

"WASHINGTON GLADDEN"  
CONGREGATIONAL HISTORY AND POLITY.  
E. NEIL HUNT

In recent years concern for "Social Action" has seen a resurgence within the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, particularly at the national level. As a result of this renewed interest by some, I have undertaken a brief study of Washington Gladden, a prominent Congregationalist and unofficial Father of the Social Gospel. Washington Gladden, as the minister of the First Congregational Church of Columbus, Ohio, exerted a national and international influence of the Social Gospel movement. He coupled a sociological concern with his liberal theological dedication to re-emphasize the role of the church as the institutional servant of the Kingdom of God in continuing society. Although Walter Rauschenbusch has been considered by most people the most prominent member of the Social Gospel movement, it was Washington Gladden who offered the original impetus with his practical emphasis upon the reintegration of the sacred and the secular, and the Church and the State. Before I examine Washington Gladden in any detail, let us take a look at the Social Gospel movement.

The story of the social gospel forms one of the most distinctive chapters in the American experience. It was said by Historian Carl Degler that "The acceptance of the social gospel spelled the transformation of American Protestantism".<sup>(1)</sup> The social gospel was more than a traditional religious movement as it stepped outside the churches in order to intersect the political, social, and the economic forces of a changing America. Born in post-Civil War America, the social gospel grew to maturity in the era of Progressivism. At one time the demise of the social gospel was forecast to come following W.W.I, however its impact continues even today. ,

"In one sense 'social gospel' refers to a historical movement that supposedly came to an end a half-century ago. But in another sense it speaks of a social consciousness and mission that is being renewed in every succeeding generation."<sup>(2)</sup> At one time the social gospel was defined as "the application of the teaching of Jesus and the total message of the Christian salvation to society, the economic life, and social institutions, . . . as well as to individuals."<sup>(3)</sup>

The social gospel grew within the matrix of American Protestantism, interacting with the changing realities and problems of an increasingly industrialized and urbanized nation. The movement saw itself as a crusade for justice and righteousness in all areas of the common life of the people. "The awakening of the church to a social gospel was the product of both the pressure of external events and the internal continuity of theological reflection and social action. The origins of the social gospel are, then, many and varied, ranging from Evangelicalism to liberalism and spawned by such crusades as christian socialism and abolitionism."<sup>(4)</sup> Because of this, it is not possible to fix an exact chronology, however the movement seemed to develop in four phases.

The first phase (birth) occurred between 1865-1880. This was a period characterized by the attempt to delineate problems and issues. During the second phase, 1880-1890, efforts were undertaken to speak to these conditions. The third phase, 1890-1900, saw the movement come of age.

During the fourth phase, 1900-1915, the movement came to maturity and public influence. Central to the rise of the social gospel movement was the criticisms of large-scale production systems, concentrated economic power, urbanization, and monopolistic tendencies. Sounds only too familiar!

Also involved was a call by some for a social reinterpretation of christianity. It was Stephen Colwell who demanded that christianity embrace the "whole mass of humanity" rather than merely creeds and doctrinal formulations. It was Professor Graham Taylor, of the Chicago Theological Seminary, who argued that the church's task was formative rather than reformatory. He suggested that positive personality formation could approximate the divine life ideal. Churches, Professor Taylor suggested, should initiate social movements and agencies necessary to carry movements to fruition, while refraining from the administration of ensuing operations. The church's task, Taylor said, "is to serve as the conscience of society, and to offer sacrificial service which alone can regenerate the community".(5)

The Social Gospel, by its liberalism, forced the church to rethink its social reason for existence. By its theological challenge, it compelled the humanizing of theology. By its organizational efforts it gave rise to associational activity designed for social service to humanity. "The Social Gospel ushered in a new era of industrialism with a demand for social justice".(6)

This is a very short look at the social gospel, but it does provide a view of the movement in which Washington Gladden was involved. Let us now turn to the man himself.

Washington Gladden was born in Pottsgrove, Pennsylvania, on February 11, 1836, the son of a country schoolmaster. In fact both of his parents were at one time schoolteachers. His mother having been a student in his father's class when he first started to teach. Before Washington Gladden was six years old his father died, forcing his mother to return to teaching. In the winter of 1842 Amanda Gladden took her family to live in Owego, New York. From his own "Recollections" we learn the following genealogy of Washington Gladden.

