

The Religion of Socialism: Theology and Institutions in the Social Gospel Era

Dan McKanan, Collegium 2009

Introductory Note: This text is an excerpt from the draft of my current book project, *Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the Left in United States History*. The goal of this book is to tell a coherent story about the role of religion in radical social movements (particularly anti-racist, anti-sexist, socialist, and pacifist movements) from the early nineteenth century to the present. I argue that the left was (and is) a continuous tradition rather than a collection of unrelated social movements, and that religious ideas and institutions have always been an integral part of this tradition. I accent the religious diversity of the left, and the fluid boundaries between seemingly “secular” and religious forms of activism. My own Unitarian Universalist commitments inform this approach insofar as Unitarians, Universalists, and other religious liberals often occupied the gray area between religion and secularity. Also in line with my liberal theology, I insist that the practice of interpersonal encounter was an ongoing source of religious meaning for left activists.

Most likely, my book will be organized into three major sections, corresponding to the three epochs in which left activists achieved major changes in national policy: the abolitionist era culminating in the Civil War; the social gospel era culminating in the social welfare policies of the New Deal; and the Civil Rights era. Each section will be subdivided into five chapters: one on earlier “sources” of activism, one on interpersonal “encounters,” one on “theologies,” one on “institutions,” and one on the diverse spiritual “pathways” of activists. The material I am sharing with Collegium comes from the “theologies” and “institutions” chapters of the social gospel section. Though that section will eventually address a variety of movements, this material focuses primarily on activists associated with the Socialist Party of America between 1900 and 1934. This is a rough draft, and you will notice several places where I need to fill in certain points. I am at a stage where I would greatly welcome any feedback on my interpretation or suggestions about additional people or anecdotes to mention. Also, I apologize for the length of this piece—feel free to read just one of the two sections if you wish. Enjoy!

Theologies of the Socialist Party

Though scholarship on the social gospel movement has typically focused on mainline Protestant denominations affiliated with the Federal Council of Churches, the movement was in fact much broader. Methodists, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians worked alongside not only Unitarians and Universalists, but also Theosophists, Ethical Culturists, New Thought teachers, and unaffiliated liberals. Leading social activists frequently changed religious affiliations during the period between 1870 and 1935, and even the most seemingly secular movements made frequent use of religious ideas and institutions. The coalition-building skills of some key leaders made it possible for social gospelers to articulate two seemingly very different theologies with minimal theological debate. One of these theologies identified Jesus as the key source for the social vision, sought to reduce Christianity as a whole to the practice of “following Jesus,” and typically identified itself with the “primitive” Christianity that had been suppressed by Constantine. The other claimed that the new social vision was ushering in an entirely new, universal religion, destined to supersede Christianity in the same way that Christianity had superseded Judaism and paganism.

The idea that primitive Christianity implied a radical economic vision was articulated by a number of religious liberals in the 1840s, among them the Gothic novelist George Lippard and the mercurial editor Orestes Brownson. By the 1870s it was the common faith of radical labor leaders, many of whom coupled their praise of Jesus with a fierce denunciation of the mainstream church. In one widely cited poem, for example,

Knights of Labor leader Terence Powderly drew a contrast between Jesus and contemporary ministers: ““Christ taught humility./He taught no favoritism should be shown./ He loved the poor./ He walked among the poor./ He denounced the unjust rich./ He took the side of the laborer in the unequal struggle of life. . . . They do not practice humility. /They play favorites./ They do not love the poor./ they do not walk among the poor./ They do not denounce the rich./ They do not take the side of the laborer in the struggle of life.”¹ [add Mother Jones, Eugene Debs]

Such exegeses relied more on working class intuition than on historical scholarship. Paradoxically, some of the most influential works of social gospel exegesis—books that inspired their readers to pay more attention to the social dimension of Jesus’ teaching—were actually written as refutations of the more extreme claims of early socialists. This was certainly the case for Francis Greenwood Peabody’s *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, a book that is generally regarded as the founding text of social gospel exegesis. A Unitarian professor at Harvard Divinity School, Peabody took the radical social movement more seriously than most academic theologians of his day, but he also insisted that the “supreme concern of Jesus” was “not the reorganization of human society, but the disclosure to the human soul of its relation to God.”² Jesus’ message to the individual could certainly inspire work for social change, but it offered no blueprint for a new society. This approach was echoed a few decades later by Shailer Mathews, dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School and a leading figure in the Federal Council.

¹ Cited in Craig, p. 42.

² Francis Greenwood Peabody, *Jesus and the Social Question*, p. 77.

The socialists pushed back in the early decades of the twentieth century. Edward Ellis Carr, editor of the *Christian Socialist*, was a fervent devotee of the notion that Jesus was a socialist, and he filled his newspaper with exegeses to this effect. His usual style was to publish lengthy exegetical pieces in installments, with each issue's article focusing primarily on one or two key passages. In 1905, for example, Carr contributed his own "Words of Jesus" and also published an exposition of "The Socialism of Jesus" by the pseudonymous "Discipulus." The volume for 1912 featured "International Sunday School Lessons" by Rev. William Prosser, with a format but not a content comparable to what one might find in virtually any denominational paper of the day. All of these exegeses are stark in their assertion that the message of the gospels (and, in many cases, of the Old Testament) is primarily about economic justice. Commenting on Jesus' call to "seek ye first the kingdom of God," for example, Carr asserted flatly that by "kingdom" Jesus was referring to a system of "external government" and not to a more spiritual reality. The Mosaic law itself had approached Socialism with "the best ideas of Single Tax possible for the time"; Jesus himself had hoped for a "complete revolution of human government"; and the early Christians, unable to seize state power, had built a socialist "kingdom" in miniature. "The 'kingdom' took care of its own by co-operation in labor and equality in distribution," wrote Carr. "So will the Socialist government."³

Discipulus's analysis of the "socialism of Jesus" offers a fairly complete picture of how Christian Socialist Fellowship members did (and did not) understand the socialist authority of Jesus. He began, curiously enough, by asserting a vague, mystical Christology as the basis of his own religious enthusiasm, which "dates from the time when I learned to identify the ever-living Christ with that Infinite Love which has been

³ Edward Ellis Carr, "Words of Jesus III," *Christian Socialist* 2/4 (February 15, 1905): 5.

present in the universe from the beginning.” This conversion inspired him—so he claims—to read the gospels straight through as “if I, a mechanic (and such I have been), were listening for the first time to these words of a mechanic.” Through this reading he discovered not only that Jesus was critical of the rich, but also that he disparaged middle-class thrift and prudence while praising “the quality especially prized by the working class—prompt and unsparing generosity manifesting itself in the freest giving and taking, borrowing and lending.”⁴ In subsequent installments, Discipulus cited Jesus’ harsh rhetoric about “scribes and pharisees” as evidence that he was a “‘class-conscious’ . . . agitator of the type ever held by the selfish majority of the controlling classes most pernicious.”⁵

Despite his pose of naivete, Discipulus was not unaware of alternative interpretive possibilities. At a time when mainstream historical critics were increasingly attuned to the apocalyptic dimensions of Jesus’ thought, Discipulus disavowed a literal reading of the second coming.⁶ He stumbled even more over the Tolstoyan interpretation of Jesus’ teaching about nonresistance. Since “Jesus was no builder of systems,” he conceded, “some good men” have insisted that he would support only “a loose, structureless kind of co-operation.” But in fact, he insisted, the only passage that supports anarchism is “Resist not evil,” and even that must be interpreted in “due subordination to [Jesus’] sole absolute ethic, which is devotion to the welfare of all.” Had he lived in an age of majority rule, he doubtless would have supported government action on behalf of cooperation, for the gospels make clear that he was a “man of decision” and not a “mild dreamer”: “I

⁴ Discipulus, “The Socialism of Jesus,” *Christian Socialist* 2/15 (August 1, 1905): 5.

⁵ Discipulus, “The Socialism of Jesus,” *Christian Socialist* 2/16 (August 15, 1905): 5; Discipulus, “The Socialism of Jesus,” *Christian Socialist* 2/17 (September 1, 1905): 2

⁶ Discipulus, “The Socialism of Jesus,” *Christian Socialist* 2/19 (October 1, 1905): 2.

could not doubt that such a mind must prefer the effectiveness of socialism to the ineffectiveness of anarchism.”⁷_[d1]

A similar blend of confident assertiveness and anxious wrestling with alternative perspectives appears in Roland Sawyer’s “The Social Science of Jesus,” which was featured in a 1912 issue devoted entirely to Sawyer’s campaign for governor of Massachusetts. Sawyer was a Congregationalist minister who had been educated at conservative Gordon Conwell Seminary [check to be sure this wasn’t before a merger], but by the time he espoused Socialism he had drifted to a position of extreme theological liberalism. He thus began his essay with an utter repudiation of classical Christology: “No one any longer thinks of Jesus as a ready-made God, angel or man, sent down from heaven. We now know that he grew up in life as other men grow, acted upon by the forces that beat upon his life.” Sawyer’s next move, refreshing in light of the implicit anti-Judaism of many Jesus-oriented liberals, was to post a complete continuity between the economic teachings of Moses and Jesus. Moses’ “Hebrew movement,” according to Sawyer, was “a great struggle for human betterment” that created “legislation to protect the toiler,” prohibited interest and insured economic equality through the Jubilee laws. All these provisions were “adopted by a democratic referendum” and successfully practiced for generations.⁸

Jesus’ task, then, was simply to restore the Mosaic code. Jesus’ promise “not one yod or tittle [of the law] should be abolished” was, for Sawyer, the foundation for a social justice crusade. “Of all the great figures of the ancient world Jesus was the first to arise for the toilers and against the aristocracy, as such. He was the first class-conscious

⁷ Discipulus, “The Socialism of Jesus,” *Christian Socialist* 2/18 (September 15, 1905): 5.

