed to the problem, either directly or through acquiescence, and all must repent in humility. Too much is at stake for selfishness, greed, materialism, nationalism, and ethnocentricity to sidetrack the Church in its mission.

The words of Rauschenbusch sound forth the clarion call to a nation and a

Church:

Will some Gibbon of Mongol race sit by the shore of the Pacific in the year A.D. 3000 and write on the "Decline and Fall of the Christian Empire"? If so, he will probably describe the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as the golden age when outwardly life flourished as never before, but when that decay, which resulted in the gradual collapse of the twenty-first and twenty-second centuries, was already far advanced.

Or will the twentieth century mark for the future historian the real adolescence of humanity, the great emancipation from barbarism and from the paralysis of injustice, and the beginning of a progress in the intellectual, social, and moral life of mankind to which all past history has no parallel? (*Christianity and the Social Crisis* 285)

And what will be the determining factor? It seems clear that the twentieth century has indeed failed so far in bringing about God's Kingdom on earth. However, it is not too late. To conclude chapter five in *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, Rauschenbusch wrote that "it will depend almost wholly on the moral forces which the Christian nations can bring to the fighting line against wrong, and the fighting energy of those moral forces will again depend on the degree to which they are inspired by religious faith and enthusiasm. It is either a revival of social religion or the deluge" (286). The Church must pray for this century to end with a revival and not the deluge.

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