




7-2021

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Recommended Citation

Lubienecki, PhD, P. (2021). Social Reconstruction: American Catholics Radical Response to the Social Gospel Movement and Progressives.. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 24 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.2401052021>

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Journal of Catholic Education

Spring 2021, Volume 24, Issue 1, 83-106

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<https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.2401052021>



Social Reconstruction: American Catholics' Radical Response to the Social Gospel Movement and Progressives

Paul Lubienecki¹

Abstract: At the fin de siècle the Industrial Revolution created egregious physical, emotional and spiritual conditions for American society and especially for the worker but who would come forward to alleviate those conditions? Protestants implemented their Social Gospel Movement as a proposed cure to these problems. Secular Progressives engaged in a more activist role both materially and through legislation. Both of these groups had limited successes with disappointing outcomes. America's Catholics, more accustomed to living and working in industrialized neighborhoods, eventually developed their own programs and agenda to address social and labor concerns. However some scholars believed that Catholic efforts merely replicated what others had achieved. It was the actions of America's Catholics in answer to these issues that propelled them onto the national scene with a sense of purpose, inclusion and equality. This paper examines each group to ascertain their programs, relevant accomplishments and demonstrate how resolutions to solve social and labor problems proceeded yet stagnated for some. For America's Catholics their agenda for social reconstruction empowered them to assert themselves as equals with a long lasting viable program of future corrective action.

Keywords: social gospel, progressives, Catholics, labor education

In the last part of the 19th and into the initial decades of the 20th centuries it became acceptable to champion for social and labor reforms as Catholics, Protestants and progressive activists increasingly campaigned to eradicate the social injustices of the nation's industrial surge.¹ Yet the historiography dealing with this era discounted the capability of America's Catholics in these efforts. Some historians relegated Catholic programs as a replication of Protestant initiatives or as part of a greater parochial outreach.²

Although many of the Catholic hierarchy supported the industrial capitalists, they recognized that the hazardous working environment and ensuing social and moral conditions demanded an

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improvement in the standard of living for the worker. But where should the catalyst for such corrections come? Would progressive social legislation and the acceptance of organized labor unions create a better environment for the laborer? Or, should the Church directly intervene to address and alleviate the plight of the worker?

The Catholic Church, through the initial social encyclical of *Rerum Novarum* (1891), intended to address the “labor issue” but for a universal audience. That audience however was more European in nature. Americans, in their own unique and exceptionalist manner, interpreted the document to conform to their needs. With the end of the First World War the American bishops in 1919 issued their own revolutionary document, the *Bishops’ Program for Social Reconstruction*, to advance an American Catholic agenda to address social and labor challenges. My contention is that American interpretations of the encyclical empowered America’s Catholics to consider themselves as equals with Protestants and other activists in social reform programs. Consequently this emboldened the American Catholic Church to issue its own detailed program for social restoration. This is based on two compelling arguments. First a collaborative effort of American Catholic hierarchy, laity and clergy emerged which accelerated American Catholics into a more significant role in industrial and social reform efforts. Secondly, American Catholics continued with social and labor reforms and labor education programs where others had failed or abandoned those efforts.

Initially, America’s Catholics proceeded cautiously and gradually in the areas of social and labor reform. But as the number of American Catholics multiplied in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries so did their influence. The conclusion of the First World War proved vital to the assimilation of Catholics in the nation and the formulation of a comprehensive Catholic plan to alleviate social ills. With a fresh sense of participation in the nation’s affairs the bishops discerned that their position now was to assist in the restoration of an American pluralistic society.

As the nineteenth century concluded, Catholics and Protestants competed to be the voice of the worker, the guardian of the marginalized and the defender of the “American way.”³ Both vied to be the spiritual and moral representative of the nation as each wanted social and labor reforms that accentuated their ideological and theological discrepancies. The Protestant Social Gospel movement sought its place with the worker and as a reformer of the transgressions from the Industrial Revolution. Juxtapose to this divine Protestant crusade, Progressivism emerged to break the chains of intellectual and religious thought that appeared to bind Americans and inhibited any meaningful reform.⁴ Both movements originated from an urgent need to reassess and transform American society and its political and economic institutions. Consequently, they resolutely intersected at various points. Progressivism however, while it shared some of the Social Gospel’s fervor, was heavily dependent on humanitarianism and secular interests to arouse the American conscience.

Although the Catholic hierarchy generally remained conservative they recognized that the hazardous working environment, along with the deteriorated social and moral conditions, mandated an improvement in the standard of living through social legislation and the acceptance of organized labor unions. Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore preached against the “sweatshops and starvation wages” laborers endured.⁵ Some Catholic leaders considered government intervention in the

economy as a cure for social problems. The burgeoning lay middle class began a shift towards a more progressive posture of social reform; a position that included the other social concerns of the day.⁶ In an era of reform movements a Catholic response, as an offset to other religious and secular agendas, was inevitable. But the American Catholic magisterium, and some of the laity, was hesitant to engage in reform movements as they were likely to be associated with American Protestantism or viewed as subversive.

With initiatives by Protestants and Progressives already in place, how could American Catholics formulate a policy to alleviate the contemporary labor and social ills? The dilemma then was how to develop a program of social engagement and how soon without disruption to the Church?

Social Gospel Movement as a Progressive Effort

American industrial society in the nineteenth century manifested a pluralistic urban culture that placed value on success not religion. Into this medley, the Social Gospel sought to change society linking personal holiness with social reform which echoed revivalist traditions in American religious history.⁷ The emergence of the Social Gospel movement did not necessarily constitute a bifurcation of social reform into Catholic and Protestant theologies nonetheless separate strategies evolved. The Social Gospel movement was, in a sense, more than the introduction of Christian or rather Protestant principles into society. It applied social reform principles to Christianity as salvation was a social affair of God's kingdom here and now.⁸ Some historians, like John Commons, argued that the Social Gospel Movement was theology in action based on experience.⁹

In this analysis the Social Gospel was likely more compatible to Catholics in the imminent formation of their own social reform programs. Similarly, the Progressive movement incorporated comparable elements. Both Movements relied on a moralistic and religious dimension to move forward but those components eventually were responsible for the termination of these crusades. The Social Gospel exposed conservative and liberal elements within Protestant America which in time fractured and defeated mainline denominations and diminished their endeavors at social reform.¹⁰

Progressive era activists were awash with righteous indignation as their movement unintentionally assumed the character of an evangelical revival in matters of reform. Progressivism however, while it shared some of the Social Gospel's fervor, was heavily dependent on humanitarianism and secular interests to arouse the American conscience.¹¹ Others maintained that the Progressives were a post-religious phenomenon as the progressives tended to be the children of devout believers who abandoned Christian orthodoxy.¹² Jane Addams was an example of this conundrum. She rationalized that the settlement house was not a continuation of religious piety but a revolt against Puritan ideas and dogma and the adaption of Christianity to social needs.¹³ Still as the nation's interests fluctuated so did progressive causes.

Social Gospel Origins

The Protestant lineage of the Social Gospel movement was rooted in European theology and philosophy with liberal and conservative components. Modern German biblical scholarship instigated a re-evaluation of the Scriptures which guided many theologians to emphasize the here-

and-now rather than the hereafter. In Great Britain during the mid-nineteenth century, Protestant clergy such as Frederick Maurice, Charles Kingsley and others called for a revitalized Church. Their mission, popularly known as Christian Socialism, demanded reforms for the poor and working classes and efforts to ameliorate their circumstances.¹⁴ Theirs was not a political philosophy but a theological idealism.