⁸ Roland D. Sawyer, “The Social Science of Jesus,” *Christian Socialist* 9/36 (September 1, 1912): 9.

teacher. . . . From each according to his capacity, to each according to his need, was an underlying principle in all his teachings.” Indeed, Sawyer almost conceded, among contemporary radicals Jesus would have fit best with the pacifist anarchists inspired by Kropotkin: “Jesus threw a bomb into the Roman conception of the state though it was a bomb of love. He was the communist anarchist pure and simple.” This was a significant concession, for throughout 1912 the Socialist Party was in the throes of a debate that would culminate in the 1913 expulsion of the anarchist members of the Industrial Workers of the World. Most likely, Sawyer’s preoccupation with the anarchist critique reflected his involvement in this debate. Like Disciplus, he quickly backpedaled. Jesus was too identified with the “poor and lowly” to be captivated by merely symbolic or “mendicant” approaches to social reform, and his willingness to allow his disciples to keep their fishing boats proved that he was not a pure communist. On this basis, Sawyer concluded that “the Socialists can well claim that were Jesus here today he would be one of us.”⁹

Beyond the pages of the *Christian Socialist*, a Jesus-centered Socialist theology appeared in at least a dozen books. Austin Bierbower’s *Socialism of Christ* anticipated the formation of the Socialist Party by a full decade, Bouck White’s *The Call of the Carpenter* staked out a position compatible with the left wing of the Party, and Upton Sinclair’s *They Call Me Carpenter* echoed the fanciful motifs of *In His Steps*, even though its author’s anticlerical reputation made many Christian Socialists wary.¹⁰ In the 1920s Anna Rochester and Grace Hutchins, missionaries and settlement house workers

⁹ Ibid., pp. 10-13.

¹⁰ Austin Bierbower, *Socialism of Christ* (Chicago: Charles H. Sergel, 1890); Bouck White, *The Call of the Carpenter* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Page, 1912); and Upton Sinclair, *They Call Me Carpenter* (Pasadena, Calif.: Upton Sinclair, 1922).

who gravitated from the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation to the Communist Party, sought in *Jesus Christ and the World Today* to find “in and through the mind and experience of Jesus Christ the way of life for individuals, churches, classes and nations that shall lead toward a solution of our present problems.”¹¹ Their book included extensive lists of discussion questions, suggesting that they assumed readers were eager to sort out what *imitatio Christi* might mean in their own lives. Perhaps the most influential expression of the “socialist Jesus” theology came at the beginning of the Great Depression, when Kirby Page argued in *Jesus or Christianity* that organized Christianity had “accumulated so many alien and hostile elements as to make it a different religion from the simple faith of its founder.”¹² Donald Meyer has rightly characterized this volume as “one of the significant books of the last days of the unreconstructed social gospel.”¹³

Historians have generally made much of social gospel paeans to Jesus’ radicalism, placing it in the long tradition of Protestant primitivism. But this theology typically existed alongside another that looked forward rather than back, and was more explicitly open to post-Christian spiritualities. For every social gospeler who claimed simply to be following Jesus, another announced the emergence of a new, universal religion that would supersede traditional Christianity.

In the first volume of the *International Socialist Review*, published at the founding of the Socialist Party of America, Social Crusade leader J. Stitt Wilson declared flatly that “God is no longer a great monarch on a distant throne . . . , but the immanent

¹¹ Grace Hutchins and Anna Rochester, *Jesus Christ and the World Today* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1922), p. v.

¹² Kirby Page, *Jesus or Christianity* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1929), p. 1.

¹³ Meyer, p. 158.

presence in all energy and life. . . . Christ is not a dying mediator paying debts to offended deity, but the living revelation of the divine possibilities of every man.”¹⁴

William Thurston Brown, who would officiate at George Herron’s controversial second wedding, declared “The Beginnings of a New Religion” in 1899, while George Littlefield (whose Co-operative Fellowship slightly predated the Christian Socialist Fellowship) promised that “Socialism will make religion real . . . and the soul of man will gloriously flower out toward Divine Love when economic righteousness is established.”¹⁵ Everett Dean Martin (a Congregationalist turned Unitarian who would become one of the pioneers of the adult education movement) similarly declared that “SOCIALISM IS RELIGION: not *a* religion, just religion. There is only one religion, and that is man’s expression of his humanity. Religion is not a piece of infallible revelation handed down from heaven; it consists of the hopes and ideals resulting from the total reaction of the external world upon man’s inner consciousness.”¹⁶

[I will eventually incorporate discussion of John Haynes Holmes, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and W.E.B. DuBois as articulators of a similar position]

The founders of the Fellowship of Reconciliation were similarly capable of blending traditional appeals to Jesus with visions of universality. Those whose opposition to the war had resulted in repudiation by congregation or denomination were particularly open to new thoughts. In a 1918 sermon, for example, Paul Jones used an exegesis of Luke 8:38-39 (in which Jesus tells a healed man *not* to follow him but to return home) to call for a radically new ecclesiology. The Church, he reflected, naturally wants to “spend

¹⁴ J. Stitt Wilson, “The Present Moral Conflict,” *International Socialist Review* 1 (1901), cited in Anderson, in Dorn, p. 48.

¹⁵ George Elmer Littlefield, “Why I Am a Socialist,” *Christian Socialist* 2/11 (June 15, 1905): 1.

¹⁶ Everett Dean Martin, “Why I Am a Socialist,” *Christian Socialist* 6/3 (February 1, 1909): 2.

its time in association with Christ.” But a “new experience of God” was calling it to look outward. Rather than teaching new members about itself, Jones urged, the Church should model itself on the Red Cross and invite all comers to the life of service.¹⁷

By 1918, the Christian Socialist center of gravity had shifted from Chicago to New York, and this shift brought new partners into the conversation about universal religion. Freewheeling New Thought prophets gave way to ethical humanists, Reform Jews, and university professors who were distinctly skeptical about “primitive Christianity.” Already in the third issue of the Fellowship of Reconciliation’s *World Tomorrow*, Willard Sperry echoed the cautious approach to Jesus that had been pioneered by his Harvard predecessor Francis Greenwood Peabody: “What we have in Jesus’ life and teaching is not a code of ethical maxims intended to anticipate the complex moral problems of the twentieth century. . . . Our religion, having at once nothing and everything to say to the problems of modern business and politics and war, is seen to be not an ‘Imitation of Christ’ but an Experiment in Christ.”¹⁸ The Quaker scholar Rufus Jones cautioned that “it proves to be a very difficult task to find one’s way back to the pure, unalloyed teaching of Jesus.” Jesus’ *life*, Jones held, was a more reliable guide for contemporary Christians, but even that was “the beginning, not the end, of the revelation of God through humanity.”¹⁹

Both Jones’s radical mysticism and Norman Thomas’s “Implicit Religion of Radicalism” influenced a remarkable symposium published in the *World Tomorrow* in 1923_[d2]. This issue features responses to three brief essays by “young people either in college or recently out” who “have an idealistic, social outlook on life” but are unable to

¹⁷ Paul Jones, “Reconstruction in the Church,” *Social Preparation* 5/4 (October 1918): 15-18.

¹⁸ Willard Sperry, “Seeds of War in the Social Order—Part III,” *The New World* 1/3 (March 1918): 68.

¹⁹ Rufus Jones, “The Essential Truth of Christianity,” *World Tomorrow* 1/7 (July 1918): 158-59.

embrace either orthodox Christianity or classical theism. The first posited a Roycean view of religion as “loyalty to an ideal which transcends this life.” The second began with theodicy, explaining that “we see tragedies in the mass like the war, the famine in Russia, all slums, and the San Francisco earthquake—some fashioned artistically by the hand of man, some more crudely by Mother Nature. . . . And we find it impossible to conceive of any deity worthy of the name making such a mess of things.” But he or she was quick to add that the result of this lack of faith was not “nugatory hopelessness” but its opposite: “Love itself becomes to us a god to which we cling with the greater passion and fealty because it is all we have.” The third “friend” made the same argument at greater length, sandwiching it between a profession of love for his or her minister father and an appeal for unity among radicals. Even the rationalists and skeptics, he or she concluded, can also “live in the ideal” and identify “with what is spiritual in all spirits.”²⁰_[d3]

In the initial response, entitled “The Experience of Religion,” Rufus Jones’s invocation of “religion” rather than “Christianity” established a conceptual framework on which virtually all the other respondents built. Jones affirmed that all people are “innately religious” and that “the human soul reveals its essential nature [in] a native tendency . . . to seek for God.” In light of this reality, Jones was confident that the young friends’ tendency to “create ideals” would “keeps [them] moving on toward the city of God,” and toward a Father who was in turn seeking them out. Jones could cite the Church Fathers on behalf of his position. The “heart of the Gospel message,” he affirmed, is that “there is something divine in man and something human in God, and we can find each other and enjoy each other. He became man that we might become divine.” This position, of

²⁰ “What Can We Believe? Three Friends of The World Tomorrow State Their Difficulties,” *The World Tomorrow* 5/5 (May 1922): 131-36.

course, was diametrically opposed to Karl Barth's sharp distinction between the "religious" quest for God and the "Christian" revelation by which God breaks into human experience.²¹

Though FOR member Reinhold Niebuhr would famously embrace the Barthian stance a decade later, Jones's position was eagerly embraced by the other respondents and, indeed, by FOR members generally. For some, Jonesian religion entailed a broader ecumenism than that found in the Federal Council of Churches. W. E. Orchard explained that the churches were in decline because the "universal emotion" of religion could not be felt in churches divided both by theological and liturgical tastes and by "social standing." This in turn "makes impossible any growth of a social instinct based upon religion." As a solution he proposed that "we could endeavor to combine within the denomination, in the same Church, and shared by the same people, the various types of worship in which different Churches have specialized."²² Sarah Cleghorn similarly offered a poem in which she built on a passage from the Episcopalian liturgy to affirm a religion including those inside and outside the churches: "'For the whole state of Christ's Church militant' / Is a large prayer. I call it universal, / Like a bright circle in a crowd of dancers, / Where every one, sooner or later, comes."²³

John Haynes Holmes addressed the young "friends" more directly, affirming both their emphasis on the "problem of evil" and Jones's view of God as a "necessity of thought." He then asserted confidently that he had resolved all the difficulties by means of "a new conception of the Divine Being." In contrast to the omnipotent Creator of classical Christianity, Holmes's God was an "evolving deity" who "has always been

²¹ Rufus Jones, "The Experience of Religion," *The World Tomorrow* 5/5 (May 1922): 136-38.

²² W. E. Orchard, "Church Worship of Tomorrow," *The World Tomorrow* 5/5 (May 1922): 147-48.