MALE DESCENT

Relation

	John Gladding Plymouth, Mass. in 1640	Gladden believes this to be true although he could not prove it.
		Intervening genealogy unknown
Great-Grandfather	Azariah Gladding Soldier in Revolution Norwich, Connecticut	Reason and process of name change unknown
Grandfather	Thomas Gladden Shoemaker & Farmer Southampton, Massachusetts	
Father	Solomon Gladden School Teacher Pottsgrove, Pennsylvania	Amanda Daniels Gladden
	Washington Gladden Minister Columbus, Ohio	Jennie O. Cahoon
Frederick Gladden	George Gladden	Alice Gladden
		Mrs. George Helen Twiss

After his mother remarried in 1842, Washington Gladden spent most of his growing-up years living with other members of his family. He experienced a form of family apprenticeship while living on his uncle's farm.

"It was understood that I was adopted into my uncle's family; that he was to give me advantages of the common school; that I was to work for him upon the farm until I was twenty-one, and that I should then receive a good horse or one hundred dollars in money. Such were the ordinary terms of apprenticeship on which boys in those days were received into farmers families."(8)

While growing up Gladden regularly attended the Presbyterian Church in Owego, although he argued that the sermons avoided human and life problems and sounded more like resplendent platitudes. Concerning his early religious training, Gladden wrote in his book "Recollections"

"Besides the daily Bible reading, my Biblical education was well advanced by the memorizing, as Sunday-school lessons, of all the historical portions of the New Testament, and many of the Bible stories of the Old Testament. And that nothing might be wanting to my theological outfit, I committed to memory also the whole of the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster divines."(9)

When Gladden was sixteen years old, his uncle encouraged him to accept a printer's apprenticeship at the Owego Gazette, which he did. During his

apprenticeship, personal inertia and lack of participation rather than any disbelief, caused him to fall away from the church. However, in 1854 at a series of evangelistic services at the Congregational church, lead by the Rev. Dr. Jedediah Burchard, recaptured his lost religious vigor. Then in April of 1855, Gladden rather unexpectedly enrolled in the Owego Academy in order to prepare for service in the ministry.

As a student he tended to view the existing theological climate as unrealistic and sadistic because it emphasized the fear rather than the love of God. This was a criticism that would continue to mark his later theological and social writings. For Gladden, the growing interest in temperance and in slavery offered hope that a new spirit was emerging in applied theology. Ultimately to affect his future ministry was his own congregation's involvement in the ethical movement. Again from his book "Recollections" we can hear Gladden's thoughts.

"It was not an individualistic pietism that appealed to me; it was a religion that laid hold upon life with both hands, and proposed, first and foremost, to realize the Kingdom of God in this world. I do not think that any other outlook upon the work would have attracted me. I had known the history of this little Congregational church from its beginning; I had been in keenest sympathy with all for which it stood, and the ethical thoroughness with which it committed itself to the cause of freedom when the gage of battle was thrown down by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise called out my enthusiasm. I wanted to be--

if I could make myself fit-- the minister of a church like that. I could not think of any life better worth living."(10)

After the Owego Academy, it was off to Williams College. Upon graduation from Williams College, Gladden was contracted to teach at the principal public school back in Owego. It was while he waited for this position that he met Rev. Moses Tyler who encouraged him to seek a license to preach from the Susquehanna Association of Congregational Ministers.

"On the 18th day of January, 1860, I was examined by the Susquehanna Association of Congregational Ministers in Central New York and recommended to the Congregational churches as a preacher. This was not my ordination; that took place ten months afterward; but it was, in fact, my introduction to the work of the ministry, for two days later, on January 20, I began to preach regularly, and that service has never been interrupted."(11)

In 1860, Gladden resigned his teaching position and went to the Le Raysville Congregational Church for eight weeks of evangelism and preaching. At the successful conclusion of that engagement, he accepted a call to Brooklyn's First Congregational Methodist Church. On November 15, 1860, he was ordained into the Congregational church fellowship.

The start of the Civil War put heavy financial and emotional strains on his parish, which caused him to have a severe nervous collapse, leaving



his future ministry in doubt. Within a short time he was able to resume a part-time pastorate in Morrisania, New York, which worked into a full-time pastorate as his health returned. During his pastorate at Morrisania he read extensively, developing his own limited theology which was most influenced by the work that Horace Bushnell was doing.

During the Civil War his only brother came up missing. Gladden secured an appointment for hospital service from the Christian Commission, then traveled to the front to aid the wounded and to search for his lost brother. His search was futile and he soon had to return home without information about his brother, and with malaria contracted during his tour of duty at the front.