In the post-Civil War era in America similar developments proceeded from a tradition of transcendentalism and communitarian values. Laymen such as Henry George and Edward Bellamy insisted on a religious component to cure social ills without the horror of revolution or the abandonment of capitalism.¹⁵ Protestant ministers Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch assumed religious leadership roles within the movement and emphasized the social aspects of the Gospel to the delight, or consternation, of Protestants on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁶

Walter Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel as Christian Orthodoxy

The focus of the Social Gospel movement was on divine intervention in order to achieve social readjustment.¹⁷ "Enlightened conservatives" examined the "newness" of science and industry in the late nineteenth century. They acknowledged that the content of their Christianity was more important than the sentimental piety of the Gilded Age. Four "evils" influenced the formation of doctrines for the movement: crime, political corruption, urbanization and labor-capital conflicts.¹⁸ Social Gospel adherents believed in an optimistic, if not naïve manner, that application of the Gospel to this havoc would result in reform, reconstruction and a return to Christian values.

The Movement was controlled by the clergy but reliant on the laity. Washington Gladden, the Protestant preacher and social reformer who advocated for the worker, was labeled as the "father of the social gospel."¹⁹ He condensed the essence of this Movement as a Christian faith that was not constrained by dogma or ritual but situated in the simple injunction to "love thy neighbor as thyself." Gladden's desire was for Christian unity achieved through the Social Gospel movement but it was a Protestant unity he sought not a comprehensive ecumenicalism.²⁰

The Social Gospel movement also attempted to reinforce American values at the dawn of a new century. The Movement's theologians aspired to shape a particular concept of the Kingdom of God on earth. Those principles were an obvious connection to progressive thought and nationalism which supported social obligation and America's sense of mission. The premier theologian of the Social Gospel group was historian Walter Rauschenbusch. He considered how the evangelical traditions of American Protestantism created the twin beliefs of liberty and democratic equality in the United States. For Rauschenbusch history was the method for Christian ministers to reinterpret the timeless truths of the Bible. Accordingly Churches could use their moral authority to affect a revolutionary change in society.²¹

Rauschenbusch succinctly stated that the Social Gospel was Christian orthodoxy. The Church then, vis-à-vis the Social Gospel, was the common factor in salvation which brought social forces to bear on the evils of society. Rauschenbusch recognized that part of the tragic consequences of American capitalism was a system that represented a distortion of the divine-human relationship. Wealth became a technique for the rich to isolate themselves from the sufferings of the poor.²²

Many in the United States regarded democracy and individual liberty, part of the American way, as Protestant American traits only. It was inconceivable to Rauschenbusch that the dogma of the Gospel could be preached in the advanced industrial society of the United States by Catholic bishops subservient to Rome. He felt that remediation of social concerns could not be adequately addressed by non-Protestants. Rauschenbusch characterized Catholicism as profoundly anti-democratic and as a major cause for the difficulties that many nations encountered in maintaining free institutions.²³ Writing in *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, he affirmed that “even today, when the current of democracy is flowing powerfully through the modern world, the Roman Church has a persistent affinity for the monarchical principle and an instinctive distrust for democracy.”²⁴

Theology of a Christian Economic Order

At the 1898 Baptist Congress in Buffalo, Rauschenbusch criticized both the state and corporations for their failure to “aid the common man” and settle labor disputes.²⁵ In 1907, Rauschenbusch presented five fundamental requirements for a Christian economic order to correct these wrongs: social justice, collective property rights, industrial democracy, approximate equality and cooperation. He favored labor in its struggles with industrial capitalists and believed that political democracy without industrial democracy was “form without substance.”²⁶ The following year the General Conference of the Methodist Federation for Social Service issued their report titled *The Church and Social Problems*. It cited the good work of the industrialists but addressed the negative conditions of the worker and urged labor and capital to find “industrial peace and human brotherhood.”²⁷

The theology of the Social Gospel presupposed a kind of monolithic culture. The objective of mainline Protestant denominations then was to recoup the confidence of the working class through the incorporation of the laborer into the Protestant church. The Movement’s greatest strength was spiritual rather than practical. It utilized theology as a lens to engage in political, economic and sociological analysis instead of attaining tangible solutions.

Inconsistencies Within

The Movement, however, was inconsistent at times. The mission of the Social Gospel initially promoted morals and ethics over economics. It regarded the conflict between labor and capital as the crux of this industrial clash. The Protestant Social Gospel constructed an aura that was socially liberal and politically active yet only proposed limited legislation to correct society’s evils. Some of the “social gospellers” were more proactive in their preaching to the middle class about social ills rather than acting to correct the circumstances.²⁸ With the exception of the Episcopalians and Baptists, no other denominations established associations or made an official commitment to the cause of social Christianity.

The Social Gospel Movement cultivated a composition of predominantly white American Protestant middle-class members who, buffeted by economic and technological change, feared a decline in their social status. Essentially, it related more with the middle class than with the

working class.²⁹ Protestant ministers failed to comprehend the social needs of the ethnic urban poor who lived in slums that were an extension of the industrial revolution. Whole congregations often relocated their parish into better neighborhoods abandoning the poor without religious care.³⁰ Into those ethnic working class areas Catholic parishes were soon established to minister to the neglected.

While some liberals deemed the Movement as the salvation of Christianity from secular futility, conservatives regarded it as a shift away from theological orthodoxy.³¹ The Social Gospel crusade did accomplish much and compelled some to aid their neighbors. Contrary to analysis of some historians the historical evidence demonstrated that the Movement failed in its campaign to be the leading voice of the worker and to convert the urban immigrant masses.³²

Protestants, Catholics and Social Reform

At the twilight of the nineteenth century and the dawn of the twentieth, two parallel Christian movements emerged quite different in political and practical implications. Their mutual focus was to end the exploitation of labor and correct the evils of urbanization and support the labor movement. The Protestant Social Gospel approach tended to be evangelical with a strong emotional appeal. Catholic social concerns stressed rights and justice based on the appeal of natural law.³³ Did this imply that there was religious competition for the soul of the American worker by Catholics and Protestants?

Rival faiths did not aggressively proselytize in the factories or mills of industrial America. There was no proof of any interaction or even awareness at the ministerial or ecclesiastical levels. No evidence existed of any collaborative efforts between Protestants and Catholics on remedies to the social questions.³⁴ Some Protestants such as Reverend Lyman Abbott, economist Carroll Wright and other Social Gospel advocates panegyrically welcomed the publication of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) which addressed the plight of the worker and advocated for reform.³⁵ Still this did not promote collaboration to alleviate social problems. Protestants tolerated religious diversity but not pluralism.

The real purpose of mainline Protestantism, particularly during the cultural changes concurrent with the Social Gospel Movement, was to maintain social order and stability which many believed that Jews and Catholics would destroy.³⁶ Most Catholics in America continued to live in an antagonistic anti-Catholic nation. Therefore ecumenical idealism was not viable despite the mutual recognition of the social evils brought about by industrial capitalists.

Contradictions

Catholicism, according to historian Ken Fones-Wolf, was unable to legitimize labor's struggles or offer a meaningful program for social and political reform. Catholics were unable to maximize political clout and consequently, union leadership was dependent upon Protestant religious liberals of the Social Gospel for results. Fones-Wolf's interpretation suggested that *Rerum Novarum* added nothing particularly new or revolutionary to aid workers in their struggles. His perspective of *Rerum Novarum* was that it only "encourages a degree of pro labor social consciousness."³⁷

Fones-Wolf contended that while the Catholic Church was better suited to reach an urban working class it was the Protestant denominations, and the Social Gospelers, that were likely to appeal to labor as their “clergymen spoke the language of unionism.” Additionally, he portrayed America’s Catholics as mimicking Protestant characteristics “suggesting that Catholic union leaders may have been attempting simply to Americanize their movement through an alliance with Social Gospel Christians.”³⁸

This insular analysis disregarded how Catholics, after the publication of *Rerum Novarum*, became a viable partner with labor through the acceptance of unions such as the Knights of Labor. With significant Catholic participation in most labor unions membership was no longer a matter for excommunication or viewed as sinful. The immigrant Catholic working class judged the Roman Catholic Church to be supportive of their organized labor activities. Conversely American Protestants, with their strong pedigree of individualism and exceptionalism, discerned that it was natural to espouse the “iron law of wages” and oppose unionization rather than support it.