²³ Sarah Cleghorn, "Definitions," *The World Tomorrow* 5/5 (May 1922): 140.

struggling, failing and beginning again, falling and rising again.” This proposal, of course, resolved the problems of theodicy only by depriving believers of the assurance attached to traditional views of God. But Holmes added a final twist that revealed the depth of his commitment to the sixth and seventh articles of the socialist creed. Though God had “failed much,” Holmes argued, “he has at least succeeded once—namely, in the fact of man.” Since God was incarnate in all of humanity, “in man we have the guarantee of the ultimate victory of God, the successful outcome of his creative efforts, for now that man has come, God has found an ally for co-operation in his work.”²⁴

These^[d4] essays were not merely talk. By 1922, Fellowship members were well aware of the Christic echoes in Mohandas Gandhi’s “experiments with truth,” and in the decades to come their attempts to emulate him would help them reconcile the “universal” and “Jesus-centered” approaches to religion. John Haynes Holmes, meanwhile, spent the 1920s seeking to embody his new vision of religious fellowship in his ex-Unitarian congregation, now renamed the Community Church of New York.

At least one FOR member felt that even Holmes was not going quite far enough. Like Holmes, Bishop Paul Jones had fallen afoul of his denomination during World War I, losing his position as Episcopal Bishop of Salt Lake City. By 1923 he had completed a stint as an FOR leader and was working in campus ministry at Antioch College. In a review of Holmes’s *New Churches for Old* and a few similar proposals, he argued that the new religion would be best embodied not in institutionalized churches, but in ephemeral fellowships like the FOR itself. The universal religion, Jones explained, was expressed most fully in the “hardly noticeable” spirit that leads people to be “dissatisfied with the personal and social imperfections in which they live, spurring them to seek . . . a

²⁴ John Haynes Holmes, “God’s Struggle with Evil,” *The World Tomorrow* 5/5 (May 1922): 141-42.

deeper unity in life.” This spirit could be seen equally in the missionary, the trade-unionist, and even “the social climber,” for all distinctions between sacred and secular are “outworn.” “When that inner spirit begins to work in a man urging him to seek for greater truth, freedom and expression, there is no possible way of telling whether it will land him in the Church or agnosticism, in a monastery or a laboratory, on a street corner preaching salvation or on the opposite corner preaching communism.”²⁵

The important thing, Jones went on, is that the spirit also leads people to seek the fellowship of small groups and thus achieve an “integration of lives fused by a common impulse and experience.” This in turn allows them to exercise power beyond their numbers. Referring to the early days of the Fellowship, Jones wrote that “a few individuals go to prison rather than war and the Church is shocked, then they talk about it and the Church won’t listen, then they are invited to discuss it and people are more interested in these discussions than in the regular Church subjects. . . . Few are converted and the Church still blesses war; but something has been started.” To the extent that the spirit is not captured by large and visible institutions, it cannot be defeated: “Organized movements and institutions can be combatted, but the world has not yet found a finally successful way of thwarting the free spirit of God working in human hearts.” Small fellowships were, in sum, “the divine process for saving the world.” And if this theory “seems to leave too little place for the Church as we know it, so much the worse for the Church.”²⁶ These words, of course, point to the institutional challenge we observed in the abolitionist period: was it possible to articulate a truly radical theology without losing access to the institutional resources of the Christian churches?

²⁵ Paul Jones, “The Breath Within the Clay,” *The World Tomorrow* 6/8 (August 1923): 242-43.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 243-44.

Religious Institutions and the Socialist Party

In describing the transformative power of small fellowships, Jones was thinking only as far back as the origins of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. But his point can be extended back to the beginnings of the social gospel era. The institutional roots of activism in this period can be traced to a myriad of small groups whose members achieved an “integration of lives fused by a common impulse and experience.” These groups included settlement houses, institutional churches, intimate “fellowships” of committed activists, and non-denominational “people’s churches.” As I have already suggested with respect to settlement houses, all of these local gatherings institutionalized the practice of encounter, providing new generations of idealists with the opportunity to catch the spirit of radicalism.

One institutional form that pushed idealistic ministers (and a few others) to a radical social gospel was what I will call the “fellowship.” By “fellowship” I mean a small, intimate group of individuals with a shared commitment to building the Kingdom of God on earth. Most fellowships included lay and ordained persons; they appealed particularly to idealistic young ministers who chafed at the restrictions imposed on them by conventional churchgoers and wealthy church patrons. Since fellowships typically included ministers serving dispersed congregations, they gathered only occasionally for “conferences,” either on college campuses or on rural estates or retreat centers. Since—unlike theological seminaries and institutional churches—they included only the most idealistic Social Gospelers and did not depend on outside financial support, fellowships

typically had a radicalizing effect on their members. As they “searched the scriptures” together, fellowship members prodded one another to embrace ever more challenging answers to Charles Sheldon’s question, “What would Jesus do?”

The fellowship that figures most prominently in traditional histories of the social gospel was the Brotherhood of the Kingdom. This was a network of Baptist ministers, including Walter Rauschenbusch, who met regularly at the Hudson River [family estate] of Leighton Williams. This group was generally sympathetic to socialism; indeed, Williams was a Party member. [need to fill in more details]

Also located on the East Coast were a cluster of overlapping Episcopalian groups, among them the broad-based Church Association for the Advancement of the Interests of Labor (founded in 1887), the Anglican inspired Christian Social Union (founded in England in 1889 and transplanted to the US in 1891), and the more narrowly focused Society of Christian Socialists (1889). Members of all these groups were inspired by the energetic activism of W. D. P. Bliss, who served [CAIL?], [CSU?] and the Society of Christian Socialists as secretary and journal editor. [I still need to read Richard B. Dressner, “William Dwight Porter Bliss’s Christian Socialism,” *Church History* 47 (March 1978): 66-82] Bliss, who left few personal papers to illuminate his life story, was a study in contrasts. He affiliated with both the orthodox Marxism of the Socialist Labor Party and the elitist and evolutionary perspective of the British Fabians. Raised in Turkey by Congregationalist missionary parents, he converted to Episcopalianism both because he admired the Anglican Christian Socialists and because he yearned for the organic church unity dreamed of by the Oxford movement. “THE CHURCH MUST HAVE A HIGH CONCEPTION OF HERSELF,” Bliss declared in one manifesto for “church reform.”

“Denominationalism is sin. Church Unity is a crying need. It cannot be reached by compromise, and compact, and human scheming. It must evolve. The Christ must bring it in, if it be His Church.”²⁷

Though these words resonated with many Episcopalians, Bliss was hardly a denominational loyalist. He encouraged young ministers to risk expulsion from their churches by preaching socialism, rather than “demean themselves to become as hired men of a parish.”²⁸ His Church of the Carpenter followed the Episcopalian liturgy (because “we . . . start no new sect in the already divided body of the church”) but welcomed persons “of any church or of no church.”²⁹ And his preferred path to church union relied on the anti-doctrinal liberalism of America more than the English love for ancient creeds: “Only the church of God not of theologies or rituals, or schemes, will ever become the one Wide Church of Man.”³⁰

Bliss’s Society of Christian Socialists was largely but not exclusively Episcopalian in makeup—in 1889-90, for example, it included Universalist activist Mary Livermore as second vice president. In keeping with English usage, where “Christian Socialism” was virtually synonymous with “Social Gospel,” the Society interpreted “socialism” more broadly than some party Socialists would have liked. But Bliss’s emphasis was on moving it to the left. Continental versions of Christian Socialism were “weak and vague,” and the true path required becoming more “definite and scientific” in keeping with the broader political movement.³¹ In keeping with this principle, Bliss emphasized an evolutionary path to socialism but added that “evolution and Revolution

²⁷ “Church Reform: Our Position,” *The Dawn* 3/1 (December 4, 1890): 8.

²⁸ “Church Unity,” *The Dawn* 3/2 (December 18, 1890): 10.

²⁹ Bliss, “The Kingdom of Christ,” *The Dawn* 3/1 (December 4, 1890): 9.

³⁰ “Church Unity,” *The Dawn* 3/2 (December 18, 1890): 11.

³¹ “Christian Socialism,” in “Facts for American Socialists, Number 3,” *The Dawn* 7/4 (April 1895): 11.

are not contraries”; he supported ameliorative social policies but also insisted that “we only go to the root of the matter when we overthrow this system.”³² His political instincts were as catholic as his ecclesiology. In 1890 he encouraged Society members to join either the Socialist Labor Party or one of the populist groups, and indicated that his real preference would be for a “new party” in which “the Farmers’ Alliance, Knights of Labor, Trades Unionists, Nationalists, Prohibitionists, Christian Socialists” could join together.³³

In 1891, Bliss’s *Dawn* published an article by a young Congregationalist minister described as “the first representative of our Society of Christian Socialists in Minnesota.”³⁴ George Herron, a fiery preacher with an oversized Messiah complex, would soon inspire about half a dozen distinct “fellowships,” all of them quite consequential for the subsequent development of the Socialist Party. [need to integrate material from the diss summary that Handy published in CH] The first, and most famous, was the Kingdom movement. This fellowship was first gathered by President George Gates of Iowa (now Grinnell) College in 1892, shortly after his first meeting with Herron. The initial retreat was a great success, and soon Gates had arranged with a wealthy member of Herron’s congregation to endow a professorship for the young preacher. The platform enabled Herron to lead annual movement retreats, to speak regularly in Chicago and other urban centers, and to launch a journal whose editorial board was (briefly) a Who’s Who of the Social Gospel [list members?]. But the institutional logic of the fellowship soon clashed with that of the college. Herron’s colleagues resented the weeks he spent off campus, while conservative donors were appalled at his radicalism. When his

³² “Our Aim,” *The Dawn* 3/1 (December 4, 1890): 1.

³³ “Editorial,” *The Dawn* 3/1 (December 4, 1890): 2.

³⁴ George Herron, “The Message of Jesus to Men of Wealth,” *The Dawn* 3/3 (January 1, 1891): 8.

affair with the daughter of his patroness was discovered, Herron was sent packing. Even the non-socialist President Gates could not survive at Grinnell; he left in [date?] to assume the presidency of Fisk University. (A more moderate Social Gospel tradition survived at Grinnell [fill in details from Luker].)

