

# Reform Judaism and the Jewish “Social Gospel”<sup>1</sup>

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During a campaign speech at the African Methodist Episcopal Church Convention in St. Louis on Saturday July 5, 2008, then Senator Barack Obama described his conception of religious responsibility in these words:

[O]ur faith cannot be an idle faith. It requires more of us than Sundays at church. It requires more than just our daily prayer. It must be an active faith rooted in that most fundamental of all truths: that I am my brother’s keeper, that I am my sister’s keeper. That we must live that truth not only with good words, but good deeds.<sup>2</sup>

In this speech, many Americans were unknowingly hearing echoes of a religious movement and worldview that developed around the turn of the twentieth century. The Social Gospel, as it has come to be known, was a movement that saw in Christianity a religious calling to improve society and its institutions. President Obama is but one of many Americans who can attribute their understanding of the role religion should play in society to the Social Gospel.

Despite acknowledging that “[s]cholarly research into the subject...has been minimal,” the authors of a standard work on the subject of the Social Gospel published in 1976 were still willing to conclude that “Judaism... did not produce a social gospel movement comparable to that in Protestantism...”<sup>3</sup> In this estimation, White and Hopkins drew on the work of a noted sociologist of the American Jewish experience writing two decades earlier who declared that “...it is one of the most remarkable things about American Judaism... that it is not particularly concerned with social problems.”

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The author, Nathan Glazer, goes on to note that "the failure of a Jewish 'social gospel' movement to develop among Reform Jews is really surprising."<sup>4</sup> While the reader is left wondering why this would, in fact, be surprising, no doubt is left as to the question of whether or not American Jews, and specifically the American Reform Movement, had developed its own "social gospel." In the opinion of these authors, the answer is unequivocally "no."

As more recent scholars have begun to acknowledge, however, the truth is very much the opposite. The historian Jonathan Sarna has written in his award winning work, *American Judaism* (2004), that the "social justice motif [was] the Jewish equivalent of the Protestant Social Gospel"<sup>5</sup> and that classical Reform Judaism was "parallel to the Protestant Social Gospel movement."<sup>6</sup> Sarna is indeed correct, but his observation can be extended even further. More than simply offering a parallel or equivalent expression of the Protestant Social Gospel in Jewish terms, American Reform Judaism in the late nineteenth century did what no denominational church group, including the as-of-yet unformed Social Gospel Movement, had done before: it formally articulated the central role that social justice played in religious life. In effect, the American Reform Movement was the first denomination in American religious life to develop a "social gospel," as it were.

In the last decades of the nineteenth and on into the early twentieth century, the American Jewish community confronted many of the same intellectual and social challenges as American Protestantism. These challenges had their roots in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century was an historical event the ripples of which are still felt in contemporary times. Like a wave, all those in the West that came into contact with the Enlightenment were impacted by its force. The institution that was to be most profoundly affected by Enlightenment thinking was that of religion. Fast on the heels of the Scientific Revolution, the European Enlightenment was the beginning of an intellectual milieu that subsequently challenged every hallowed truth that Western religion (i.e., Christianity and Judaism) held sacred.

These challenges affected American Christianity and American Judaism as much as their European counterparts. Referring to American Christianity, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr. points out that:

[p]erhaps at no time in its American development has the path of Christianity been so sorely beset with pitfalls and perils as in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The validity of the Bible itself seemed at stake in the light of new pronouncements of science and scholarship. Darwinism, the emerging science of biblical criticism, the increasing knowledge and study of other great religions—such threats could not be ignored....<sup>7</sup>

In the same vein, Michael A. Meyer has observed that “[i]n late nineteenth-century America the intellectual challenges were new ones.... Higher Biblical criticism, comparative religion, Darwinism, and social relevance stood at the top of the list.”<sup>8</sup> These new ideas forced members of both Christian and Jewish religious communities to confront modernity and decide how they were going to respond to it within the context of their religious lives.