The Social Gospel, according to Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, struggled to lend authoritative religious support to the cause of organized labor even though labor unions helped to establish a measure of justice for the common worker.³⁹ The histories of individual Catholic dioceses illustrated that American Catholics were building parishes in urban working class neighborhoods not abandoning them.⁴⁰ The narrative of American history equated organized labor and social reform more with the Catholic Church not inevitably so with the Social Gospel Movement.

The Threat of the Protestant “New Theology”

America’s Protestants continued to wrestle with the tendencies of modern progressive thought and theology. Some Protestant lay and religious leaders interchangeably used the terms “liberal” and “social gospel” while many others did not identify themselves with the Movement who stressed a traditional evangelical theology.⁴¹ The liberal clergy succeeded in restoring a degree of their prestige through immersion in progressive social Christianity. However religious conservatives voiced doubts about the relevance of the Social Gospel principles.

Many of these conservative Protestants felt restricted and forced into accepting a position of either traditional Christian belief or a new program of social action.⁴² Conservative evangelicals, who often addressed matters of social concern, judged the Social Gospel as a threat. This “new” theology challenged the relevance of eternal salvation through Christ with an exaggerated prominence on social concerns as an alternative to the Gospel itself.⁴³ What then was the mission of Protestantism: was it to feed the poor and become entangled in economic reform or was it to convert sinners?

For many conservative Protestants they reacted by rejecting anti-reformist measures as their interests centered on conforming to God’s will rather than discernment of individual purposes. These conservatives, who resided mainly in rural areas, rebuffed progressive concepts in matters of religion and culture by reaffirmation of orthodoxy or attacks on liberal modernism. This response was an obvious return to the fundamental precepts of the faith and a refutation of the Social Gospel.⁴⁴

For the conservatives the Social Gospel suffered under the handicap of its alliance with liberal theology. Fundamentalists ascertained that the rise of modernism and “social Christianity” created errors. The First World War was a confirmation of their position that demonstrated the weakness and vanity of a progressive society.⁴⁵ With the conclusion of the war the uncompromising fundamentalists commandeered Protestant efforts at reform and effectively ended the Social Gospel movement.

Confirmation of this perspective came from Rev. Dr. John Roach Straton’s sermon at New York’s Calvary Baptist Church in 1925. His homily titled “*How to Save America*” stressed that people and preachers surrender themselves to God and return to “old time religion.” Rev. Straton believed that ministers spent too much time trying to solve the issues of capital and labor and that a “preacher is not to take sides in such controversies” but to bring all parties back to righteous and repentance of sins.⁴⁶ Any positive aspects of progressive thought in American Protestantism were obliterated as the pendulum swung from Rev. Josiah Strong’s declaration that “Christ came not only to save individual souls but society” to a more personal fundamentalist theology.

The Progressive Movement

Contemporaneously with the Social Gospel was the more secular styled Progressive Movement. The evolution of the Progressive Era set in motion numerous forces for change in the social and economic fabric of the United States and like the Social Gospel it also attained its apex with the First World War.⁴⁷ The Progressives recognized the dichotomy of American industry and capitalism in relation to the worker and society. The gap between rich and poor widened as industrial output increased with no corresponding means to meet human needs or reform the accompanying manifest evils of corporate enterprise.

But most Progressives rejected religion and the religious notion that the status of rich or poor was the natural result of a divine preordained process. This skewed dogma inhibited those who sought change and reform. Progressives were more aware of secular humanist values than conventional religious doctrines. They wanted to make humanitarianism the replacement for Protestantism in America. Those who toiled for social reconstruction consisted of social workers, educators, politicians, economists, academics and journalists who preached their own Gospel of Progressivism.⁴⁸

The Progressive leader, Jane Addams, inserted her own version of religion into the movement. She viewed “Christendom” as a civic society imbued with Protestant principles not as a sect but in society itself.⁴⁹ Liberal clergy traversed both movements and this duplicity provided a simulated religious sanction to the Progressives’ mission. Historian Richard Hofstadter commented that no other major movement in American history received so much pastoral support. The Progressive Movement, while not embracing organized religion, consequently was able to acquire a full complement of chaplains.⁵⁰

The Progressive Era primarily centered on social legislation that served democratic purposes since some considered government as the only viable source for reform. Social security, unemployment insurance, safer working conditions, restrictions on child labor, legal protection for women

employees and better wages and hours, in addition to improved housing, were the hallmarks of reform. Melvyn Dubofsky asserted that the Progressive era reforms “include a little something for everyone” as there were stricter anti-trust laws, business regulations and social reforms.⁵¹ For a brief period this was America’s secular religion of democracy and civic piety.

Movements of Paradox

Yet both the Social Gospel and the Progressive movements were full of incongruities. The Social Gospel preached reform but when coherent proposals for social change, especially for labor, were proposed a wide chasm emerged between the middle class and labor. Ministers who lived a middle class existence and professed a friendship for labor lacked a complete comprehension of the workers’ struggles.⁵² The Social Gospel was often unrealistic in its evaluation of the ills affecting society. At times, it functioned as a panacea for the guilt feelings of the middle class or facilitated the clergy to compete intellectually with political and scholarly elites.⁵³

Similarly the Progressives engaged in a mindset that right and wrong were the only important categories, advocated for the questioning of ideas and the examination of institutions. The difficulty of the Progressive movement was integrating sectionalism into a broader national organization. Historian Frederick Jackson Turner mused that this readjustment of older ideas to new conditions meant that government was regarded as the bastion of traditional democracy. Accordingly socialism was considered as a substitute to that former safeguard of democracy.⁵⁴ Since Progressives only supported their own value system those radicals and dissenters who did challenge any progressive ideas discovered instability and confusion which handicapped many reform efforts.⁵⁵

As a middle class movement Progressives who promoted worker reforms were shocked by the militancy of labor. For some this was their first and only encounter with constituents of organized labor. Ultimately, many Progressives aligned themselves with property conscious conservatives.⁵⁶ Progressivism thrived on humanists’ principles not religious orthodoxy. Although many inserted moralism into the cause they subtly, and unknowingly, weaved religious principles into the fabric of a secular movement.

As the First World War preoccupied the nation the Progressive Era, to the disappointment of many reformers, terminated into a conservative impasse. Years later, many of the proposed reforms of the progressives resurfaced in much New Deal legislation. With the 1920s, both Movements vanished but social and labor issues remained. Within this vacuum emerged a nascent American Catholic program for social and labor reconstruction. The ascent of American Catholics at this moment propelled them onto the national stage of equality and began a course of social engagement.

American Catholics in a New Century

At the fin de siècle America’s Catholics were surrounded by a whirlwind of episodes specifically anti-Catholic agitation, the Americanist controversy, the Pope’s encyclicals, the Progressives and the Social Gospel. For some this proved to be a crippling type of “spiritual neurosis.” The American Catholic hierarchy, previously uplifted by *Rerum Novarum* (1891) only to be wounded years

later by *Testem Benevolentiae* (1899), was uncertain how to vigorously guide their flock into the twentieth century.⁵⁷ As the ecclesiastical structure regrouped a new source of influence emerged within the American Catholic Church one that formed sound principles of social reconstruction: the laity.