In 1866 Gladden was called to the Congregational Church of North Adams, Massachusetts. There, Gladden was impressed by the close personal and social integration of the community. It was at the Congregational Church of North Adams that Gladden's ministerial influence reached a new high. Today we are indebted to Washington Gladden for the hymn "Oh, Master Let Me Walk With Thee" written during his pastorate at North Adams.

In 1871, Gladden became religious editor of the "New York Independent". During his four year tenure at the "Independent", he made significant editorial attacks on the New York Tweed Ring, a corrupt political organization which had systematically pilfered the city treasury during its years in power. With help of his editorials, civic pressure led to court action which caused the decline of the Tweed Ring within three months.

This, Gladden believed, demonstrated the power of society to effect its own social self-corrective when facing public corruption. Because of a personal disagreement with what he felt was unethical advertising, Gladden resigned his post in the fall of 1874.

For the next eight years he served as pastor of the North Congregational Church in Springfield, Massachusetts. It was here that a number of his books were written. In 1882, by unanimous vote of the congregation, Gladden was called to the First Congregational Church Society in Columbus, Ohio. It was this position at which he would remain for the rest of his life.

During his life-time, Gladden had a reputation for industrial impartiality which led members of labor and of management to seek his counsel. From Gladden's pen came more than thirty-eight books and some 114 pamphlets, articles which covered historical, theological, and social topics. Gladden preached Sunday mornings on topics of personal religion, while his evening or weekday lectures would focus on questions of social, religious, or theological thought. This enabled him to write as much as he did.

Washington Gladden was offered, or considered, for the presidency of at least three universities; Ohio State, University of Illinois, and Illinois State University. In 1918, at the age of 82, Washington Gladden died at his home in Columbus, Ohio.

Following is a chronology of the life of Washington Gladden.

- 1836 February 11, Birth at Pottsgrove, Pennsylvania.
- 1841 Father died; went home to Owego with his mother.
- 1841-42 Spent a year with his grandparents at Bedlam, Massachusetts.
- 1852 Apprenticed at 16 years of age as printer in the office of the Owego Gazette, Owego, New York.
- 1855 Began study for the ministry at Owego Academy.
- 1856 Entered Williams College, graduating in 1859.
- 1859 Graduated, began teaching in Owego.
- 1860 December 5, married Jennie O. Cohoon of Brooklyn, New York. Mrs. Gladden died in 1909.
- 1861 Nervous collapse; moved to Morrisania, suburb of New York City.
- 1861-66 Pastor of Congregational Church, Morrisania, New York.
- 1863 Informed of brother's disappearance in battle during Civil War. Secured Commission to Christian Service; engaged in hospital work.
- 1865 Delivered Commencement poem "After the War" at Williamstown, Mass.
- 1866-71 Pastor of the Congregational Church, North Adams, Massachusetts.
- 1871-75 Religious editor of the "New York Independent".
- 1875-82 Pastor of the North Congregational Church, Springfield, Mass., after resigning "Independent" over advertising policy.
- 1878-81 Editor of "Sunday Afternoon, A Magazine for the Household".
- 1881 Received L.L.D. degree from the University of Wisconsin.
- 1882-1918 Pastor of First Congregational Church, Columbus, Ohio. Arrived during Christmas week.
- 1882 Received D.D. degree from Roanoke College.
- 1888 Traveled overseas.
- 1889 Lyman Beecher Lecturer, Yale University.
- 1892 Appointed to Preaching staff, Harvard University, for two years. Also served 1902-03.
- 1893 Offered presidency of Ohio State University by R. B. Hayes and Trustees. Legislature forced retraction of offer because of Gladden's attack on the anti-Catholic organizations. Offered presidency at University of Illinois in the meantime.
- 1900-02 Served as member of City Council, Columbus, Ohio.

- 1902 Lyman Beecher Lecturer, Yale University (2nd series).
- 1904 Moderator of the National Council of Congregational Churches; elected at Des Moines, Iowa convention.
- 1905 Received L.L.D. degree from Notre Dame University.
- 1905 Addressed the annual meeting of the American Board of Foreign Missions, Congregational Church, at Seattle.
- 1914 Resigned pulpit, First Congregational Church, Columbus. Named Pastor Emeritus.
- 1917 Addressed National Congregational Council in Columbus, Ohio.
- 1918 Death at his home in Columbus, July 2.

Washington Gladden was an active member of our National Council of the Congregational Churches and in 1904, at the Des Moines convention, was elected moderator, a position he held until 1907. During his term, spring of 1905, the national council's foreign mission board received a gift of \$100,000.00 from John D. Rockefeller, then president of the Standard Oil Company. Gladden objected to both the solicitation of such a gift when it became known the mission board had solicited the gift, and to the money itself because it was "tainted money", gained through unethical and monopolistic business practices.