Out of the wreckage emerged a cluster of overlapping fellowships. A significant circle of Chicago-area ministers had been inspired by Herron's visits to that city. In 1897 J. Stitt Wilson left the Methodist ministry to organize the Social Crusade, a network of mostly Methodists and Congregationalists who devoted themselves to public, outdoor preaching on behalf of Herron's theology and the politics of the Socialist Labor Party. Its members included William Wise and James Hollingsworth, both of whom would participate in the Unity Convention of 1901, as well as future Socialist Congressman Carl D. Thompson. Wilson's move to California in [date] sparked a similar fellowship on the West Coast that included among its members Lawrence Gronlund, whose [date] book on the *Cooperative Commonwealth* had inspired both Edward Bellamy and a host of Christian Socialists.³⁵ [Need to clarify if Gronlund really was in the same group as Wilson, and also how B. F. Mills fits into the picture.] Another circle, led by George Howard Gibson and Ralph Albertson, relocated to a rural commune in Georgia called the Christian Commonwealth, where they launched the journal that gave the *Social Gospel* its identity.³⁶ Back in Chicago, a group that called itself simply the "Fellowship" published the *Socialist Spirit* and included future party stalwart John Spargo as well as Herron himself. Spargo and Herron soon gravitated to a harshly anti-religious style of

³⁵ Douglas Firth Anderson, "'An Active and Unceasing Campaign of Social Education': J. Stitt Wilson and Herronite Socialist Christianity," in Dorn, 45-46; and Robert T. Handy, "Christianity and Socialism in America, 1900-1920," *Church History* 21/1 (March 1952): 46.

³⁶ Need to read that article, also cite Dombrowski.

socialism, even as Stitt Wilson [and Mills] aligned themselves with California's New Thought movement [need to find out if Wattles was also part of this group] and the Christian Commonwealth folks embraced Tolstoy's pacifism. Still, all found a home in the Socialist Party, suggesting the breadth of its platform as well as the ideological ferment generated by socialist fellowships.

Other early fellowships were equally diverse. A rather obscure Brotherhood of the Daily Life, active at least in 1905, identified itself as Catholic in its broadest sense. Jew, Gentile, Christian or Pagan, all are welcome."³⁷ The Collectivist Society of New York was organized in 1902 to produce and distribute socialist pamphlets. Though its members were not exclusively religious, it sent its first pamphlet to 10,000 ministers and referred to its standard of membership as a "confession of faith." Generously supported by insurance executive Rufus Weeks, a lay Episcopalian, it included a large number of Episcopal ministers as well as the feminist theorist Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Baptist stalwart Leighton Williams.³⁸

Small fellowships do not, however, tell the whole story of institutional activity during the social gospel period. Much more than the abolitionist era, the new age was marked by a spirit of coming together. Inspired by a new vision of social solidarity, activists hoped to overcome the schismatic tendencies of their forebears, building national organizations to transcend barriers of religion, class, and race. Already in the nineteenth century, the inclusive spirit was embodied in the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Knights of Labor. In the first decade of the twentieth century,

³⁷ "The Christian Socialist Fellowship," *Christian Socialist* 2/20 (October 15, 1905): 7. The quote is from a letter by Robert W. Irwin.

³⁸ W. J. Ghent, "The Collectivist Society," *The Commons* 9/2 (March 1904): 89-90; E. E. Carr, "The Christian Socialist Fellowship: A Brief Account of its Origins and Progress," *Christian Socialist* 4/16 (August 15, 1907): 5.

the same spirit gave birth to the Socialist Party of America and the Federal Council of Churches, organizations that together represented the full breadth of radical and reforming religious activism. Among the single-issue groups organized at the same time, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the American Civil Liberties Union achieved a longevity unparalleled by any of the abolitionist-era groups. And the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a pacifist organization with strong ties to both the Socialist Party and the Federal Council, proved to be the single most important seedbed of civil rights era activism.

All of these national groups had local roots in such places as Chicago, Boston, New York, and San Francisco—to say nothing of Girard, Kansas, and Kalamazoo, Michigan [are those the best examples?]. By 1910, Hull House had inspired [?] settlement houses in cities ranging from [?] to [?]. [Need to fill in by reading Davis, *Spearheads for Reform*. I am now inclined to put more of this material in this chapter, and include in the previous chapter a bare minimum.]

An “institutional church” combined the features of a settlement house with those of urban gospel missions and of the large “free” congregations that had been established over the course of the nineteenth century for such high profile preachers as Theodore Parker, Henry Ward Beecher, and David Swing. Typically located in large cities, they abolished the traditional fundraising practice of pew rentals and incorporated a dizzying array of programs targeting the working class: soup kitchens, social clubs, sewing and cooking classes, kindergartens, gymnasiums. William Jewett Tucker, who may have coined the term, had organized a club for workingmen while serving New York’s Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in 1878, and he promoted similar practices during

his subsequent professorate at Andover Seminary.³⁹ In 1882 [or 1888—dates are confusing], Episcopalian William Stephen Rainsford transformed Saint George's, a declining parish in New York City into an institutional church by abolishing pew rents and persuading financier J. P. Morgan to fund clubs for boys and girls, a gymnasium, a trade school, and even a cadet battalion.⁴⁰ Not to be outdone, Cornelius Vanderbilt helped Saint Bartholomew's build a facility with three and a half acres of floor space, and programs including an employment bureau, medical clinic, and loan association.⁴¹ Another institutional church, the Baptist Temple in Philadelphia, even spawned a university. By 1894 a national network of congregations had organized themselves as the Open and Institutional Church League, which aspired to save "all men and all of the man by all means, abolishing so far as possible the distinction between the religious and secular, and sanctifying all days and all means to the great end of saving the world for Christ."

Institutional churches were founded for a variety of motives. At least initially, Tucker may have desired to exert social control over his working class neighbors: in 1878 he affirmed that his social club did not desire "to change the relative position of men, to make the rich poor and the poor rich but to teach them the nature of their mutual relations and the duties which it involves."⁴² Others just hoped to save their jobs by keeping dwindling congregations afloat. When Graham Taylor became the pastor of Hartford's Fourth Church in 1880, its membership had declined to just forty-five. He began ministering to alcoholics and criminals in an effort to revive the congregation, and soon

³⁹ Aaron Ignatius Abell, *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism 1865-1900* (Hamden: Archon, 1962): pp. 137, 142.

⁴⁰ David Hein and Gardiner H. Shattuck, *The Episcopalians*, p. 97.

⁴¹ Abell, *Urban Impact*, pp. 150-51.

⁴² Cited in Abell, *Urban Impact*, p. 142. Appears to have been quoted by Oneida's *American Socialist!*

had a flock of three hundred families.⁴³ The membership of Saint George's swelled from two hundred to four thousand under Rainsford's leadership. Both the evangelistic motive and the reliance on wealthy donors may have moderated the ideologies of institutional church pastors, just as many settlement house leaders followed Jane Addams's example of preferring pragmatic results over radical commitment.

A few congregations, however, become bulwarks of truly radical activism. Most of these were part of an overlapping network that I will refer to as "people's churches." Like institutional churches, people's churches abolished pew rents and offered a wide range of social services; unlike them, they eschewed denominational affiliation and theological boundaries—sometimes because their pastors had faced denominational heresy trials. Most sponsored public forums—often displacing traditional Sunday evening worship services—that brought a broad public into conversation with politicians, academics, and representatives of the era's most radical social movements. The Forum model had been pioneered by New York's Cooper Institute, a workingmen's college founded in 1859 that offered free lectures on politics, science, and society in its 900-seat Great Hall.

The first congregation to call itself "People's Church" did not quite fit this model. Methodist John William Hamilton launched Boston's People's Church in 1876, building it into the largest church of his denomination in the city. Though the church was known for its outreach to people of all denominations, it did not transcend its Methodist identity, but in fact helped propel Hamilton into the episcopacy. More to the point, [need to clarify Hamilton's politics].

⁴³ Abell, *Urban Impact*, pp. 150-52.

Indianapolis's Plymouth Church came closer to the model, though it never adopted the "People's" moniker. When Oscar Carlton McCulloch became pastor in 1877, he set about making some of the same changes Charles Sheldon would initiate in Topeka a few years later. He replaced a theologically conservative creed with a constitution that declared the congregation's goals to be "public worship of God, weekly renewal of religious sympathies and affections, mutual acquaintance and assistance, and the alleviation by physical and spiritual means of poverty, ignorance, misery, vice and crime." He also declared his desire to "make this church a People's College" and to "undertake in a small way" what Peter Cooper had achieved in New York.⁴⁴ [need to do more research to determine just how radical this congregation was; evidently the GW Cooke article noted above focuses primarily on it, so that might be a good place to start. Charles Lytle p. 219 notes that the church absorbed a defunct Unitarian congregation in 1880, and that after McCulloch's death chairman Horace McKay arranged for a new building and affiliation with the Unitarians. Evidently McKay was the leader of only one faction, because a UCC website says that Plymouth merged with North Congregational in 1884; McCulloch died 1891; merged with Mayflower Congregational to become First Congregational in 1908—still UCC.]

A more radical, indeed quite idiosyncratic variant was San Francisco's Metropolitan Temple, also launched in the 1870s. Founding minister Isaac S. Kalloch was a Baptist whose ministry at Boston's Tremont Temple (a denominationally affiliated free congregation) had ended with a sensational adultery trial. The scandal drove Kalloch west to Kansas, where he founded Ottawa University [check], and then on to San Francisco. Metropolitan Temple, built with the support of a non-Baptist philanthropist

⁴⁴ Abell, *Urban Impact*, pp. 152-53.

from Los Angeles, soon claimed to be the largest Baptist congregation in the country. Kalloch charged a dime for admission rather than taking a collection, and he began each Sunday evening service with a “prelude” featuring political reflections. He also made the hall available for public speeches, and in 1878 Henry George launched his lecturing career there with an address laden with biblical images: “Shall the ploughers forever plough the backs of a class condemned to toil? Shall the millstones of greed forever grind the faces of the poor? Ladies and gentlemen, it is not in the order of the universe! . . . Paul planteth, and Apollos watereth, but God gives the increase. The ground is ploughed; the seed is set; the good tree will grow.”⁴⁵

By 1879 Kalloch had developed quite a following, and he was recruited as mayoral candidate for the Workingmen’s party, a local movement that was inspired by (but not directly affiliated with) Karl Marx’s First International and that had taken a strong position against Chinese immigration. Ten days before the election, he was shot and injured by a political rival, and the resulting sympathy vote propelled him into office. Further scandal ensued seven months later, when Kalloch’s son shot and killed the assailant. [Need to have one more sentence explaining what happened next, and the collapse of the workingmen’s movement.] Incidents like this, of course, only solidified the link between socialism and violence in the public consciousness.