During the concluding decades of the nineteenth century and the initial years of the twentieth century the American Catholic Church sought a distinctive path to characterize its identity within the universal Church and America. This was the era of the imperial episcopacy. It was the preface to brick-and-mortar Catholicism that traversed the ideas of the Progressive Era and the praxis of the Social Gospel Movement. These were also exigent and perilous times that encompassed both economic mania and decay, the escalation of political and ideological systems and international military conflicts.

A greater issue was how the clergy and hierarchy could solidify the Catholic Church's place within American society. If the Church was too aligned with workers or organized labor this might create anxiety within the established industrial capitalist order. If the Church affiliated itself with capital the lay Catholic worker might abandon the church totally. The American ecclesiastics now searched for a compromise position that recognized the complaints and concerns of Catholic laborers yet satisfied industrialist by leading the laity away from radicalism and socialism. Within the labor-capital affair was a burgeoning lay Catholic middle class that now spanned both factions of labor and management.

Impediments for America's Lay Catholics

As lay Catholics advanced in all areas of society so did their power and influence. The hierarchy exhibited a form of collegiality with the laity through congresses and conventions but it was an ersatz arrangement. Bishops discouraged the laity from wider initiatives and prohibited their involvement in key areas of ecclesiastical responsibility.⁵⁸ The hierarchy also moved slowly and cautiously, not enthusiastically, in promotion of lay initiatives for social and labor reforms.

The Catholic laity, by tradition and reputation, was perceived as an inferior component to the Church. For centuries, the manifestation was of two classes. The primary group was the clergy who operated the church, decided doctrine, administered the sacraments and preached. The other class, the lay members of the Church, did not attain that status and therefore did not have significant duties or important ministerial responsibilities.⁵⁹ However, America's lay Catholics evolved into a contradiction to that tradition. They worked to formulate a response to clerical authority and to be a viable alternative to the Social Gospel movement. But this could only occur once American Catholics developed their own social reform movement.

The American Church, in the primary years of the twentieth century, wished to move beyond the incidental consequences of *Testem Benevolentiae* through active cooperation within the universal Church. Catholic thought, in both America and Europe, was captured within a legalistic and jurisdictional concept of Church that maintained a defensive attitude toward the modern world.⁶⁰ With a strengthening capitalist economy, the preferential option for liberal and conservative Catholics was to maintain nominal appreciation for organized labor. Consequently, lay and clerical

leaders in the United States offered praise for the doctrines of *Rerum Novarum* but were unable to fully appreciate the document's content as a source for change. This occurred because Catholics were devoid of the intellectual tools and methodology for implementing those concepts.⁶¹

But the social and labor dilemma was not just an American phenomenon. Labor troubles and the corresponding social issues were a trans-Atlantic reality. On both sides of the Atlantic a professional class of Catholics matured aware of the urban industrial squalor and the struggles of labor. To some extent most American Catholics were already integrated into the issues of social injustice and industrial problems based on an empirical encounter not an intellectual perspective.

Catholic laymen and women had a social vision where religious and social needs coincided. Their premise was that Catholics could assimilate into a larger humanitarian mainstream of trans-Atlantic society with a moral Catholic foundation in a predominantly Protestant world. Accordingly, the laity re-emerged to be an independent political, spiritual and social voice for the marginalized and the laborer. But due to the disorder from the Americanist crisis, the intellectual formation of American Catholicism was not located in the lay congregations of the parish but resided with the directors of the seminaries.⁶²

There was some movement toward a Progressive era style restructuring in politics, science and social reform but this represented the minority of American Catholic thought.⁶³ Catholics were not prominent in Progressive Era reform movements and only a negligible number of clergymen contributed to social reform. Drastic action and thought were necessary to move American Catholics to address the specific issues of labor and society but these efforts were impeded as the Church in the United States still functioned as a subaltern to the Vatican.

Ambivalence Toward the Worker

The American Catholic Church reached sacerdotal equality in 1908 when Pope Pius X declared that Catholics in the United States were no longer "residents" of a mission territory.⁶⁴ The change in jurisdictional status did not initiate any modifications or adjustments to the internal structure or operations of the American church.⁶⁵ It was however, a tacit reward for ultimately adhering to the traditions of the universal Church. This improved position created a sense of permanency for an American Catholic hierarchy that only a decade earlier was reprimanded for its sense of American individualism.

Most of America's Catholic magisterium tolerated the developments of worker movements and unions. They must; this was the heritage tendered to them by *Rerum Novarum*. American Catholics now constituted majorities in many union locals and represented forty percent of the leadership in industrial unions.⁶⁶ If the hierarchy withheld support for organized labor this ultimately could have eroded spiritual, cultural and economic ties to the laity.

Rapid industrial change, along with economic fluctuations and political deference to industrial capitalists, widened the gap between the workers and capitalists.⁶⁷ Contingent on labor remaining religiously neutral and anti-socialist the Catholic clergy then were ostensibly dispassionate on the labor issue. Only when violence erupted or the specter of socialism loomed did the clergy voice concern for the working class.⁶⁸

In the pre-World War I years the social concerns of the Catholic clergy initially focused not on the worker problem but on the establishment of social welfare agencies. The influx of immigrants required Church leaders to establish social service organizations and charitable institutions under Catholic auspices. This was due, partially, to an improved socially conscious awareness among Catholic lay and religious leaders who recognized that the overwhelming majority of immigrants were Catholics. More significantly, their efforts were meant to obstruct competition by Protestants and Progressives in their desire to create corresponding secular organizations to alleviate social ills.

American Catholics and Ethnic Social Programs

During this time diverse American Catholic ethnic groups were also involved in social welfare programs. Extensive lay activity originated with German Americans in the *Central Verein* in the 1850s and later in the 1870s with Irish Americans and their *Irish National Benevolent Union*. With the era of the “new immigration” other nationalities pursued the natural instinct to organize social agencies and associations within their own ethnic groups. Their purpose was to educate and assimilate the “foreigners” into mainstream American culture.⁶⁹

Consequently from 1901 to 1919 middle class lay Catholics, of various ethnic origins, consolidated and formed the *American Federation of Catholic Societies*. Operating at a national level, the Federation’s goal was to build a Christian America on Catholic principles. Eventually, the Federation modified its social reform program to concentrate on the labor issue.⁷⁰ The influx of Catholic immigrants that swelled the Church’s growth in the New World concluded with the war in Europe and restrictive immigration legislation in the 1920s. With this the era of the immigrant church ended. Now with superior numbers the laity emerged as the dominant structure within the American Catholic church.

Catholics as Equals

The First World War and its aftermath created a crucial role in the formation of the American Catholic church for both the laity and the clergy. Many Catholics joined the armed forces and a majority supported the Allied powers.⁷¹ Catholics who fought in the War now believed that their contributions obligated the nation to recognize Catholics as equals and truly integrated Americans.⁷² This sense of entitlement mutated into a consciousness of empowerment for the Catholic laity as they exhibited a self-confidence of what they could offer to the Church and society. The War muffled the ethnic separatism of many immigrant Catholics and deepened their American Catholic patriotism. This, and the laity’s improved status as a middle class entity, encouraged many to be more militant and vocal.⁷³

To the Church the laity was a financial source for the increase in parish building construction. The growth of parishes, parochial schools and confraternities enabled the laity to be an influential voice in each diocese. However they did not necessarily speak with a commanding tone in Church affairs. The laity was more firmly entrenched in the civic and political arena. America’s Catholics viewed the 1920s as their opportunity to define Catholic culture.⁷⁴

As Catholic socio-economic ascendancy intensified many believed that they were now fully Americanized in a pluralistic society and sought to be acknowledged. The hierarchy recognized that the laity was an integral part of mainstream American culture and a potential force that could shape the Church's future. The laity's mission, categorized as "religio-civic action" by Catholic theologian John Courtney Murray, was to the temporal order and society.⁷⁵

These accomplishments enhanced the role of the Catholic laity moving them onto parity with the clergy. Lay Catholic men and women were no longer amateurs but activists who procured their rightful place with ecclesial representatives in social justice and labor reform matters.⁷⁶ But the American hierarchy was not prepared to function in a collaborative partnership with the laity in the administration of the Church.