In the Protestant Christian community of the late nineteenth century, the fledgling Social Gospel Movement was one group that was open to the fruits of modernity. As noted above, biblical criticism and Darwin’s theory of evolution were central to enlightened scientific thinking and nineteenth century liberal Christian theologians were very much open to them both. As Gary Dorrien points out, “American liberal Christianity in the later nineteenth century emphasized the convergence between Christianity and evolution [and] the constructive value of modern historical criticism....”<sup>9</sup> It was these and other ideas that laid the groundwork for a more fully developed liberal theology in American Protestantism in the twentieth century.

Darwin’s theory of evolution was accepted by, amongst others, the “father of the Social Gospel,” Washington Gladden (1836–1918). Despite grave concerns about Herbert Spencer’s theory of social Darwinism that, among other things “opposed all state-supported poor laws, education, sanitary supervision, and other measures that impeded the beneficent [sic] natural process that Spencer called ‘the survival of the fittest,’” Gladden “found evolutionary theory inspiring as proof of the unity and rationality of nature.”<sup>10</sup> Consistent with his acceptance of modernity, Gladden also welcomed the findings of biblical criticism, penning the widely popular book *Who Wrote the Bible?* (1891) as an introduction to biblical criticism.

At the same time, in the Jewish community, it was the Reform Movement that was most eager to embrace enlightenment ideas.

Parallel to the acceptance of biblical scholarship and Darwin's theory of evolution in the liberal Protestant community, leaders of Reform Judaism were also assimilating these new findings. The two leaders of Reform Judaism in America in the nineteenth century, Kaufmann Kohler (1843–1926) and Emil G. Hirsch (1851–1923), were like their liberal Protestant counterparts in that they accepted the findings of German Enlightenment scholarship, but were not innovators when it came to biblical criticism. Instead, they were "translat[ors of] the ideas of [] Germans into the popular thought of American Reform."<sup>11</sup> In that, they translated, sometimes literally, the conclusions of the European Enlightenment for their American Jewish constituents. On the question of the Bible, "Kohler and Hirsch were both uncompromising biblical critics." Attempting to communicate this new, historical understanding of the Bible in a manner that did not undermine its primacy of place within Judaism, Kohler put it thus: "The Bible is holy *not because it is inspired, but because and insofar as it does still, inspire.*"<sup>12</sup> In that, revelation itself was no longer what was important; the religious import of the Hebrew Bible after the Enlightenment was no longer a result of context but, instead, content.

On the subject of evolution, despite the fact that "[a]mong earlier American Reform Jews, Darwinism was treated with contempt" due to the perception that it was "a form of 'materialism'...that made for the 'brutalization of our species,'" Kohler and Hirsch also embraced Darwinism. Kohler stated that Darwinism was "the cornerstone and the capstone of the modern view of nature," adding a spiritual element to the theory, positing that "once the organism was externally complete, it could then develop its inward spiritual powers."<sup>13</sup> Here, too, Reform Judaism was accepting of the findings of modern science.

The Social Gospel and Reform Judaism were both, at least in part, the outgrowth of a shared intellectual encounter with the Enlightenment; one that opened both movements up to new ways of thinking about theology and the role of religion in society. Reform Judaism and liberal Protestantism formulated their own particular responses to modernity in contrast to their more traditional co-religionists. Their respective responses shared much in common, so much so that one could be forgiven for mistaking one for the other. The European Enlightenment brought these two American religious movements so close together as to blur many of the distinctions between them.

As Egal Feldman has shown, Reform Judaism and the Social Gospel Movement shared much in common beyond just their embrace of biblical criticism and Darwin's theory of evolution. "In almost perfect accord with the progressive wing of American Protestantism, American Reform Rabbis meditated over the theories of evolution, glorified the ethical suggestions of the Hebrew Prophets and questioned the religious significance of ancient ecclesiastical rituals."<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, instead of delving deeper into these issues, Feldman focuses his essay on the prevalence of anti-Semitism amongst liberal Protestant clergy and misses entirely the more fundamental question of the two movements' respective theologies and the broader meaning of their similarities. In fact, so similar were these two groups that the same sociologist who declared that Reform Jews had failed to create a "social gospel" of their own, went so far as to state in his book *American Judaism* that "[a]round the turn of the century, it would not have been far-fetched for a historian of ideas to predict a merger between Reform Judaism and liberal Christianity."<sup>15</sup> Essentially, Reform Judaism and the Social Gospel had become opposite sides of the same coin.