During his life, Washington Gladden did not hesitate to speak to social issues, although he was not a social agitator. He remained a critic of the social order, refusing to identify himself with any party or faction. In his theology he was progressive, but not destructive, with the life of the church. He challenged redeemed men to practice immortality within their present life, thereby raising general social life to higher levels of christian perfection. He was a conscientious, prophetic-type personality

who believed personal morality was meaningless without a parallel concern for social betterment and justice. In his time Gladden was a pioneer in three general fields; the popular exposition of new biblical scholarship, the social application of the Gospel, and the presentation of liberal theology.

Carl S. Patton, co-minister of First Congregational Church, Columbus, Ohio from October, 1911 to October 1917, summarized Gladden's theological and social perspective as he described one personal experience with Washington Gladden. "When I was considering the call to become associated with him at the First Church, I remember saying to him, that I had two primary interests and not much more, an interest in liberal religious thought and a desire to see the Gospel of Christ applied in all the manifold relations of life; he looked at me, let one eyelid droop in a manner that will be remembered by his old friends, and said, 'Well what else IS there?'" (13)

Aided by Washington Gladden, Graham Taylor, and many others, Congregationalists have been involved in social issues. Following are excerpts from C. Howard Hopkins' book "A History of Congregational Social Action".

(Congregationalists had been reticent about establishing a national organization, but when they met in Boston in 1865 to do so, they adopted a statement that reflected their historic stance and looked confidently ahead: It was the grand peculiarity of our Puritan Fathers, that they held this gospel, not merely as the ground of their personal salvation, but as declaring the worth of man by the incarnation and sacrifice of the Son of God; and therefore applied its principles to elevate society, to regulate

education, to civilize humanity, to purify law, to reform the church and the State, to assert, to defend, and to die for liberty: in short, to mold and redeem by its all-transforming energy everything that belongs to man in his individual and social relations. Needled in the 1880's by Josiah Strong, Washington Gladden, and William Jewett Tucker, and in the 1890's by Graham Taylor, David Starr Jordan, David N. Beach, and others, the denomination first set up a commission on labor at its national meeting in 1901. When it next met in 1904, this commission presented a program outlining the functions of labor committees in local churches and suggesting that sympathetic relations be established with both organized and unorganized labor, and that workers' efforts for physical, social, and moral betterment be aided. The committee was agreed that the industrial question had "come to stay," that "justice to capital and labor alike" was necessary, and that "only by the principles of the Gospel" could viable solutions be reached.

The 1904 meeting of the National Council at Des Moines held a joint session with the local labor council, hearing addresses by Graham Taylor and E. E. Clark, the Grand Chief Conductor of the Order of Railway Conductors. Not until 1910 was the commission given a paid secretary, but he, the Reverend Henry A. Atkinson, soon produced a three-year correspondence course in "social service studies," traveled widely, investigated strike conditions in Michigan and Colorado, studied plants using profit-sharing plans, and aided in several urban religious surveys. In 1913 the denomination created a supervisory "Commission on Social Service" that acted as guide, irritant, and overseer until 1934. In 1915 it had set forth these objectives:

To make known the social principles of Christianity.

To arouse the spirit of social service in our churches.

To secure the cooperation of the churches with all other agencies doing social service work.

To outline programs for churches in their work for community betterment.

To interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ and the new purpose of the church to industrial workers.

To represent the denomination in official capacity at meetings where labor and social service subjects are discussed.

To study and give leadership within the denomination for service in bettering the rural conditions and making more effective the ministry of our country churches.

To study the social waste caused by vice, crime and bad economic conditions, and to develop programs for meeting these needs.

To organize, develop, unify, and inspire the masculine forces of the denomination.

When this statement became outdated, the National Council adopted a fresh, if lengthy, new description of its social ideals in 1925: We believe in making the social and spiritual ideals of Jesus our test for community as well as for individual life; in strengthening and deepening the inner personal relationship of the individual with God, and recognizing his obligation and duty to society. This is crystallized in the two commandments of Jesus: "Love Thy God and Love Thy Neighbor," We believe this pattern ideal for a Christian social order involves the recognition of the sacredness of life, the supreme worth of each single personality and our common membership in one another-the brotherhood of all. In short, it means creative activity in cooperation with our fellow human beings, and with God, in the everyday life of society and in the development of a new and better world social order. Translating this ideal:

## I. Into Education Means:

1. The building of a social order in which every child has the best opportunity for development,

2. Adequate and equal educational opportunity for all, with the possibility of extended training for those competent.

3. A thorough and scientific program of religious and secular education designed to Christianize everyday life and conduct.