The Hierarchy Solidifies Their Power

During the First World War the prelates and clergy, anxious to demonstrate American Catholic patriotism, inosculated themselves to President Wilson in his campaign to "make the world safe for democracy." Specifically, the hierarchy formed the National Catholic War Council (NCWC) in 1917 to coordinate Catholic efforts in support of the war and the military through sponsorship of Liberty Bond rallies and numerous relief efforts.⁷⁷ The NCWC was organized by the clergy and bishops to operate as a national and united group of the hierarchy to promote Catholic causes. It was the first united organization of the American hierarchy.

The bishops, in order to expedite their own works through the NCWC, expropriated the efforts of the Catholic lay group the Knights of Columbus.⁷⁸ In addition to their other spiritual and temporal works of mercy, the Knights were a Federally approved service agency for Catholic soldiers. The Knights performed the bulk of the work yet encountered resistance by the prelates because the Knights, as a lay association, were suitably organized and well-funded. It was a lay group that initiated service and relief work not the clergy. However, after the influential intervention of Cardinal Gibbons the Knights of Columbus "voluntarily" accepted a subservient role.⁷⁹ This maneuver, by the magisterium, maintained clerical efforts to solidify power and authority over the laity.

Viewing the post-war years as an era for social and labor justice and as an opportunity to transform society, the bishops reconstituted the War Council into the National Catholic Welfare Conference.⁸⁰ Pope Benedict XV encouraged this organization to be a permanent adjunct of the national episcopate that applied Christian principles to the issues of labor and education. This was also an opportunity for the American bishops to maintain their position of singular authority over local Church affairs. The prelates established five departments (Laws and Legislation, Education, Social Action, Lay Organizations and Publicity, Press and Literature) to implement their policies. The Social Action Department retained strategic power as it was responsible for the education of all Catholics and non-Catholics in the Church's teachings on social justice matters.⁸¹

Not all of the hierarchy supported this organization. Boston's Cardinal William O'Connell regarded the organization as a continuation of an independent American church not aligned with Rome. Other bishops refused to sustain it financially or consider it as a provocation to their

authority. The effectiveness of the NCWC's programs was solely dependent upon the unity of the bishops and without ecclesiastical support, any crusade for social and labor justice was not feasible.⁸²

However, the majority discovered that the Conference's headquarters, located in Washington, D.C., offered them an unprecedented degree of exposure. This facilitated the Catholic magisterium to speak as a national body and to be heard in the civic debate by both the public and the politicians. The bishops were resolute to fully utilize this new arrangement and participated in the new post-war sensation of American achievement on the world stage.

The Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction

The hierarchy's defining moment at this time was the institutional commitment to social action outlined in their 1919 pastoral letter titled the "Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction." For most Americans, the social and economic problems of the post war years accompanied the country's development as an urban industrialized nation. American laborers were under duress and the middle-class was apprehensive of both corporate power and organized labor.⁸³

Having participated in the war effort the prelates defined the role of the American Church as a matter of reforming or remodeling the social fabric of society based on moral law. To further emphasize their agenda the bishops stated that the "nation's business is our business."⁸⁴ They further elaborated that the duty of every American Catholic was to participate in this reconstruction of society.

The Catholic prelates formulated a comprehensive plan that scrutinized these social concerns following the War. Consequently, to accentuate a unified Catholic presence, the bishops devised a strategy for an America that was transformed through a program of social reconstruction. This, they believed, contributed to the economic stability of the nation. The Catholic bishops, not reactionary in nature, wanted to confine their model of change to a capitalist system that contained a few reasonable reforms to be achieved in a short period. More progressive and fundamental reforms were tabled for a distant completion date.

Their plan was not particularly novel in 1919. Moreover the hierarchy aroused the sentiment of Progressive Era Americans who felt that institutions and programs required change. The prelates reviewed similar concepts from the British Labor Party, British Quaker employers, the American Federation of Labor and executives from the United States Chamber of Commerce.⁸⁵ But it was the idealistic writings of Father John Ryan that were the foundation of this innovative American Catholic document.

This ecclesiastical proposal was not official doctrine of the magisterium. Its purpose was to be a non-binding "educational" directive. The bishops sought an enculturation of Christian social ethical principles in an American setting. The 1919 Program of Social Reconstruction reflected a Catholic counterpart to the demands put forward in the Progressive Era by the Social Gospel Movement.⁸⁶ This was an unintended American Catholic response to the Progressives, the Social Gospel and the Protestants. It was also an implicit rejoinder to the Russian Revolution and the troublesome labor conditions in the United States.

Father John Ryan and a Living Wage

The architect of the Bishops' Program, Father John A. Ryan, inherited his father's distaste for monopolies and the economic policies of capitalists and corporations. As a seminary student in the late 1890s, Ryan discovered *Rerum Novarum* which validated his own views on the regulation of industry by the state. Fr. Ryan's avocation was the adaptation of *Rerum's* principles to the American economic environment.⁸⁷ His 1906 dissertation, *A Living Wage, It's Ethical and Economic Aspects*, became the foundation for his additional work in 1918 on social reconstruction.

Ryan, a professor of moral theology at Catholic University, was petitioned by Father John O'Grady a secretary on the Reconstruction Committee of the NCWC, to refine and finish his monograph on social reconstruction.⁸⁸ Ryan devoted his academic life as an advocate for a living wage. Melding the doctrines of *Rerum Novarum* with the American ideas of democracy Ryan cultivated not only his own personal social philosophy but advanced it as a major factor to shape American Catholic social identity.⁸⁹ The genius of Ryan's work was his ability to merge Catholic social thought with American reform programs.

Written by Ryan and issued in February 1919, the American bishops proposed "a practical and moderate program" of those "reforms that were to be desirable and also obtainable within a reasonable time and to a few general principles which should be a guide to more distant developments." The magisterium considered this an "imperative call to action ...for translating our faith into works."⁹⁰ There were several immediate noteworthy goals to be implemented: continuation of the National War Labor Board to mediate labor disputes; public housing for the urban poor; a national employment service; progressive taxation; regulation of monopolies and government control of utilities.⁹¹ The document unintentionally provided a transition in social thought toward the future legislation of the New Deal.

American Catholic Social Reform and the 1919 Program

The key agenda of the Bishop's Program focused on the worker. Like *Rerum*, the American bishops insisted on "the establishment of wage rates that will be at least sufficient for the decent maintenance of a family." The creation of a minimum wage was for male workers and "adequate to the decent individual support of female workers." Wages were to be "high enough" for the possibility to generate savings "to protect the worker and his family against sickness, accidents, invalidity and old age."⁹²

The document stipulated that a living wage should prevail with no reduction. A living wage represented "only a minimum of justice" according to the document. The true effect of a living wage was a "guarantee of a continuous and general operation of industrial establishments" and an "instrument of prosperity for labor and capital alike." The American Catholic Church viewed this as a policy of justice and "sound economics" applicable to all workers regardless of gender.