At the same time as both American Reform Judaism and the early social gospelers were encountering the fruits of modernity on the intellectual plain, they were also confronted with the social ills of urbanization and industrialization. It was Walter Rauschenbusch's first pastorate at Second German Baptist Church in the Hell's Kitchen section of New York's Bowery district that was the beginning of the development of his conception of the Social Gospel.<sup>16</sup> Although Reform Jewish leaders may well have not been as intimately connected as Rauschenbusch to the rising poverty and hardship of life in the urban centers, there is no doubt that they were impacted by, among other things, the mass immigration of Jews, and others, at the turn of the century. And, as we will see below, the working conditions throughout the country were very much on the radar of at least some of the leaders of the Reform Movement at this time. It is from this context of a shared encounter with new ideas and a new social and economic reality that Reform Judaism and the Social Gospel began to articulate a vision for social justice that came to define both movements.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Protestant ministers and progressive thinkers began to articulate a vision for what was to become the Social Gospel. Pioneers like Lyman Abbott

(1835–1922), Richard T. Ely (1854–1943), and Washington Gladden, gave sermons, went on lecture tours, and wrote articles and books that developed the religious ideals that founded a movement. At the same time, in the Reform Movement, early leaders were articulating their own vision of the central importance of social justice. Emil G. Hirsch, Stephen S. Wise (1874–1949), and Horace J. Wolf (1885–1926) each played formative roles in this arena. As one scholar has put it: "Washington Gladden [and] Walter Rauschenbusch...were the counterparts and in many respects the teachers and guides of the champions of social ideals that arose in Reform Jewish ranks."<sup>17</sup> Both of these movements were founded on the backs of visionary individuals who made a personal commitment to spread the "gospel" of social justice.

Gladden is credited with the early formulation of the concept of social salvation.<sup>18</sup> In 1893, Gladden published his Lyman Beecher lectures, delivered at Yale University in 1886–87, under the title *Tools and the Man*. On the very first page Gladden proclaimed that "The end of Christianity is twofold, a perfect man in a perfect society. These purposes are never separated; they cannot be separated. No man can be redeemed and saved alone; no community can be reformed and elevated save as the individuals of which it is composed are regenerated."<sup>19</sup> In these words, Gladden clearly identifies the *telos* of Christian life as the forming of a perfect society in this world. The contents page of Gladden's work, much of which he had developed in sermons and while on the lecture circuit, makes clear his belief that Christianity has something to say about social institutions and the social and economic life of individual Americans, addressing issues such as "Economics and Christian Ethics," "Property in Land," "The Labor Question," and "The Reorganization of Industry," among others.

During these same years, Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch was called to the pulpit of Sinai Congregation in Chicago, and it was there that he began to address issues of social justice. As Leonard Mervis, author of the most extensive study of early American Reform Judaism and the social justice movement to date, points out "[t]he intensity and range of Hirsch's social issues were amazing."<sup>20</sup> Addressing specific issues such as wages, the length of the workweek, sweatshops, and economic inequality, among others, Hirsch made social and economic issues a centerpiece of his rabbinate. Like Gladden with respect to Christianity, Hirsch saw this responsibility as part

of the ultimate purpose of Judaism, concluding that the religion of the future “will be impatient of men who claim that they have the right to be saved...while not stirring a foot or lifting a hand to redeem brother men from hunger and wretchedness.”<sup>21</sup> Because of his defining role in establishing the importance of social justice in Reform Judaism, Hirsch could be rightly termed the “father of the Jewish ‘social gospel.’”