Probably the two congregations that did the most to inspire the proliferation of “People’s Churches” were those located in Chicago and Saint Paul. The former was launched in 1880 by Hiram Thomas, who had recently resigned a Methodist pulpit rather than face a heresy trial. It held services in a theater and an opera house, and promised to provide a place where “strangers and those without a religious home, and those of much

⁴⁵ Henry George, *The Life of Henry George, by his son*, pp. 295-96.

or little faith” could unite in “the great law and duty of love to God and man, and in earnest efforts to do good in the world.” Underscoring its commitment to religious liberalism, the congregation promised to “require no theological tests” and noted that “We think and let think.”⁴⁶ Saint Paul’s People’s Church was also launched by a renegade Methodist, Samuel G. Smith, who preached the “wild, free theology of the West” and later taught sociology at the University of Minnesota.⁴⁷ [look at Smith’s *Democracy and the Church* and Thomas pubs to pin down their politics] Between 1887 and the beginning of World War I, at least thirty additional People’s Churches were launched in locations ranging from New York and Washington to Lowell, Massachusetts, Iowa Falls, Iowa, and Fairmont, West Virginia.

Given their lack of denominational accountability, the pastors of People’s Churches were relatively free to embrace sociopolitical radicalism, though their commitment to freedom of thought typically prevented them from imposing their allegiances wholesale on their congregations. In Eugene Debs’s hometown of Terre Haute, Indiana, Rev. James H. Hollingsworth launched a People’s Church after, in Debs’s words, giving “up his church and the brightest worldly prospects on account of Socialism.”⁴⁸ He was one of a small cluster of Socialist ministers who participated in the Party’s founding convention and remained loyal for the remainder of his life. Another early party Socialist, William Thurston Brown, launched a People’s Church after being forced from the quite liberal Plymouth congregation in Rochester, New York.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Alfred Theodore Andreas, *History of Chicago*, 827.

⁴⁷ See Larry Millett, *Lost Twin Cities*, pp. 207-209, and Meyer, p. 126.

⁴⁸ EVD to Fred D. Warren, August 2, 1912. Need full reference. Debs does not specify *which* church Hollingsworth lost, but he was already a Socialist in 1901, and was serving People’s Church in 1905.

⁴⁹ Jacob H. Dorn, “‘The Oldest and Youngest of the Idealistic Forces at Work in Our Civilization’: Encounters Between Christianity and Socialism,” in Dorn, 26. Also need that article on Brown. Need to

[possibly incorporate something on John L. Scudder's People's Palace in Jersey City, since Scudder shows up as a pro-Socialist in 1908 *Homiletic Review*]

In Cincinnati, former settlement house worker Herbert Seeley Bigelow launched People's Church after a group of lay leaders defected from the church in protest of his "unitarian principles," single-tax preaching, and attempt to admit a Negro to membership. Decorating its sanctuary with quotations from Leo Tolstoy, [name] Ruskin, Henry George, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson—as well as the biblical admonition to "know the truth and the truth shall make ye free"—the reorganized church insisted that its only "article of faith" was the "establishment of the brotherhood of man." A multi-racial congregation that included unskilled laborers and Jewish merchants supported Bigelow in a series of political campaigns, and by the beginning of World War I he had joined the Socialist Party. He gained a bit of national notoriety in 1917, when he was abducted by Klansmen just before giving a Socialist speech in Kentucky, taken into a dense woods and horsewhipped for his anti-war preaching. He would later serve in Congress as a New Deal Democrat.⁵⁰ Bigelow's contemporary Howard Y. Williams, one of Smith's successors at Saint Paul People's, also walked the line between Socialist and Progressive politics, serving as the first secretary of the League for Independent Political Action, which steered non-party members to Norman Thomas's presidential campaign, and [Farmer Worker?]

People's Churches could be extremely large, if only ephemerally so. Two years after its founding, Saint Paul People's built a sanctuary seating 2500-3000, perhaps the

clarify the chronology for both Carr and Brown. Dorn says Carr served People's Kalamazoo in 1890s, but he seems to have been in Danville in 1904-5. So perhaps he went BACK to a Methodist congregation. . . .

⁵⁰ Zane L. Miller, *Boss Cox's Cincinnati*, 143-45; "Pacifist Whipped in Kuklux Style," NYT, October 30, 1917, p. 3; "Ohio: Two & None," *Time*, January 13, 1936. Also see Daniel r. Beaver, *A Buckeye Crusader: A Sketch of the Political Career of Herbert Seely Bigelow*.

largest Protestant Church in the United States at the time. George Elmer Littlefield claimed five hundred members for his “Co-operative Fellowship” in suburban Westwood, Massachusetts.⁵¹ Perhaps the biggest of them all was the second People’s founded in Chicago, this one launched by Preston Bradley in 1912. Absorbing a thirty-member remnant of Hiram Thomas’s congregation, Bradley built his Sunday morning attendance to 2000 by the 1920s; in the 1940s membership was 4000 and as many as a million people tuned in to his weekly radio broadcasts.⁵² [A bit on Bradley’s politics?]

Probably the most notorious pastor in this tradition was Benjamin Fay Mills, a traditional evangelist who had been converted to socialism by George Herron. Mills served a Unitarian Church in Oakland for five years before launching the Los Angeles Fellowship in 1904. Attracting a thousand members in its first few months, the Fellowship blended revivalist style, socialist politics, and—increasingly—the theological viewpoint of the New Thought movement. Members could join simply by making a financial pledge and committing themselves to “trustful and unselfish living.” Once in, they studied Whitman, Emerson, and the Bhagavad-Gita, joined the Fellowship’s orchestra, or worked to establish daughter congregations across the country. A writer in the *Arena*, a journal identified with both the Social Gospel and New Thought movements, described it as “perhaps the most significant and remarkable religious movement in the world today,” yet within a decade Mills had renounced his radical views and left his congregation to a rapid collapse.⁵³

⁵¹ *Christian Socialist* 1905—no clear on exact issue.

⁵² Charles H. Lyttle, *Freedom Moves West: A History of the Western Unitarian Conference 1852-1952* (Providence: Blackstone Editions, 2006), pp. 239-41.

⁵³ W. A. Corey, “The Benjamin Fay Mills Movement in Los Angeles,” *Arena* 33/187 (June 1905): 593-95; “Rev. Benj. Fay Mills Dead,” *NYT* May 2, 1916, p. 13; Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land*, p. 257; and Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom*, p. 205.

A somewhat steadier personality was Alexander Kent, previously a successful Universalist minister who launched People's Church of Washington, D.C., in 1891 and served it until his death in 1909. Kent was an active supporter of the National American Women's Suffrage Association as well as "a Socialist [who] stood sweetly but fearlessly for the social revolution." The church welcomed all who sympathized with its purposes as members, and committed itself collectively "*to work for such changes in industrial and social conditions as will open the doors of opportunity to the millions now born into poverty and moral degradation.*"⁵⁴

Beyond the big cities, People's Churches thrived in a variety of small town's. People's Kalamazoo, one of the few congregations to survive to the present,

The stability achieved by this congregation was more the exception than the rule. Alexander Irvine's experience in New Haven may have been more typical. He launched a People's Church because the Congregationalists would not tolerate his radical preaching, but he soon discovered that the new congregation's creed—"This church is a self-governing community for the worship of God and the service of man"—meant very different things to different people. When the church invited William Jennings Bryan to speak in New Haven, Irvine thought tickets should be distributed on a purely egalitarian basis, while the church committee assumed "self-governing" meant they could reserve the best seats for their friends. "An educated woman" joined because "she saw in our simple creed an open door," then left when she learned of Irvine's friendship with an impoverished coal heaver. The coal heaver himself left when he discovered Irvine didn't believe in hell. The chairman of the trustees connected Irvine with an "American Yogi"

⁵⁴ "Alexander Kent," CS 6/1 (January 1, 1909): 8; [Webb, William B.], *Centennial History of the City of Washington, D.C.* (Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1892), pp. 584, 587.

who gave him detailed instructions on how to bathe and sleep that were “taken verbatim from a ten-cent book on astrology.” Irvine joined the Socialist Party during this time, in part because he was accused of Socialism so often that he thought he should find out what it meant. This allegiance drove out the Single-Taxers and attracted a new crop of Socialists who, in turn, left when they discovered that Irvine’s sermons featured not “economic determinism” but a search “for the hidden springs of the heart.” Ultimately, Irvine retreated to a rural farm before launching a career as a socialist propagandist.⁵⁵

An important variation on the People’s Church was the explicitly Socialist congregation. These churches, probably without exception, were quite small and as a result they are difficult to track in the sources. In many cases, it is not clear if a particular organization is better described as a (predominantly clerical) “fellowship” or a (predominantly lay) “church.” As a nationwide fellowship, for example, the Society of Christian Socialists encouraged its members to organize themselves locally for more intimate mutual support. The resulting group in Cincinnati seems to have been a congregation under the leadership of Rev. E. P. Foster, who edited a paper called *The Golden Rule* and (according to *The Dawn*) “has a larger congregation now that he has been dismissed from his church.”⁵⁶ The Chicago group, on the other hand, was led by Rev. W. E. Sillence, but also included Rev. Dr. Noble of the Union Park Congregational Church and Rev. J. P. Brushingham, described as “our president, preaching a full gospel to his people and dealing with live subjects.” So there must have been a core

⁵⁵ Irvine, *From the Bottom*, pp. 227-33.

⁵⁶ “Cincinnati,” *The Dawn* 3/2 (December 18, 1890): 8.

“fellowship,” though they had sufficient outward-directed energy to rent Emerson Hall for public services.⁵⁷

The prototype for socialist congregations was Bliss’s own Church of the Carpenter, founded as the Mission of the Carpenter in 1890 [check date]. Bliss’s original model combined an Episcopalian liturgy, a noon meal with “an informal conference as to practical work” and a Sunday evening lecture. A year later, he replaced the sermon with an “informal address” intended to set the agenda for the noontime conference. The goal was to meld working people and idealistic Christians into a single “brotherhood” strong enough to resist the “Common Foe, the growing power of Mammon, and Wrong, and Injustice and every sin.”⁵⁸ [Need to flesh this out more, and if appropriate add in story of Herbert Casson’s Labor Church in Lynn, founded in 1894, and Grace Community in Denver, led by George Lackland and Aaron Heist. See Meyer 80]

Fellowships, people’s churches, institutional churches, and settlement houses all flourished in the tumultuous 1890s. At the dawn of the new century, activists seasoned in all these contexts came together to form the Socialist Party of America, a movement whose balance of radicalism and inclusivity allowed it to anchor the American left for a generation. The Party does not figure prominently in most studies of the social gospel; indeed, most scholars assume that it was a classic example of the secular left’s hostility to religion. It is certainly true that the Party had many leaders who held no personal religious beliefs and many leaders (not always the same ones!) who were addicted to vitriolic attacks on the churches. But it is also true that the Party was in large measure the

⁵⁷ “Chicago,” *The Dawn* 3/2 (December 18, 1890): 8; and W. E. Sillence, “Live Work in Chicago,” *The Dawn* 3/4 (January 15, 1891): 6. I need to track this further in *Dawn*, and also see what the story is with all the Weeks.