This work directed the State to "make comprehensive provision for insurance against illness, invalidity, unemployment and old age." The *Program of Social Reconstruction* was revolutionary as it appealed for funding for social insurance of workers' compensation and unemployment benefits "raised by a levy on industry." While this social insurance was to be administered by the State it was not to interfere with the "individual freedom of the worker and his family."⁹³

The bishops were walking a new path of social reform that supported men, women and children in the work place. The Church succinctly defended the worker through the “recognition of the right of labor to organize and to deal with employers through its chosen representatives.” In an exceptional and progressive concept the bishops also advocated that women in the work place “who were engaged at the same tasks as men should receive equal pay for equal amounts and qualities of work.” They were also in agreement with “public opinion in the majority of the States... against the continuous employment of children.”⁹⁴ The hierarchy reaffirmed that legislation to abolish child labor must not become stagnant and to extend laws that strengthen and enforced “safety and sanitation in work places.”⁹⁵

The long term objectives continued the activist nature of the pastoral letter. The bishops suggested the formation of workers’ cooperatives and industrial realignment into “co-partnerships.” This allowed “workers to own and manage the industries themselves and... exercise a reasonable share in the management.”⁹⁶ These collaborative partnerships of labor and management authorized workers to have an equal voice in the setting of wages, working conditions and industrial management.

The “instruments of production will still be owned by individuals not by the State.”⁹⁷ The Church recognized that the “employer has a right to get a reasonable living out of his business.” The document extolled the virtues of *Rerum Novarum* and insisted that “the laborer is a human being not merely an instrument of production and that the laborer’s right to a decent livelihood is the first moral charge upon industry.”⁹⁸

Father Ryan and the *Program of Social Reconstruction* did not propose the elimination of capitalism in exchange for socialism. Ryan in fact condemned socialism as a social and economic movement that was hostile to religion, individual rights and human welfare.⁹⁹ As an economic technique he argued that it was infused with limitations. Ryan stressed that the “rights of property were not unlimited; there was nothing in Catholic doctrine to support any such theory. The right of property was the right to use not the right of ownership.”¹⁰⁰ Yet Ryan stressed individual rights even as he critiqued individualism. This apparent paradox echoed the merging of Catholic and American traditions. His belief and that of many American Catholics was that Church teaching brought American ideals of freedom and equality into full realization.

This document reiterated that industrial reform was a necessary factor in the alleviation of poverty and pauperism for the American worker.¹⁰¹ It demanded not only “universal living wages” but obligated industry “directly or indirectly to a more just distribution of wealth in the interest of the laborer.”¹⁰² Unfortunately, the actuality for Ryan was that the number of bishops who backed his living wage agenda for social reform could be counted on one finger.¹⁰³

The American Catholic Church, at the end of the First World War, was seeking a middle ground as an alternative to the social injustices of capitalism and the secularism of socialism. The proposals in the bishops’ social reconstruction program were intended to be that answer. Reaction to the document polarized both Catholics and non-Catholics. Historian Jay Dolan declared the public’s response as “very favorable” with many in amazement at how the Catholic hierarchy was socially progressive. Protestants and labor leaders reacted positively to the plan.¹⁰⁴ Radical elements in the

labor movement praised the pastoral letter particularly the justification of the worker in controlling the industrial process and distribution of the product.

The document's critics, such as the National Association of Manufacturers, condemned it as "partisan, pro-labor union, socialist propaganda under the official insignia of the Roman Catholic Church."¹⁰⁵ Corporations considered it as a plot by the Catholic Church to introduce extremism and socialism into the nation. Anti-Catholic nativists revived fears, even among Catholics, of a "Bolshevik menace and Red Scare" at home due to the revolutionary concepts of the prelates.¹⁰⁶

Praxis

During the initial two decades of the twentieth century, American Catholics searched for the best methods to implement *Rerum Novarum* and apply the concepts of Father Ryan, and the *Bishops' Program for Social Reconstruction*. A bold effort was initiated by Father Peter Dietz. Ministering in Cleveland and other parts of Ohio, he functioned from a position of collaboration with organized labor to resolve the workers' distress. Dietz firmly believed, more so than other priests of his era, that strong unions brought social justice and prevented the development of socialism.¹⁰⁷ Social and labor progress for Dietz was realized through prayer and active participation and education of the worker and laity. Dietz attempted to establish a Catholic social movement that embraced the laity and proposed education to train workers which would correct social injustice.

His most momentous accomplishment, for transforming *Rerum Novarum* and *Bishops' Program for Social Reconstruction* into daily action, came through the formation of the Militia of Christ. He viewed it as a "Catholic auxiliary" to the trade union movement and the nucleus for Catholic trade union thought.¹⁰⁸ Dietz realized that half the membership, and the majority of the leadership, of the American Federation of Labor was Catholic. His mission was to incorporate Catholic principles and doctrine into the labor movement. The priest's fundamental goal was to build social education and social action groups of lay Catholics and unionized Catholic workers through "labor schools and colleges."¹⁰⁹ However, his future plans failed to materialize due to a lack of funds and a lack of interest by Catholic clergy.¹¹⁰

Conclusions: Victors and Failures

Social Gospel minister Washington Gladden preached that Christianizing the government was the duty of every Christian in order to effect change but admitted that it was a "herculean labor."¹¹¹ With the conclusion of the First World War and the emerging "Roaring Twenties" Protestants abandoned the social and labor reform precepts of the Social Gospel movement. They elected to journey down a more religiously fundamentalist path stressing the spiritual rather than the corporeal. The dichotomy of social salvation was contrary to the Gospel.

Accordingly the secular activists of the Progressive movement considered government as the supreme authority for change. But legislation to enact reform was measured with limited successes. Uncertainty and internal division mitigated reforms to the future. Optimism for change faded due to slow advances and the harsh realities of international threats Their cause was not fully

realized until the passage of numerous New Deal programs. For both Protestants and Progressives their initial passion at reform efforts subtly deteriorated into reduced programs and while women's rights were advocated all groups ignored minorities and peoples of color.

For America's Catholics their efforts at labor and social reform proved to be an assortment of circumscribed accomplishments mingled with future expectations. The actuality of American Catholicism, between the great social encyclical of *Rerum Novarum* and the *Bishops' Program of Reconstruction*, was a Church vested in the cope of paternalism and elitism. The clergy seldom recognized or protested against social and labor injustices. When they did so, it was only to pacify parishioners and alleviate parochial discontent or to protect workers from themselves. Activist priests such as Ryan and Dietz were alienated in their efforts to affect social change that must filter down into the labor movement. They believed that the Church was obligated to be entwined in the labor movement. For their struggles they were perceived as "semi-socialists" and chaplains to the disgraced I.W.W.¹¹² Both priests toiled to facilitate a social liberalism within the American Catholic church but they were a minority.

The achievement of these two priest was that they definitively melded religion, that being Catholicism, to the labor movement. Ryan insisted that the social question was in great part a religious question.¹¹³ The hierarchy, unable to ignore the words and works of these priests, responded with their own agenda. Yet these clerics, more so than the hierarchy, found ways to implement the theology and apply it directly to the labor and social struggles of American society. Efficaciously, their actions not only predicted the future course of American Catholic social engagement but became reality in the following years and decades.¹¹⁴

After the First World War the laity considered themselves to be equal and patriotic American citizens having fought and sacrificed in the war effort. As the American Catholic laity matured in economic, political and secular prominence their role as peers in church administration was regrettably relegated to the pews. Deferential respect for the clergy remained as the laity's position was that of dutiful parishioner.

This stagnated labor and social reforms in the United States during the 1920s. However the function of the laity would be altered in the coming years. With the commencement of the 1930s, tinged by European political events and the dominant American economic engine, Catholics prepared to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. Another compelling social encyclical that advocated for workers' rights was proclaimed. *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) became a clarion call to enact Leo's prescriptions for social and economic justice through greater action by the laity. The document stipulated not only justice but a reconstruction of the social order.¹¹⁵ This encyclical was as innovative as any politically charged treatise in the intervening hundred years. Once again the American interpretation of this document irrevocably catapulted American Catholicism to a position long championed by the laity. Passage of New Deal legislation in the 1930s resurrected social and labor reforms. With the emergence of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement the laity, not the clergy, were now the activist leaders of social reconstruction.