These early Protestant and Jewish “social gospelers” did not work only in their own respective religious communities. As part of a larger ecumenical spirit that was prevailing at the time, these leaders also interacted with each other and joined together to further their cause for social justice. Feldman notes that “an unprecedented ecumenical atmosphere prevailed at this time and it was officially endorsed, one might say, with the convening of the World’s Parliament of Religions, held in conjunction with Chicago’s Columbian Exposition of 1893.”<sup>22</sup> So positive were relationships between progressive Jews and Christians that even in Birmingham, Alabama, where “[i]n 1918 only 3,500 of Birmingham’s 198,000 citizens were Jews,” Rabbi Morris Newfield was able to build strong coalitions around social justice issues with his Christian counterparts. Referring to the rabbi’s close friendships with Henry M. Edmonds, a Presbyterian minister, and Middleton S. Barnwell, a rector of the local Episcopalian Church, Mark Cowett has observed the significance of “Newfield’s friendships with Edmonds and Barnwell, who...treated him like a brother in a fraternity of socially-advanced clergymen.”<sup>23</sup> Similar friendships built around the shared commitment to social justice were developing between Jewish and Christian clergy throughout the country during this period.

One particularly important example of the connection between these two movements can be found in the published correspondence of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, possibly the most important of the “social gospel” rabbis. In a letter to then Governor of the state of New Jersey, Woodrow Wilson, dated September 27, 1911, Wise writes that:

our own Free Synagogue united in a series of public meetings on Sunday evenings at which the social, industrial and civic problems of our time were considered with special reference to their religious bases.... This year, our churches plan to have a second series of meetings.... Among those who are to speak for us are

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Washington Gladden... The general theme of the addresses for 1912 is to be "social justice."<sup>24</sup>

In a second letter to "Mrs. Walter Rauschenbusch," thanking her for a gift she had sent him, dated January 16, 1928, and ten years after the passing of her husband, the great theologian of the social gospel, Wise writes:

I cannot tell you how deeply I appreciate the receipt of this gift... because it comes out of the heart and in memory of Professor Rauschenbusch, one of the great spirits of our day. I have always felt, and I dare say you know I have said it from time to time, that he was one of the real prophets of the religious social awakening of our time.<sup>25</sup>

These two excerpts serve as examples of the bond between the leaders of the Social Gospel and the Reform Movement. Gladden's willingness to participate in a lecture series convened by Rabbi Wise and the gift sent to him by Pauline Rauschenbusch attest to their personal and professional relationships. Because these Jewish and Protestant leaders recognized in each other a shared desire to improve the lot of society, they were able to work together to achieve their common goals.

The arguments advanced thus far demonstrate that, contrary to the opinion of some, a number of influential leaders in the American Reform rabbinate were absolutely in step with their Protestant counterparts in terms of developing their own "social gospel." Whether it was responding to intellectual trends coming from Europe, developing a religious and moral critique of the working conditions in their industrialized reality, or establishing social justice as a central pillar of their religious message, the similarities between these two groups is undeniable. The two movements had so much in common that Mervis has noted that:

[i]t is not a coincidence that in the year [1908] the newly founded Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America announced a social creed that the Central Conference [of American Rabbis] made its first noted commitment. Nor is it coincidental that the rabbi [Horace J. Wolf] responsible for the first Central Conference social justice platform came from Rochester, New York, the city where Rauschenbusch taught.<sup>26</sup>

Although each of these areas of intersection deserve greater attention and offer many opportunities for further research, it is in one additional area that the case may be most strongly made not only that a “social gospel” movement did, in fact, develop among Reform Jews but that the Reform Movement was a pioneer in this area of American religious awakening.

While both the Social Gospel and Reform movements expressed a commitment to social justice causes, it is certainly true that other, more traditional congregations and religious groups were also involved in helping the poor and alleviating some of the stresses of life in the new industrialized reality of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. One example is from the Catholic community. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued *Rerum Novarum*, the labor encyclical. This document “placed before the Catholic world the challenge of dealing with socialism and contemporary industrial problems.”<sup>27</sup> What truly distinguished both the Reform and Social Gospel movements from their more traditional counterparts therefore was not necessarily the commitment to social justice, per se, but rather the theological underpinning of that very commitment. The intellectual liberalism of the nineteenth century did not only result in expanded horizons for those students of science and literary criticism; it meant the possibility of fundamental change in the theological outlook of individuals and groups in religious life.