⁵⁸ Bliss, “The Kingdom of Christ,” *The Dawn* 3/1 (December 4, 1890): 9; and “Church Reform,” *The Dawn* 3/7 (February 26, 1891): 8.

institutional embodiment of the radical wing of the social gospel. Without social gospelers, of both the Protestant and post-Christian variety, there would have been no Socialist Party.

The defining characteristic of the Socialist Party was its ambivalent response to one of the persistent dilemmas faced by left institutions. Is it better to create an ideologically pure vanguard, willing to speak truth to power without regard for consequences? Or should leftists work with moderate reformers to create a mass movement that will gradually move to more radical ground? In the 1890s these alternatives had been embodied by the Socialist Labor Party's Daniel DeLeon, who preached an uncompromising Marxism, and the Populists' William Jennings Bryan, who traded in the movement's radical agenda for the panacea of "free silver" and fusion with the Democrats—only to lose the presidency anyhow. The Socialist Party's founders, drawn from both the radical wing of the Populist movement and the anti-DeLeon "Kangaroo" wing of the SLP, agreed that neither DeLeon or Bryan offered a way forward. What was needed, instead, was a thoroughly American socialism, rooted in indigenous reform traditions, willing to make use of electoral democracy, but unequivocally committed to the eventual overthrow of capitalism.

The desire for an American socialism is the key to understanding the role of social gospelers within the party. The party's most influential strategists—Morris Hilquit of New York and Victor Berger of Milwaukee—were themselves immigrant, atheist Marxists, but they knew full well that men like themselves could not win elections beyond their own immigrant neighborhoods. The ideal candidate, of course, was Eugene Debs—an eloquent working man with a Jesus-centered spirituality who had demonstrated

his mettle during the [railway strike]. But most non-immigrant trade unionists steered clear of outright socialism. Lacking native-born working class leaders, the Party turned to the next best thing—popular preachers who could rally voters with the radical message of Jesus.

Though a number of social gospellers had, in fact, been members either of the Socialist Labor Party or Eugene Debs's Social Democracy prior to 1901, the perception that they were Christians first and partisans second gave them an aura of neutrality that allowed them to play a mediating role in the Unity Convention that brought the two groups together. George Herron served as temporary chair of the convention and played a pivotal role [in manifesto of union? Need to look at Howard H Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism*, and Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*]. Social Crusade veterans William H. Wise and James Hollingsworth were also present as delegates. . . .

Once the party was established, social gospellers settled naturally into a role as propagandists and educators. Universalist minister Charles Vail, who had already published [?] in [?], was appointed as the Party's first "national organizer" [which meant what?]. Vail was one of at least four clerics who published influential manuals of Socialism during the Party's first five years.⁵⁹ In Chicago, Charles Kerr, formerly publisher of Jenkin Lloyd Jones's radical *Unity* magazine, launched the most influential Socialist publishing house, churning out Marxist classics, the sophisticated *International Socialist Review* (edited by former settlement house worker Algie Simons), and "Why I

⁵⁹ In an early history of the Christian Socialist Fellowship, Edward Ellis Carr claimed that ministers were responsible for the five most important Socialist books, listing Franklin Monroe Sprague's *Socialism from Genesis to Revelation*, Charles Vail's *Principles of Scientific Socialism*; Walter Thomas Mills's *The Struggle for Existence*; John Spargo's *Socialism*; and Walter Rauschenbusch's *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. Interestingly, these five represent five different denominations; the inclusion of Rauschenbusch's work alongside four explicitly socialist books reflects the high regard Rauschenbusch had among social gospellers of all stripes. See E. E. Carr, "The Christian Socialist Fellowship: A Brief Account of its Origin and Progress," *Christian Socialist* 4/16 (August 15, 1907): 5.

Became a Socialist” tracts that often gave credit to Jesus. [I need to check virtually every fact in that sentence.] John Spargo worked with George Herron and his wealthy mother in law to establish the Rand School of Social Science in New York City, where workers learned socialist theory and organizing techniques from Unitarian minister George Willis Cooke, [adjective?] Scott Nearing . . . Girard, Kansas, was the unlikely home to [fill in details on Mills & International School of Social Economy, Wayland and Appeal to Reason, and Kate Miller O’Hare]

Ministers were also in high demand as Socialist Party candidates. Job Harriman, Eugene Debs’s first running mate, had served briefly as a Disciples minister prior to launching his political career [need to find a good bio]. At least half a dozen Protestant ministers were elected to public office on the Socialist Party ticket, among them Berkeley mayor J. Stitt Wilson, Wisconsin Congressman Carl Thompson, and Massachusetts legislator Roland Sawyer [add other mayors]. Dozens more ran unsuccessfully [details from CSF list?]. Ministers would play an even more prominent role after the Communist schism, with Norman Thomas heading the national ticket in every campaign from 1928 to [date], and renowned theologian Reinhold Niebuhr running for Congress in [date?]. It would be hard to name a political grouping, with the exception of the Black Congressional Caucus, with as large a clerical contingent as the Socialist Party.

[SOMEWHERE—PERHAPS HERE—I NEED AN EXTENDED DISCUSSION OF JEWISH SOCIALISTS]

Though the Party was all-consuming for some Social Gospelers, others felt the need for more intimate fellowship with Socialists who shared their religious commitments. This was certainly the case for Rev. E. E. Carr, who launched the

Christian Socialist in tiny Danville, Illinois, in 1904. Its message, Carr declared, was twofold: to urge ministers and church members “to advocate the Real Gospel of Christ” while persuading Socialists “not to ignore nor belittle the tremendous importance of religion.”⁶⁰ At the same time, Carr was unequivocal in his support for the Socialist Party, to which he hoped to recruit millions of Christian voters.⁶¹ This vision had broad appeal. By 1907 Carr had recruited to his editorial board such rural Socialists as Oscar Donaldson (in Webster City, Iowa), Lucien Rule (Goshen, Kentucky), and Paul Castle (Central Park, Mont.); transplanted Social Crusaders Stitt Wilson (Berkeley) and Carl Thompson (Milwaukee); people’s church founder George Littlefield (Westwood, Massachusetts); New York area Episcopalians Rufus Weeks and George Strobell; Rand School teacher George Willis Cooke (an active Unitarian); and former Anti-Saloon League evangelist Jacob O. Bentall (a former Baptist). Even more impressively, he was able to sustain the journal for eighteen years, perhaps the longest span of any explicitly Christian Socialist publication in United States history.⁶² At its peak, it had perhaps 19,000 readers.

Carr may well have imagined, from the beginning, that his journal would spark the creation of a nationwide fellowship of Christian Socialists. It was, however, Lucien Rule of Kentucky who took the first initiative in creating what would become the Christian Socialist Fellowship. By the summer of 1905 he had organized a local fellowship and was promoting its constitution as a model for the national group. That

⁶⁰ “Knights of the Cross,” *Christian Socialist* 2/5 (March 1, 1905): 3.

⁶¹ E. E. Carr, “The Reason for It,” *Christian Socialist* 2/8 (April 15, 1905): 4.

⁶² *The Dawn*, *The Socialist Spirit*, *The Social Crusade*, *The Social Gospel*, and other journals of the 1890s were all quite short-lived. *The World Tomorrow*, which was not quite Socialist, lasted from 1918 to 1934 [check], and Adin Ballou’s *Practical Christian*, which expounded an earlier version of socialism, endured from [dates].

document blended a very broad theology (“[We believe] that God, the Source of all life and Good, and Father of Humanity, made and intended the earth and its fullness for the use and enjoyment of all His children, the sons and daughters of men, who labor with hand or brain”) with fervent support for “the International Socialist Movement as the means of hastening that good time of God and Man, which we believe to be near at hand.”⁶³ By September the pages of the *Christian Socialist* were filling up with correspondence on the Fellowship: while Anglo-Catholic A.L. Byron-Curtis wished for less “sectarianism” and more emphasis on the “full light of the Incarnation,” Social Gospel luminary Charles Sheldon wrote that “So far as I understand the pledge you enclose I am ready to sign it.”⁶⁴ (Interestingly, Byron-Curtis but not Sheldon showed up in the published list of members a few years later.⁶⁵ In June 1906 the Fellowship was formally launched at a conference in Louisville. [Might be good to look at Constitution in summers of 06 or 07, for a statement on mission]

Within a few years, the new Fellowship was functioning at the national, regional, and local levels. Nationally, it hosted annual conferences in such cities as Louisville (1906), Chicago (1907), New York (1908), and Toledo (1909). These conferences included business sessions (some of them tumultuous), but placed more emphasis on speech-making. The organizers invited prominent Socialists and Social Gospellers to speak as a strategy for getting them more invested in the Fellowship’s mission; thus the 1908 Chicago conference featured both A. M. Simons (editor of the *International Socialist Review*) and Harry Ward (author of the Methodist Social Creed, which served as model for that of the Federal Council). It also conducted some of its sessions at Jane

⁶³ “A Christian Socialist Fellowship,” *Christian Socialist* 2/16 (August 15, 1905): 7.

⁶⁴ “The Christian Socialist Fellowship,” *Christian Socialist* 2/19 (October 1, 1905): 6.

⁶⁵ “Christian Socialist Fellowship,” *Christian Socialist* 5/10 (May 15, 1908): 5.

Addams's Hull House.⁶⁶ National conferences were also an occasion for outreach, as the gathered Socialist luminaries were sent out to preach at any local church that would receive them: the *Christian Socialist* reported thirteen such sermons after the 1908 conference.

On a regional level, the Fellowship established district secretaries in 1906, and by 1908 these secretaries were energetically organizing regional conferences in such places as Old Orchard, Maine; Asbury Park, New Jersey; Baltimore; Buffalo; and Rochester. These regional gatherings functioned much as had the pre-1901 clerical "fellowships": those gathered in Maine, for example, were especially impressed with a bucolic setting in which "the lichen-covered tree-trunks towered into the soft darkness of the summer night," while the Baltimore gathering culminated in the formation of a local branch including "one clergyman, several other professional men, one lady, and gentlemen of various useful employments." But they were also propagandistic occasions: six hundred people attended the public portion of the Maine conference, and advocates of "personal salvation, regeneration, premillenarianism, divine healing and adventism" were all combatively present."⁶⁷

Prior to 1908, however, the national membership stood at just 32, and the greatest energy was in the two cities able to sponsor congregation-like local groups. Chicago's Christian Socialist Fellowship Center was launched with a splash at the end of 1906, holding Sunday morning services at the Masonic Temple. The founder, J.O. Bentall, had

⁶⁶ "Elaborate Preparations for Conference Sessions," *Christian Socialist* 4/10 (May 15, 1907): 4.