4. Conservation of health, including careful instruction in sex hygiene and home building, abundant and wholesome recreation facilities, and education for leisure, including a nation-wide system of adult education.

5. Insistence on constitutional rights and duties, including freedom of speech, of the press, and of peaceable assemblage.

6. Constructive education and Christian care of dependents, defectives, and delinquents, in order to restore them to normal life whenever possible, with kindly segregation for those who are hopelessly feeble-minded. (This means that such institutions as the jails, prisons, and orphan asylums should be so conducted as to be genuine centers for education and health.)

7. A scientifically planned program of international education promoting peace and goodwill and exposing the evils of war, intoxicants, illiteracy, and other social sins.

## II. Into Industrial and Economic Relationship Means:

1. A reciprocity of service--that group interests, whether of labor or capital, must always be integrated with the welfare of society as a whole, and that society in its turn must insure justice to each group.



2. A frank abandonment of all efforts to secure something for nothing, and recognition that all ownership is a social trust involving Christian administration for the good of all and that the unlimited exercise of the right of private ownership is undesirable.

3. Abolishing child labor and establishing standards for employment of minors which will insure maximum physical, intellectual and moral development.

4. Freedom from employment one day in seven, the eight-hour day as the present maximum for all industrial workers.

5. Providing safe and sanitary industrial conditions especially protecting women; adequate accident, sickness, and unemployment insurance, together with suitable provision for old age.

6. An effective national system of public employment bureaus to make possible the proper distribution of the labor forces of America.

7. That the first charge upon industry should be a minimum comfort wage and that all labor should give an honest day's work for an honest day's pay.

8. Adequate provision for impartial investigation and publicity, conciliation and arbitration in industrial disputes.

9. The right of labor to organize with representatives of its own choosing and, where able, to share in the management of industrial relations.

10. Encouragement of the organization of consumers' cooperatives for the more equitable distribution of the essentials of life.

11. The supremacy of the service rather than the profit motive in the acquisition and use of property on the part of both labor and capital, and the most equitable division of the product of industry that can be devised.

Part III concerned agriculture, share-cropping, and rural destitution.

#### IV. Into Racial Relations Means:

1. The practice of the American principle of the same protection and rights for all races who share our common life.
2. The elimination of racial discrimination, and substitution of full brotherly treatment for all races in America.
3. The fullest cooperation between the churches of various races even though of different denominations.
4. Educational and social equipment for the special needs of immigrants, with government information bureaus.

#### V. Into International Relations Means:

1. The removal of every unjust barrier of trade, color, creed, and race, and the practice of equal justice for all nations.
2. The administration of the property and privileges within each country so that they will be of the greatest benefit not only to that nation but to all the world.
3. Discouragement of all propaganda tending to mislead peoples in their international relations or to create prejudice.
4. The replacement of selfish imperialism by such disinterested treatment of backward nations as to contribute the maximum to the welfare of each nation and of all the world.
5. The abolition of military armaments by all nations except for an internal police force.
6. That the church of Christ as an institution should not be used as an instrument or an agency in the support of war.
7. A permanent association of the nations for world peace and goodwill, the outlawry of war, and the settling of differences between nations by conference, arbitration, or by an international court.

We believe it is the duty of every church to investigate local moral and economic conditions as well as to know world needs. We believe that it is only as our churches themselves follow the example and spirit of Jesus in the fullest sense--translating these social ideals into the daily life of the church and the community--that we can ever hope to build the Kingdom of God on earth.

These affirmations we make as Christians and loyal citizens of our beloved country. We present them as an expression of our faith and patriotism. We urge upon all our citizens the support of our cherished institutions, faithfulness at the ballot, respect for law, and loyal support of its administrators. We believe that our country can and will make a great contribution to the realization of Christian ideals throughout the world.

By 1942 this statement came under revision, to meet the needs of a new era. At the bottom of the Depression, the National Council had reorganized the commission as the Council for Social Action. For several decades its monthly magazine "Social Action" led the field of denominational expressions of social concern. The many issues that this one church confronted during the Depression and World War II belie the allegation that the social gospel was dead. )

Perhaps it is time for us, as a denomination to review where we are as a denomination on the issue of social action and assist our local churches by having a board that would serve as an informational source for the local church.

NOTES

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2. Ronald C. White, Jr. and C. Howard Hopkins, "The Social Gospel."  
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3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Richard D. Knudten, "The Systematic Thought of Washington Gladden."  
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