Endnotes

- 1 Lewis L. Gould ed., *The Progressive Era*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1974), 3.
- 2 Ken Fones-Wolf, "Religion and Trade Union Politics in the United States, 1880-1920." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 34, Religion and the Working Class (Fall 1988), 39.
- 3 Many Americans viewed the "American Way" as rugged individualism, hard work and Christianity. See Lyle W. Dorsett, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 111.
- 4 Stanley P. Caine, "The Origins of Progressivism," in Gould, *The Progressive Era*, 11.
- 5 "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" Cardinal James Gibbons, December 4, 1904. Sermon preached at Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. James Cardinal Gibbons, *Discourses and Sermons for Every Sunday*. (Baltimore: Murphy Publishers, 1906). Special Collections, Christ the King Seminary, East Aurora, NY.
- 6 Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, (Garden City: Double Day & Co., 1985), 340-341.
- 7 Some considered the Social Gospel movement as a cooperative effort among social activists predominantly Protestant in nature but inclusive of Catholics and Jews. See William, R. Hutchinson, *Religious Pluralism in America. The Contentious History of a Founding Idea*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 85.
- 8 George E. Vincent, "The Kingdom of God" *The Chautauquan Daily*, Vol. 39, No. 44, August 22, 1914, 1.
- 9 John R. Commons, *Social Reform and the Church*. (New York: Crowell & Co., 1894), 76.
- 10 William R. Hutchinson, *Religious Pluralism in America. The Contentious History of a Founding Idea*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 150.
- 11 Arthur A. Ekirch, *Progressivism In America. A Study of the Era from Theodore Roosevelt to Woodrow Wilson*, (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), 58.
- 12 Kevin E. Schmesing, *Within the Market Strife. American Catholic Thought from Rerum Novarum to Vatican II*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 22-25. Historians Ronald C. White & Howard Hopkins in *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America*, (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1976) argued that while the two movements had many similarities the Social Gospel was a theological movement while Christopher Lasch [*The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as Social Type*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965), 11] argued that Progressives represented a truly secular program.
- 13 Correspondence of Jane Addams to Graham Taylor, December 1, 1917 in Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as Social Type* and No listed author, "Jane Addams," *The Chautauquan*, Vol. 49, No. 2, January 1908, 265.
- 14 Ekirch, *Progressivism In America*, 53.
- 15 Caine, "The Origins of Progressivism," 12.
- 16 Willem A. Visser 'T Hooft, *The Background of the Social Gospel in America*, (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1963), 32. See also Louis Filler, "Christian Socialism," *A Dictionary of American Social Reform*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1963), 139.
- 17 The historiography varied as to the dateline of this movement. Some historians placed the start in the 1850s; a consensus birthed it in the 1880s with an end date in the late 1920s or early 1930s.

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- 18 Richard D. Knudten, *The Systematic Thought of Washington Gladden*, (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), 12.
- 19 Donald K. Gornell, *The Age of Social Responsibility. The Social Gospel in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920*. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1988), 302. Other historians selected Walter Rauschenbusch as the procreator of this movement.
- 20 Jacob Henry Dorn, *Washington Gladden. Prophet of the Social Gospel*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1967), 349. Gladden protested anti-Catholic sentiments stirred up by the American Protective Association in the 1890s and spoke against those ministers who preached on the “menace of Catholicism.” and Robert T. Handy, ed., *The Social Gospel in America, 1870-1920*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 30.
- 21 Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, (New York: Macmillan Press, 1917), 24.
- 22 Christopher H. Evans, “‘What Would Walter Want?’ Walter Rauschenbusch and the Future of Religious Progressivism.” Unpublished paper, Arizona State University, Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict, Lecture, March 30, 2009.
- 23 Roger Haight, S.J., and John Langan, S.J. “Recent Catholic Social and Ethical Teaching in Light of the Social Gospel,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Spring 1990), 103.
- 24 Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, (New York: Macmillan Press, 1907), 192.
- 25 “State Help versus Self-Help or Paternalism in Government.” Walter Rauschenbusch, November 16, 1898 Baptist Convention, Buffalo, NY. Special Collections, Christ the King Seminary.
- 26 Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, (New York: Macmillan Press 1912), 337.
- 27 Minutes of the Methodist Federation for Social Service. *Daily Christian Advocate*, May 19, 1908, 1. From this Conference, the Methodists published their “Social Creed of Methodism” which sought equal rights for workers, a safe environment, abolition of child labor, protections for women employees, reasonable work hours, a six day work week and a living wage. Apart from Rauschenbusch’s demand for collective property rights, the list of remedies to the labor problem was proclaimed more than fifteen years prior by Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.
- 28 Gornell, *The Age of Social Responsibility*, 19.
- 29 As early as 1887, a “Protestant activist” warned his colleagues that “the Protestant churches as a rule, have no following among the workingmen. Everybody knows it.” See John T. McGreevy, *Catholics and American Freedom. A History*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003), 128.
- 30 Adele Francis Gorman, “Evolution of Catholic Lay Leadership, 1820-1920,” *Historical Records and Studies*, 50 (1964), 135.
- 31 Evans, *Liberalism Without Illusions*, 56.
- 32 Historians Herbert Gutman, Ken Fones-Wolf and others studied the Social Gospel as the religion of the working class but their evidence was not exact. In Herbert Gutman, “Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age,” *American Historical Review*, 72, October 1966, 74-101, he presented more speculation on the matter than factual proofs.
- 33 Leo V. Ryan, “American Protestant and Catholic Social Concerns Circa 1890 and the Ely-Ryan Relationship.” *Review of Social Economy*, Vol. 49, No. 4, Winter 1991, 522-523.
- 34 Charles E. Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics: Twentieth Century Approaches*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 66-67.

- 35 *Rerum Novarum* (1891) was the encyclical of Pope Leo XIII that addressed the plight of the worker and called for reforms. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 334; and Kevin E. Schmesing, *Within the Market Strife. American Catholic Thought from Rerum Novarum to Vatican II*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 18.
- 36 Hutchinson, *Religious Pluralism in America*, 51-60.
- 37 Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel*, 100
- 38 *Ibid.*, 42 and 98-114 and 196-197.
- 39 Walsh, Religion, *Economics and Public Policy*, 39 and Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, (New York: Touchstone, 1982), 244. Additionally Reinhold Niebuhr, "Walter Rauschenbusch in Historical Perspective," in *Faith and Politics*, (New York: George Braziller, 1968), 33-45.
- 40 For further treatment see James Hennesey, *American Catholics. A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); James F. Connelly, ed., *The History of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia*. (Philadelphia: Archdiocese of Philadelphia, 1976) and Michael Hynes, *The History of the Diocese of Cleveland*, (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1953).
- 41 Christopher H. Evans, *Liberalism Without Illusions, Renewing An American Christian Tradition*. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 10.
- 42 Thomas E. Woods, Jr. *The Church Confronts Modernity. Catholic Intellectuals and the Progressive Era*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 65.
- 43 George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, (Oxford: University Press, 2006), 92.
- 44 Ekirch, *Progressivism In America*, 58 and Hutchinson, *Religious Pluralism in America*, 142.
- 45 John Horsch, *Modern Religious Liberalism: The Destructiveness and Irrationality of Modernist Theology*. (Scottsdale, PA. Fundamental Truth Depot, 1921), 127. Special Collections Christ the King Seminary.
- 46 "Stick to Fighting Sin Dr. Straton Advises." *New York Times*, September 21, 1925, 22.
- 47 William F. Muhs, "Worker Participation in the Progressive Era: An Assessment by Harrington Emerson," *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1, January 1982, 99.
- 48 Henry May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*. (New York: Octagon Books, 1949), 225.
- 49 Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, (New York: Macmillan, 1910), 97.
- 50 Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform. From Bryan to F.D.R.*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 152.
- 51 Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All. A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), 14.
- 52 May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*, 223.
- 53 Ekirch, *Progressivism In America*, 57.
- 54 Frederick Jackson Turner, "Social Forces in American History," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 16, No. 2, January 1911, 224.
- 55 Henry May, *The End of American Innocence. A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), 28.
- 56 William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 126.
- 57 The encyclical *Testem* reminded Catholics in the United States that the Church was Roman Catholic not American Catholic. See Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 316 for further treatment on the subject.