⁶⁷ "Christian Socialist Fellowship Conference at Old Orchard, Maine," *CS* 5/18 (September 15, 1908): 4; "Baltimore Christian Socialist Fellowship Conference," *CS* 5/20 (October 15, 1908): 3; "Baltimore Conference of the Christian Socialist Fellowship," *CS* 5/22 (November 15, 1908): 3; "Asbury Park Conference of the Christian Socialist Fellowship," *CS* 5/18 (September 15, 1908): 5; "The Buffalo Conference," *CS* 5/23 (December 1, 1908): 8; "The Rochester Conference," 5/23 (December 1, 1908): 8.

just resigned from the Anti-Saloon League to devote himself full time to Socialism, and he promised to provide a church home for Christian Socialists disgruntled with conventional churches.⁶⁸ Bentall also recruited music director Harvey Moyer, whose *Songs of Socialism* would soon be used by Socialists of many theological stripes. [check] The original New York center was located at Amity Baptist, which had already hosted the Collectivist Society, and seems to have drawn on that fellowship's largely Episcopalian membership. But its founding gathering also featured Union Seminary Professor Charles Fagnani, a Presbyterian, who declared that "Socialism *is* Christianity; and Christianity *is* Socialism; and if any man denies either of these statements, it is because he does not see clearly what Socialism is, or else because he does not see clearly what Christianity is."⁶⁹ These two groups anchored New York and Chicago as the two largest clusters of CSF members, though by 1908 the general secretary claimed local groups also in Denver, San Diego, Boston, Pittsburgh, Newark, Milwaukee, Lake Charles, Louisiana, Philadelphia, Winston Salem, Buffalo, and Brooklyn.⁷⁰

The Fellowship's rapid growth—to 260 by the annual conference in May 1908—undoubtedly reflected the great enthusiasm for the presidential campaign of Eugene Debs and Ben Hanford, who were nominated in Chicago just a few weeks before the CSF gathered there. (It was also the founding summer for the Federal Council of Churches, which the Christian Socialists scarcely noticed.) Debs himself attended the CSF conference, praising the mostly clerical audience for softening his anti-clerical prejudices: "I am glad I can call you ministers of the Man of Galilee, my comrades, for it

⁶⁸ J. O. Bentall, "Christian Socialist Fellowship Center," *Christian Socialist* 4/1 (January 1, 1907): 5.

⁶⁹ "Christian Socialist Fellowship Center Organized in New York," *Christian Socialist* 4/22 (November 15, 1907): 1.

⁷⁰ "Report of the General Secretary of the Christian Socialist Fellowship," *Christian Socialist* 5/11 (June 1, 1908): 3.

isn't long ago that I felt a great prejudice against you as a class." Carr responded by affirming that Debs was "speaking the message of freedom to this generation as Moses and Christ did to theirs," praise that provoked one newspaper to report "Socialists Deify Debs."⁷¹ Around the same time, Carr persuaded [#] ministers to sign a statement [details].

The published list provides the most comprehensive map of core clerical support for the Socialist Party during the Debs era. The most obvious feature of the list is the breadth of distribution: no single denomination or region dominated. The Baptists had the best showing in absolute numbers with 28, but this was relatively weak given that Baptists were the largest [or second] Protestant denomination. Despite editor Carr's own Methodist roots, the Methodists also had a relatively weak showing. The Episcopalians did better, reflecting the abiding influence of the Anglican Christian Socialist tradition. But Congregationalists and Unitarians were proportionately better represented than Episcopalians, while Universalists and Swedenborgians had the strongest representation of all. Overall perhaps 1 in 25 Swedenborgian ministers, 1 in 45 Universalists and 1 in 65 Unitarians appeared on the list, compared to 1 in 1000 Baptists and 1 in 1800 Methodists. [Need to recalculate these numbers after I get a more complete count of those who switched denominations.]

These numbers point to a tension that would bedevil Christian Socialists for the entire life of the Party. On the one hand, the majority of people who identified with the label "Christian Socialist" were also members of mainline Protestant denominations affiliated with the Federal Council. On the other hand, the small liberal and post-Christian traditions that would be excluded from the Federal Council were *much* better represented among Christian Socialists than in the population as a whole. The

⁷¹ "Metropolitan Press Reports of the C. S. F. Conference," *Christian Socialist* 5/12 (June 15, 1908): 3.

institutional structures of the fellowship, people's church, and free school all appealed to people who had once been Christian and still admired Jesus, and many of these folks believed they deserved a seat at the Christian Socialist Table. What's more, the boundaries between the mainline and liberal/post-Christian constituencies was extremely fluid. Typically, individuals gravitated from mainline to liberal or post-Christian traditions (or to an outright rejection of religion), while the influx of additional mainliners preserved the overall ratio between the two groups. Thus, as individual members gravitated in a dozen different directions, CSF leaders faced the daunting challenge of persuading mainline Christians that Socialism was not heretical or fundamentally irreligious and persuading party leaders that Marx had been wrong to dismiss Christian Socialism as "but the holy water with which the priests consecrate the heartburn of the aristocrats." [need source]

To this end, E. E. Carr laid down a clear line early on, and most CSF members stuck to it. "The Christian Socialist Fellowship should stand," he declared, "First, for Socialism. It is no indefinite expression of mere sentiment. It means world-wide revolution. It stands squarely with and for the International Socialist Party, affiliating particularly with the Socialist parties of the United States and Canada."⁷² For Carr, identification with the Party also entailed commitment to Marxist teachings on class struggle and economic determinism [which he believed had been taught by Jesus himself in the parable of the sower—need to find this quote]. It was possible, he believed, to adopt both these positions on the basis of Christian idealism rather than atheist materialism. The paradoxical implication of this, explained Rufus Weeks, was that "properly speaking, there *is* no Christian Socialism." As an economic doctrine, Socialism

⁷² Carr, "The Christian Socialist Fellowship," *Christian Socialist* 2/20 (October 15, 1905): 4.

was the same whether held by Christians or atheists, and the Christian Socialists had chosen the name primarily to prevent its being claimed by parties “created for the purposes of hampering socialism” (as had happened in Germany and Austria) or by ““vague thinkers or men of a hesitating temper” (as was happening in England).⁷³

In line with this vision, both the *Christian Socialist* and the CSF campaigned hard for Socialist candidates, worked hard to reassure skeptics that their movement was “not a sort of trap,” and worked strategically on behalf of Party’s 1908 declaration that “The Socialist party is primarily an economic organization. It is not concerned with religious belief.” According to Carr, clergymen constituted at least a dozen of the two hundred delegates who made that decision, as well as “scores” of active laypeople, but they were silent during the debate to allow the atheists to discern whether they wanted a broad-based party. Once the neutrality plank had been passed, Carr was more vocal in spinning its significance. The single-vote margin of victory, he claimed, was misleading because many “no” voters simply preferred an earlier version that described religion “as a private matter, a question of individual conscience.” (Though this was the language favored by European Socialists, Carr objected on the interesting grounds that it was anti-Catholic insofar as it presumed a Protestant view of conscience.)⁷⁴

After the election, Carr launched an attack on the anti-clerical lecturer Arthur Morrow Lewis, claiming that the low Socialist vote in Chicago was a consequence of Lewis’s Sunday morning lectures “ridiculing the idea of God, slandering Christianity and abusing men in the Socialist Party who still dare to proclaim their faith in God and in religion.” Carr even went so far as to warn that unless Socialists left religion alone—and

⁷³ Rufus W. Weeks, “What the Christian Socialists Stand For,” *Christian Socialist* 5/11 (June 1, 1908): 1.

⁷⁴ E. E. Carr, “Editorial Comment,” *Christian Socialist* 9/12 (March 21, 1912): 3-4; and E. Guy Talbott, “Socialism, Labor Unions, and the Church,” *Christian Socialist* 9/12 (March 21, 1912): 1-3.

were less critical of moderate reformers—“some other Party will be raised up to accomplish the glorious work we might have done.”⁷⁵ After a month of vitriolic debate, it was Lewis who backed down, prompting Carr to praise him for a “valuable Christmas Gift to the Socialist movement of America.”⁷⁶ Curiously, though, Carr’s former friend J. O. Bentall, still a nominal member of the *Christian Socialist’s* editorial board, continued to press Lewis’s side of the argument, insisting that “While it may not seem so at first sight, the scientific method is best, and it will win out in the end.”⁷⁷

As Bentall’s surprising evolution suggests, the Fellowship’s most challenging battles had less to do with atheist party leaders than with the shifting religious identities of its own constituency. As early as 1905, E. E. Carr himself could not explain what the word “Christian” meant without stumbling. The Fellowship, he wrote in the months before its founding, should stand “not for dogmatic nor sectarian Christianity, but for Christianity in general.” In part this reflected the nondoctrinal theology that was generally shared by Social Gospellers. Calling himself “an extreme liberal in theology,” Carr still insisted that “the Words of Jesus—the Sermon on the Mount, the Golden Rule, the Lord’s Prayer and many others—afford us the best religious expression of our spirit.” But, in equal measure, it reflected a Socialist strategy for winning “*the seven million nominally Christian families of America*” to the Party. Carr was happy to recognize “what good there is in certain Pagan religions,” but denounced “those who would sacrifice our magnificent opportunity to make Socialists of the Christian people of America for the sake of vague sentimentality concerning other faiths which are so little concerned here. . . . The hope of America is not in applied Paganism, but in applied Christianity.” Almost as

⁷⁵ “Two Reasons Why the Chicago Socialist Vote Was So Small,” *CS* 5/22 (November 15, 1908): 5-6.

⁷⁶ “Lewis Turns Over a New Leaf,” *Christian Socialist* 5/24 (December 15, 1908): 4-5.