Historian Gary Dorrien contends that the defining characteristic of the Social Gospel Movement “was not its reforms, but its theology of social salvation.”<sup>28</sup> Interpreting Gladden’s theology of social salvation, Dorrien continues:

For Jesus, as for genuine Christianity, the purpose of God’s in-breaking kingdom was to regenerate individuals and society as coordinate interests. Gladden preached that neither form of regeneration is possible without the other: “Whatever the order of logic may be, there can be no difference in time between the two kinds of work; that we are to labor as constantly and as diligently for the improvement of the social order as for the conversion of man.”<sup>29</sup>

It was ultimately Walter Rauschenbusch who would systematically formulate the theological precepts of the Social Gospel in his *A Theology for the Social Gospel*. In it, he writes: “The new thing in

the social gospel is the clearness and insistence with which it sets forth the necessity and the possibility of redeeming the historical life of humanity from the social wrongs which now pervade it and which act as temptations and incitements to evil and as forces of resistance to the powers of redemption."<sup>30</sup> In the writings of both Gladden and Rauschenbusch one can clearly see the identification of social salvation as a this-worldly goal that can only be achieved through the perfection of social institutions. While this new theology did not necessarily entail a rejection of the traditional notion of individual salvation, it certainly added a distinctive, and for some a radical, theological dimension that distinguished the Social Gospel from other Protestant movements.

At the same time as the proponents of social salvation were beginning to articulate their new theology, American Reform Jews were also refining their theological understanding of what it meant to be a Reform Jew in America at the end of the nineteenth century. As with our earlier examples, the theological parallels between American Reform Judaism and the Social Gospel are stark.

While the Reform Movement first established itself as an alternative to traditional Judaism in Germany in the early part of the nineteenth century, it was not until 1885 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, that leaders of American Reform Judaism came together and agreed upon an authoritative document of principles that would define the religious identity of the Movement for the next five decades. The Pittsburgh Platform was a far-reaching document that represented, among other things, the extent to which Reform Judaism had broken away from its traditional moorings. Consistent with the general acceptance by progressive religious groups of biblical criticism, the platform declared in its second principle that "We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the doctrines of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age...." This and the other principles of the Platform are rooted in the notion that, as the framers of the document make clear, "We recognize in Judaism a progressive religion, ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason." It was this commitment to reason that led the early leaders of American Reform to embrace a "God-idea" in place of traditional theism; reject the binding authority of ritual law; and accept a broad-ranging ecumenism that saw in Christianity and Islam a shared responsibility to spread the

truth of ethical monotheism and the prophetic tradition throughout the world.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to these proclamations, the Pittsburgh Platform also affirmed the importance of social justice in religious life. In the Platform's eighth principle, it reads:

In full accordance with the spirit of Mosaic legislation, which strives to regulate the relation between the rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.<sup>32</sup>

In this principle, which was proposed by the first of the Jewish "social gospellers," Emil G. Hirsch,<sup>33</sup> the reader can see the identification of a religious responsibility—"In full accordance with the spirit of Mosaic legislation"—to ameliorate the social ills of the modern world—"the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society." Here, in the Pittsburgh Platform, the Reform Movement established its unflinching commitment to social justice.

While some have noted that "in the first eighteen years of the Central Conference [of American Rabbis] very little was done to implement the 'Pittsburgh Platform,'"<sup>34</sup> it is still the case that, by crafting a set of principles that enshrined within them a commitment to social justice, the American Reform Movement preceded even the Social Gospel by ratifying a formal declaration pertaining to the religious import of social justice.

As groundbreaking as the eighth principle of the Pittsburgh Platform was, it lacked the kind of theological innovation that was represented by the concept of social salvation as articulated by Gladden and Rauschenbusch. If Dorrien is correct that social salvation is the defining quality of the Social Gospel, then to claim that Reform Judaism truly established a "social gospel" of its own, it would have to have articulated a similar kind of theological foundation from which its social values could extend.