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- 58 David J. O'Brien, *The Renewal of American Catholicism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 97.
- 59 Gerald Foley, *Empowering the Laity*, (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1986), 15. Vatican II acknowledged in its document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, that the laity contributed equally "with regard to the dignity and the activity which they share in the building up of the body of Christ." There was to be a collaboration of ministry among pastors and the "other faithful." Austin Flannery, O.P. ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents of Vatican Council II*, (Northport: Costello Publishing Co., 1996), 50.
- 60 George La Piana, & John W. Swomley, *Catholic Power Versus American Freedom*. (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002), 106-108.
- 61 Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 335.
- 62 Thomas McAvoy, "American Cultural Impacts on Catholicism," in Elwyn A. Smith, ed. *The Religion of the Republic*. (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1971), 68.
- 63 Patrick W. Carey, "After Testem Benevolentiae and Pascendi," *Journal of Texas Catholic History and Culture*, Vol. 7, 1996, 18.
- 64 Analecta, "Sapientia Consilio", *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, Vol. XXXIX, Sept. 1908, 287.
- 65 George La Piana & John W. Swomley. *Catholic Power Versus American Freedom*. (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002), 111.
- 66 Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 261.
- 67 Sean Wilentz, "Rise of the Working Class," in *Perspectives on American Labor History. The Problems of Synthesis*, J. Carroll Moody and Alice Kessler-Harris, eds. (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1989), 119.
- 68 Mel Piehl, Breaking Bread. *The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 36.
- 69 Victor Greene, *American Immigrant Leaders, 1800-1910. Marginality and Identity*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1987), 14-16.
- 70 Alfred J. Ede, *The Lay Crusade for a Christian America. A Study of the American Federation of Catholic Societies, 1900-1919*, (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1988), 41 & 75-80.
- 71 Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 225. The exceptions to this were the Irish immigrants who despised the British and viewed a defeated England as an opportunity for an independent Ireland. German-Americans supported the Central Powers exhibiting ethnic pride over religion but American hysteria against Germany eventually suppressed their nationalism.
- 72 William, R. Hutchinson, *Religious Pluralism in America. The Contentious History of a Founding Idea*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 137-138.
- 73 Lynn Dumenil, *The Tribal Twenties: The Catholic Response to Anti-Catholicism*, (Notre Dame: Cushwa Center, 1988), 7.
- 74 Dolores Liptak, *The Catholic Church in the United States: At the Crossroads*, (Washington: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 1983), 39-41 and Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 246 & 255.
- 75 Charles E. Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics: Twentieth Century Approaches*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 180.
- 76 John J. O'Brien, *George G. Higgins and the Quest for Worker Justice. The Evolution of Catholic Social Thought in America*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 122.
- 77 Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 344. The NCWC eventually evolved into the current episcopal organization known as the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops.

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- 78 Chester Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 69. Officially, the Knights of Columbus “collaborated” with the National Catholic War Conference. See Maurice Francis Egan and John Kennedy, *The Knights of Columbus in Peace and War*, (New Haven: The Knights of Columbus, 1920), 222-232.
- 79 Elizabeth McKeown, *War and Welfare. American Catholics and World War I*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988), 80-81.
- 80 The NCWC’s purpose was to disseminate information about the official Catholic position on issues and act as the official representative of the hierarchy on national matters.
- 81 O’Brien, *American Catholics and Social Reform*, 40.
- 82 Joseph Mc Shane, “Sufficiently Radical.” *Catholicism, Progressivism and the Bishops’ Program of 1919*, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 182.
- 83 Ekirch, *Progressivism In America*, 9.
- 84 George Daly, CSSR, “The Catholic’s Part in Reconstruction,” *The Catholic Mind*, Vol. XVII, No. 2, January 22, 1919, 24.
- 85 Aaron Abell, *American Catholicism and Social Action. A Search for Social Justice 1865-1950*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1960), 200.
- 86 Haight and Langan, “Recent Catholic Social and Ethical Teaching in Light of the Social Gospel”, 107.
- 87 Marvin Krier Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements*, (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984), 50.
- 88 Ibid., p. 52.
- 89 Laura Murphy, “An ‘Indestructible Right’ John Ryan and the Catholic Origins of the U.S. Living Wage Movement, 1906 –1938,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, 2009, 65.
- 90 Edward Cardinal Mooney, *Bishops’ Program of Social Reconstruction*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition, (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1939), 16.
- 91 Ibid., p. 13-24. A crucial part of the New Deal legislation was the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) of 1933. Sections of the law mirrored the Bishops’ 1919 program for social reconstruction in many areas.
- 92 Ibid., 22-23
- 93 Ibid., 23
- 94 Ibid., 26
- 95 Ibid., 25
- 96 Ibid., 28
- 97 Mooney, *Bishops’ Program*, 28.
- 98 Ibid., 30
- 99 John Ryan, D.D., *The Church and Socialism and Other Essays*. (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1919), 14.
- 100 Ryan, *Social Reconstruction*, 208.
- 101 Aaron I. Abell, “Monsignor John A. Ryan: An Historical Appreciation.” *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 1, January 1946, 131.
- 102 Mooney, *Bishops’ Program*, 28.
- 103 Ward, “The Church in America”, in *The American Apostolate*, 19-20. This is an issue he often lamented.

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- 104 Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 344-345.
- 105 Mc Shane, *Sufficiently Radical*, 209.
- 106 O'Brien, *American Catholics and Social Reform*, 43.
- 107 David J. O'Brien, *Public Catholicism*. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), 143.
- 108 Charles Plater, *The Priest and Social Action*, (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1914), 141.
- 109 Mary Harrita Fox, Peter E. Dietz, *Labor Priest*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1953), 173-175.
- 110 David Saposs and Aaron Abell viewed the Militia of Christ and Fr. Dietz as bulwarks in the establishment of Catholics in the labor movement. Henry Browne disputes this assertion and considered the Militia and Dietz as nothing more than a "one man paper show." Refer to Marc Karson, "Catholic Anti-Socialism," in Laslett and Lipsett, eds. *Failure of a Dream*. Also, David J. Saposs, "The Catholic Church and the Labor Movement," *The Modern Monthly*, May-June 1933, Vol. 7.
- 111 Commons, *Social Reform and the Church*, 77.
- 112 O'Brien, *George G. Higgins and the Quest for Worker Justice*, 49. Dietz was forced to leave his ministry in Cincinnati due to pressure by business interests on Archbishop Moeller who requested he leave the diocese.
- 113 Thomas E. Woods, Jr., *The Church Confronts Modernity. Catholic Intellectuals and the Progressive Era*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 140.
- 114 O'Brien, *George G. Higgins and the Quest for Worker Justice*, 49. Dietz's labor schools anticipated the labor colleges by twenty years and the ACTU's. See Paul Lubienecki, "Catholic Labor Education and the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. Instructing Workers to Christianize the Workplace," *Journal of Catholic Education*, Vol. 18, March 2015.
- 115 Michael Walsh and Brian Davies eds., *Proclaiming Peace & Justice. Papal Documents from Rerum Novarum Through Centesimus Annus*, (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991), 62.

Author Biography

Paul Lubienecki received his PhD in History from Case Western Reserve University focusing on the formation and evolution of the Catholic labor schools having published several articles on Catholic labor education. He is the Director of the Boland Center for the Study of Labor and Religion.