⁷⁷ “What Bentall Thinks,” *CS* 5/24 (December 15, 1908): 5.

soon as Carr had laid down a hard line, however, he softened it: “we should freely and lovingly welcome to membership any Jew, Hindoo, or other religious socialist who is broad enough to work with us under the name of Jesus.”⁷⁸

A related difficulty had to do with whether the Christian Socialist Fellowship would compete directly with mainline denominations and congregations—institutions that had, of course, already expelled several early Christian Socialists. Carr certainly hoped to avoid conflict, and encouraged pastors serving denominational churches to remain there: “Let not the pastor desert the flock because it seems slow or unruly.” Recognizing that an “independent line” was sometimes necessary, Carr urged that nondenominational churches “take some other name—Peoples, All Souls, Unity, etc.—and leave the name Christian Socialist unhampered by denominational associations.” This, he hoped, would preserve a secure place within Socialism for mainliners.⁷⁹ Within a year, though, Carr was enthusing about J. O. Bentall’s plan to turn the Chicago branch of the Fellowship into a worshipping community. Bentall, for his part, promised that his center “will not constitute a new denomination,” and expressed a hope that he would soon “see the day when Socialism will be treated in all the pulpits of all the different denominations with as much energy and enthusiasm as capitalism is upheld at the present time.” But in the meantime he *also* hoped “to establish a ‘Center’ in every city in America”!⁸⁰

All of these struggles notwithstanding, the *Christian Socialist* and the CSF never lost sight of the larger goal of winning mainline Protestantism to the Socialist cause. One strategy was the publication of denominational “special issues,” published in mass

⁷⁸ EE Carr, “The Christian Socialist Fellowship,” *Christian Socialist* 2/20 (October 15, 1905): 4.

⁷⁹ EE Carr, “The Christian Socialist Fellowship,” *Christian Socialist* 2/20 (October 15, 1905): 4.

⁸⁰ J. O. Bentall, “Christian Socialist Fellowship Center,” *Christian Socialist* 4/1 (January 1, 1907): 5.

numbers and featuring articles both by CSF members and other Social Gospelers deemed sufficiently sympathetic to Socialism. The Episcopalian issue, for example, featured Bliss, Weeks, and Byron-Curtis alongside Anglican Percy Dearmer and the late bishop Frederick Huntington; the Baptist issue included highlighted Walter Rauschenbusch alongside CSF member Leighton Williams.⁸¹ The special issue tactic eventually extended as far as the conservative Lutherans, the stand-offish Catholics, and the miniscule Swedenborgians, as well as virtually all mainline Protestant denominations. The CSF also sent delegates to denominational conventions; in July 1908, for example, they proudly reported that their delegate had persuaded the General Synod of the Reformed Church to launch a three-year study of socialism. Another, as noted previously, was to arrange for CSF members to serve as guest preachers in as many pulpits as possible. Though this took place on a large scale during annual conferences, it was also an ongoing practice for both Carr and his wife. In one tour through Iowa and Illinois, for example, Ella Carr spoke at Methodist, Congregational, Evangelical, and Christian Science churches, as well as at a YMCA, a home, a socialist local, and four opera halls.⁸² The founding of the Federal Council solidified the realignment in the relationship between religion and the left that had begun with the defeat of William Jennings Bryan. For the entire nineteenth century, the large Protestant denominations had been bastions of moderate conservatism, working closely with wealthy pewholders and benefactors, and policing social as well as theological dissent by means of heresy trials. So long as this was so, it was possible if not entirely comfortable for radical liberals to align themselves with restorationist and localist evangelicals. But now the major denominations—with the exception of the

⁸¹ *Christian Socialist* 4/5 (March 1, 1907) and *Christian Socialist* 4/21 (November 1, 1907).

⁸² “Mrs. Carr’s Lectures in Iowa and Illinois,” *Christian Socialist* 9/16 (April 18, 1912) : 4.

Southern Baptists were staking out territory that was, if not radical, at least somewhat to the left of center.

Still, by the time the United States entered the First World War, there was little common ground between the Socialist Party and the Federal Council of Churches. Building on a long-standing analysis of the links between militarism and capitalism, the Party leadership staked out a stridently anti-war position. Both Eugene Debs and Kate Richards O'Hare went to jail for speeches denouncing war policy, and in 1920 Debs polled [?] votes—his highest total ever, in part because the adoption of woman suffrage had doubled the electorate—on the strength of pacifist and free speech as well as socialist votes. But this policy alienated many of the Party's longstanding religious supporters: Edward Ellis Carr lamented that [quote]; George Herron signed on with the Wilson administration as a peace negotiator; and Charles Fagnani was still harassing a colleague for pro-German sentiments [?] years later. Most Federal Council leaders, for their part, embarrassed themselves with patriotic fervor. [quotes from Fosdick and Mathews—look at Curtis]

The war was thus a frustrating time for a new generation of activists who felt deeply connected to the churches but could not support the war. We have already seen some of their personal stories [allude to previous chapter?]. Taken together, their frustration led to the creation of an organization that would do more than any other to convey the spirit of the social gospel to a new generation. The Fellowship of Reconciliation was originally founded by European pacifists who hoped to forestall the First World War. Brought to the United States in 1915, the young fellowship aspired to be more than “simply an addition to the already long list of peace societies.” Viewing war

as “one out of many unhappy consequences of the spiritual poverty of society,” Fellowship members committed themselves to “a quest after an order of society in accordance with the mind of Christ.” Some already understood this to mean socialism at the beginning of the war; a great many more came around to socialist principles as they reflected together on the social injustices that had led to the war.⁸³

Perhaps the most intellectually gifted of the young ministers who came to Socialism through the Fellowship of Reconciliation was Norman Thomas. Educated at Princeton University—where he studied with Woodrow Wilson, among others—and Union Theological Seminary, he had served a Presbyterian mission in East Harlem until his anti-war views jeopardized the mission’s funding. Moved by the experience of his brother Evan, who was sentenced to military prison for his refusal to cooperate in any way with the war, Thomas signed on as editor of *The World Tomorrow*, a semi-independent journal launched by the Fellowship in 1918. As the title suggests, the mission of *The World Tomorrow* was to help Christians develop practices of reconciliation suitable to the postwar world. For Thomas, this meant socialism as well as pacifism: in his inaugural editorial, he observed that “the war is stimulating and releasing those deep currents of industrial and economic unrest which have for many years been a gathering force” and predicted a social and economic revolution as dramatic as the religious revolution of the Reformation and the political revolution of France. But, rather than pledging an allegiance to the Party, Thomas insisted that “for the ills that beset our race the spirit of Christ is the one sole medicament.”⁸⁴

⁸³ John Nevin Sayre, “Twenty Years of the Fellowship of Reconciliation,” *Fellowship* 1/5 (September 1935): 1.

⁸⁴ “An Interpretation and Forecast,” *The New World* 1/1 (January 1918): 4-5.

Though Thomas's general vision of Christian Socialism was shared by most of his editorial successors, he stepped down as editor after four years, accepting a better-paid position at the *Nation*. His work with the Intercollegiate Socialist Society (renamed the League for Industrial Democracy in 1921) helped him move rapidly in the ranks of a Socialist Party that had been deeply traumatized by the departure of Communists whose support for the Russian Revolution was unconditional. Thomas was chosen as the party's presidential candidate in 1928, in part because none of the other viable candidates had been born in the United States. Yet he had never professed the level of Marxist orthodoxy that Edward Ellis Carr had regarded as the sine qua non of true Socialism, and he was much more open than his predecessors had been to participation in a more inclusive Labor Party. Under Thomas's leadership, the Party welcomed (either as members or as supporters) middle-class Christians who shared these attitudes, even as it lost the support of both zealous Communists and the conservative yet nominally Marxist unionists who had provided its base of support before the war. By 1932, when Thomas polled his greatest support as a presidential candidate, Christian Socialists were perhaps the most significant faction within the party, and the eight thousand members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation constituted the nucleus of that faction. Seventy-five percent of Fellowship members cast their votes for Thomas in that year.⁸⁵

That was the high water mark of Christian Socialism. Even as the Fellowship was polling Protestant ministers on socialism, President Roosevelt was—in part because of Socialist lobbying—implementing most of the reform measures that Party members had long advocated as initial steps toward Socialism. One by one, leading Socialists transformed themselves into New Deal Democrats. At the same time, the rise of Fascism

⁸⁵ J. B. Matthews, "Pacifists Prefer Thomas," *The World Tomorrow* 15/15 (October 26, 1932): 402.

and the authoritarian policies of Stalinist Russia sparked new splits within the Party. Norman Thomas tried, with limited success, to steer a middle path between those who counseled solidarity with the Soviet Union and those who preferred vitriolic condemnation.

Thomas could not, however, save the Fellowship of Reconciliation from a bitter split over pacifism. In the early years of the Great Depression, many radicals anticipated a global class war, and in that context Fellowship secretary J. B. Matthews began openly advocating armed resistance to capitalism. Reinhold Niebuhr, more temperately, insisted that in a fallen world the Christian's task was to pursue relative "justice" rather than perfect "love," even if this meant the use of force. This was too much for the pacifist majority of the Fellowship. A 1934 survey revealed that a centrist plurality of the Fellowship was *both* pacifist and socialist, with 40% espousing only pacifism and 12% espousing only socialism. The Council decided to exclude only the latter minority, removing Matthews from his position; Niebuhr resigned shortly afterward.⁸⁶ In the ensuing turmoil, *The World Tomorrow* shut down, to be replaced by an organizational newsletter called *Fellowship*. Both Matthews and Niebuhr renounced their socialism within a few years. The FOR leaders mostly kept the faith, but quietly; during World War II they focused on conscientious objectors and then launched a series of initiatives on

⁸⁶ Kirby Page, "The Future of the Fellowship," *The World Tomorrow* 17/1 (January 4, 1934): 9-11. The survey actually allowed participants to choose among six positions. I have classed as "pacifists only" those who "endeavor through methods of love, moral suasion and education to bring in the new order, but refuse to identify themselves with either the under-privileged class or the privileged class" (21%) and those who "identify themselves with the just aims of the workers and under-privileged . . . but without the use of any form of coercion" (19%). It is possible that some of the second group did, in fact, identify as socialists. I have classified as pacifist-socialists those who commit to "organizing the workers into a political party . . . to secure the abolition of capitalism" but either refuse to cooperate with violent socialist organizations (18%) or are willing to serve such organizations only in nonviolent ways (31%). Those I regard as "socialists only" either consent to the use of armed force "regretfully and only while the necessity for it continues" (10%) or are actually willing to "assist in the arming of workers and in other ways prepare them for the struggle" (2%).

racial justice. These efforts would eventually bear significant fruit, but the immediate result was the virtual disappearance of socialism from the theological conversation.