The fifth principle of the Pittsburgh Platform presents just that foundation. The principle states in full:

We recognize in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect the approaching of the realization of Israel's great mes-

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sianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and, therefore, expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.<sup>35</sup>

Most attention is usually paid to the explicit rejection of the notion that Reform Jews are part of a distinct nation. This is essentially a remnant from early German Reform Judaism which felt the need to affirm its patriotism to the Fatherland and, as a result, reject any nationalistic desire to return to the Biblical Land of Israel. In time, the denial of Jewish nationhood and the embrace of a solely religious identity were ultimately rejected by the Reform Movement in the Columbus Platform of 1937.

It is the first half of this principle that is most relevant to the question of a Jewish "social gospel" and whether Reform Judaism developed an innovative theology that formed the basis of its social justice platform. The Platform declares, in language that could have been spoken from the pulpit of any Protestant social gospeler, "We recognize in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect the approaching of the realization of Israel's great messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men."<sup>36</sup> For Walter Rauschenbusch and the social gospel, social salvation was identical to establishing the Kingdom of God on earth; the Pittsburgh Platform's invocation of "the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men" is essentially identical with Rauschenbusch's Kingdom of God idea.

The theological departure in this principle is its reference to what could be termed "epochal messianism." Despite the lack of any mention of an eschatological messianic figure in the Hebrew Bible, Jewish tradition had long held onto a belief in the arrival of a personal messiah. Maimonides (1135–1204) codified the belief in a personal messiah in his twelfth century commentary to the first redacted work from the rabbinic period, the Mishnah. His commentary to chapter 10 of tractate *Sanhedrin* is the source for his thirteen principles of faith that have become a catechism of sorts in the Jewish religion. The twelfth principle states: "We are to believe as fact that the Messiah will come and not consider

him late. If he delays, wait for him; set no time limit for his coming."<sup>37</sup> It is this belief in the arrival of a personal messiah that is rejected by the Pittsburgh Platform. Instead of a personal messiah that will come at any time, i.e., according to God's will and not as a result of people's actions, the Pittsburgh Platform took the radical position that messianism refers not to the coming of a particular person but, rather, to the beginning of an era. Unlike Maimonides, the framers of the Pittsburgh Platform claimed, in essence, that it is for people to make the messianic era a reality. Epochal messianism will arrive as a result of the "universal culture of heart and intellect"—a time when people should be "ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason" and also "to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society." Only by acknowledging that humanity is ultimately responsible for fixing the world was the Reform Movement able to jettison the traditional notion of divine redemption at the hands of a personal messiah and introduce a social justice plank into its core beliefs. Just as the Social Gospel Movement based itself on the theological conception of social salvation, the Reform Movement had at its foundation a theological conception of epochal messianism.

From these early beginnings, American Reform Judaism went on to cement its commitment to social justice. In 1910 a Committee on Synagogue and Labor was formed by the Central Conference of American Rabbis to consider ways to address the social and economic problems of the time. For the ensuing seven years, the committee faltered but made some ground in terms of declarations and the formation of additional committees related to social issues. Finally, in 1918, the Central Conference adopted a "comprehensive and bold program" that addressed many areas, including: the distribution of profits, minimum wage standards, six-day workweeks and eight-hour workdays, the abolition of child labor, housing, and dependent care. Ultimately, the Movement established the Commission on Social Justice and issued a declaration of principles in 1928.<sup>38</sup> In 1955, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations—the synagogue arm of Reform Judaism—reiterated its unwavering commitment to social justice and released a statement of Basic Principles on the Synagogue and Social Action. In this document they stated that "Reform Judaism

has developed a program of social action which relates the ethical and spiritual teachings of our faith to the problems of our communities, of our country, and of the world." Reaffirming the centrality of epochal messianism to the social justice platform of Reform Judaism, the document reads: "Another of the most sacred of our Jewish religious teachings is the vision given us by the prophets of a messianic age of peace...to seek to strengthen democracy and the ideals of justice by translating our faith into concrete social actions."<sup>39</sup>

The Reform Movement has gone on to establish a Committee on Social Action, which is "the social justice policy-making body of the Reform Movement, relating ethical and spiritual principles of Judaism to the problems of today's world."<sup>40</sup> It also founded, in 1959, the Religious Action Center in Washington, D.C. as the "hub of Jewish social justice and legislative activity in the nation's capital....The RAC educates and mobilizes the American Jewish community on legislative and social concerns, advocating on issues from economic justice to civil rights to religious liberty to Israel."<sup>41</sup> These and other initiatives have continued the legacy of the early "social gospelers" of the Reform Movement and expanded the scope of their work.

