

Leaving aside this issue, the enduring strength of George's book is that it shows Christians how to engage in discussion of complex policy issues by taking our capacity to reason seriously without reducing reason to mere rationalization, ideology, or sophistry. In the end, this requires not just great faith in man but also profound trust in the God who created us. It involves believing that human reason is ultimately oriented, despite its limitations, to knowledge of the Divine and his creation. Though daunting, the pursuit of knowledge through reason is not a task that Christians should ever shirk, because as George remarks, "Whoever sincerely seeks truth, existentially as well as in the scholarly disciplines, seeks—and thereby honors—the God who is Truth" (316).

—Samuel Gregg
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The Search for Social Salvation: Social Christianity and America, 1880–1925

Gary Scott Smith

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At a time when the President of the United States is arguing that federal funding for faith-based initiatives should be made available for alleviation of the nation's social ills, *The Search for Social Salvation* might well serve as a reference for the advocates and the opponents of such a policy.

Smith argues that the social Christianity movement of the period from 1880 to 1925 involved a broad base of individuals and denominations, that the achievements of social Christianity were constructive, and that the impact of social Christianity upon American society was widespread, long-lasting, and influential.

This study offers compelling accounts of individuals and organizations motivated by biblical convictions and personal faith to help remove the causes of social evil and ameliorate the suffering of those who were caught in the grips of a host of social ills that plagued the United States during a time of industrialization, increasing immigration, and prejudice. In describing the breadth of the Social Gospel movement, the author carefully and thoroughly incorporates the role of women, blacks, business and political leaders, novelists, evangelicals, and mainline denominations.

During the late nineteenth century and up until the 1910s, the author contends, Protestants put aside theological differences as they engaged in what amounted to the "moral equivalent of war." This diverse group of combatants believed that biblical principles and the real potential for establishing the kingdom of God on this earth would transform culture. Business leaders such as John Wanamaker and Arthur Nash tried to demonstrate that the golden rule could be adapted in commerce and industry.

Inasmuch as some leaders, including Walter Rauschenbusch and Vida Scudder, espoused Christian socialism, and others, including the more conservative, evangelical leaders of the Men and Religion Forward Movement, were seemingly poles apart, their

unity under the banner of social Christianity was truly remarkable. The range of the social issues they addressed was equally remarkable: low wages and poor working conditions, political corruption and penal reform, drunkenness and prostitution, improving schools and strengthening families, public health and human rights. Despite the inclusive nature of the movement, white Christians fell far short in terms of cooperation with leaders of the African American Church. Black clergy, especially Reverdy Ransom, and lay leaders were concerned about many of the same issues as white activists but carried the added burden in their struggle against racism, lynching, and all manner of discrimination.

Although social Christianity did not win the battle, Smith points to the fact that it won some skirmishes, slowing the advance of the enemy and frustrating the spread of malevolent and malignant forces. The movement played a significant role in deflecting the appeal of radical ideological and political forces. In espousing many policies of Progressive politics and influencing nationally prominent politicians including Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and William Jennings Bryan, it prepared the way for New Deal reforms and the Civil Rights movement.

Why, then, did social Christianity come apart by 1925? Smith concludes that the movement failed at several points. It lacked theological clarity, it advocated practice without establishing underlying principles, and it was unduly optimistic about the socially redeeming power of love and persuasion. Moreover, World War I, the rise of Bolshevism, and cultural as well as ideological differences further undermined the unity of believers. The division between liberal and fundamentalist churches grew, thus straining bonds that had prevailed for almost four decades.

Leaving no doubt that the historical record supports the soundness of his thesis—that social Christianity was promoted and sustained by a broad alliance of American Protestants, Smith has created a work that is even more important because of the story he tells. *The Search for Social Salvation* is an account of people of Christian conviction and compassion who responded to the blight of social injustice that, for countless millions, led to lives of despair. This is a good news story that deserves the attention of twenty-first century readers.

Smith's research demonstrates the power of the individual and the value of voluntary cooperation in an open society. This study also illustrates the vulnerability and weakness of a social movement that relied too greatly upon the strength of convictions without cultivating principles that form a lasting foundation.

Having spent more than a decade working on this book, Smith synthesizes an enormous amount of source material. *The Search for Social Salvation* will be a valuable resource for students of American culture, not just for those who study the history of the church.

—Marshall K. Christensen
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