From innovation in ritual, to greater equality for women, to the affirmation of the autonomy of each individual to make informed choices about his or her religious life, Reform Judaism has responded to modernity in many ways. But it is the response to the social and economic challenges of industrialized society that may have evoked the most impactful response from the Reform Movement. As an institutional religious movement, Reform was the first such group on American soil to enshrine a commitment to social justice in its declaration of principles. The centrality of social justice in all aspects of Jewish communal life in the twenty-first century must be traced back to the early work of the Reform Movement and its leaders and laypeople to affirm its central religious value. More generally, the place of social justice in the lives of all contemporary Americans should be traced back to the final decades of the nineteenth century, when progressive Christians and Jews alike were taking seriously the challenges of modernity and responding with a call to action. Despite claims to the contrary, American Reform Judaism did, in fact, develop a "social gospel" all its own.

Notes

1. I would like to acknowledge and thank my Professor, Dr. Moses Moore, for his insight into the Social Gospel Movement.
2. D. Gilgoff, "Obama Melds Social Gospel, Personal Salvation Theology," *God-o-Meter*, July 7, 2008, <http://blog.beliefnet.com/godometer/2008/07/obama-melds-social-gospel-pers.html>.
3. R. C. White and C. H. Hopkins, *The Social Gospel—Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), 230.
4. N. Glazer, *American Judaism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 138.
5. J. D. Sarna, *American Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 151.
6. *Ibid.*, 195.
7. J. M. Mulder & J. F. Wilson, *Religion in American History: Interpretive Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1978), 302.
8. M. A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 272.
9. G. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology—Imagining Progressive Religion 1805–1900* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), xvii.
10. *Ibid.*, 315.
11. M. A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 272.
12. *Ibid.*, 272–73.
13. *Ibid.*, 274.
14. E. Feldman, "The Social Gospel and the Jews," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (1969): 312.
15. N. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 53.
16. C. H. Evans, ed., *The Social Gospel Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 57–67.
17. L. J. Mervis, *The Social Justice Movement of the American Reform Rabbis, 1850–1940* (University of Pittsburgh Ph.D. dissertation, 1951), 9.
18. G. Dorrien, "Social Salvation: The Social Gospel as Theology and Economics," in *The Social Gospel Today*, ed. Christopher H. Evans (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 101–13.
19. W. Gladden, *Tools and the Man* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1893), 1.
20. L. J. Mervis, *The Social Justice Movement*, 63.
21. E. Feldman, "The Social Gospel and the Jews," 311.
22. *Ibid.*, 312.

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23. M. Cowett, "Rabbi Morris Newfield and the Social Gospel: Theology and Societal Reform in the South," *American Jewish Archives* 34, no. 1 (1982): 62.
24. C. V. Voss, ed., *Stephen S. Wise: Servant of the People—Selected Letters* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), 42–43.
25. *Ibid.*, 153.
26. L. J. Mervis, *The Social Justice Movement*, 9.
27. *Ibid.*, 10.
28. G. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 311.
29. *Ibid.*, 312.
30. W. Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 95.
31. M. A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 387–88.
32. *Ibid.*
33. W. Jacob, ed., *The Changing World of Reform Judaism—The Pittsburgh Platform in Retrospect*. (Pittsburgh: Rodef Shalom Congregation, 1985), 106–7.
34. L. J. Mervis, *The Social Justice Movement*, 24.
35. M. A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 388.
36. *Ibid.*
37. I. Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader* (New York: Behrman House Inc. 1972), 422.
38. L. J. Mervis, *The Social Justice Movement*.
39. M. A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 148–150.
40. Union for Reform Judaism, "Social Action," <http://urj.or/csa/aboutus/> (accessed on March 22, 2009).
41. Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, "About the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism," <http://rac.org/aboutrac/> (accessed on March 22, 2009).