

*"Americans had come to believe in the religion of progress and humanity.
Rauschenbusch now visualized the tremendously swift transformation of America."
-David Noble*

In a series of posts addressing the leftward trend in the church and in Western society and the hysterical aftermath of the publication of the **Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel**, I attempted to show that the modern social justice movement is little more than a revival of the old social gospel repackaged for a racially "woke" environmentally-friendly gender-bending generation.

In making that case, I had referenced Martin Erdmann's work, *Building the Kingdom of God on Earth: The Churches' Contribution to Marshall Public Support for World Order and Peace, 1919-1945* (recently republished as *Ecumenical Quest for a World Federation*). Dr. Erdmann is the Director of the **Verax Institute**, which, as part of its mission, researches and critiques global trends from a Christian worldview.

Russell Moore is president of the **Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission**, the public-policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention that, while based in Tennessee, failed to support and testify on behalf of the Tennessee Heartbeat Bill. This is a shameful example of how actual justice (in this case, laws intended to protect babies from being murdered) has taken a backseat to "social justice". But lest we be too hard on Moore, it may be that he missed the meeting simply because he was too busy giving a long, rambling, politically correct non-answer to a simple and straightforward question concerning the role of women in the church.

On August 13th, Moore produced a video on the social gospel. While some of the information he presents in the video is helpful, he does not adequately address the progressivism inherent to the historic social gospel, nor does he explain why he along with others in the SBC are playing a significant role in helping to steer the SBC leftward in the spirit of religious progressivism. This speaks to the point I made in previous posts; that many Christian leaders (Russell Moore excluded), had they lived in the early twentieth-century, would have unequivocally opposed the social gospel, and yet they are either silent about or advocating for social justice in the twenty-first century. This is quite remarkable, especially considering the Marxist undertones (or overtones) embedded in *The Narrative* as well as a seeming ambivalence toward abortion among prominent social justice advocates.

Why don't those who can articulate at least some of the dangers of the social gospel recognize the same dangers inherent to the social justice movement? I'm convinced that the reason for this is because, according to the warped thinking of the liberal mind, any opposition to the "invincible fallacy"[1] opens one up to the charge of *racism*. As I said in *Molech and the masters of deceit*:

"Why is the cry from evangelicals for social justice louder than ever, with no abatement in sight, and the cry over justice for murdered babies waning? Perhaps it is that evangelical leaders and organizations known to have once made the issue of abortion primary when it comes to political engagement have succumbed to a fear much greater than that of more butchered bodies than the Nazi holocaust could ever produce. Indeed, the commonly witnessed symptom of never-ending virtue signaling indicates that they are suffering from the most traumatic and debilitating of all phobias—the fear of being called 'racist'."

In a post titled, *Social Gospel is gaining in popularity*, Dr. Erdmann provides some background information concerning the development of the social gospel that you wouldn't have gotten from the Russell Moore video:

"The original Social Gospel is gaining in popularity within evangelical movements, parachurch institutions, and churches."

[From the caption of Moore's video:]

'There are few topics as divisive currently as the term 'social gospel.' So often, the people who are using this term misunderstand what it has meant historically and what it means today. This misunderstanding has led to reactions against any involvement by the Church in changing society. In this episode, I address the 'social gospel,' regeneration, and what the Bible commands of Christians in shaping society.'

"While Moore states that the Social Gospel was theologically wrong, he doesn't portray its history correctly and expresses his sympathy with its message of addressing and reforming structural sins (sins within society).

It is more important than ever to understand that the Social Gospel was one of the most popular expressions of the religion of progress, a religion which was entirely opposed to the biblical faith. Please read the following excerpt on Walter Rauschenbusch's use of the Social Gospel to promote self-consciously the religion of progress. The American Baptist theologian Walter Rauschenbusch was considered to be the father of the Social Gospel.

The appeal of modern-day 'Social Justice' proponents such as Russell Moore can only be countered effectively when the religion of progress, "this faith in the perfect society of the Kingdom of God on Earth," is being exposed as its underlying substratum."

*[*The rest of Erdmann's post is an excerpt from "The religion of progress in America, 1890-1914", by David W. Noble, Social Research, vol. 22, No. 4 (Winter 1955), pp. 417-440.[2]]:*

...And such support, buttressed still more by the enthusiasm for reform which swept America after 1900, spread the truly millennial hopes of a Charles Cooley among many men who were not professional sociologists. Within the limitations of space, two examples of this growing millennialism will be mentioned here: Walter Rauschenbusch and Herbert Croly.

As a young churchman of the 1890s, Walter Rauschenbusch had been confronted by the moral abyss which was the new American city. Self-consciously he turned to the new discipline of sociology for the knowledge to understand this frightening situation. By 1907 the now mature Rauschenbusch was prepared to share his learning with his fellow Christians in a major book, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*; and his message followed closely the outline of Cooley's sociology which, in turn, had paralleled the ideas of Henry Demarest Lloyd.

In familiar terms, Rauschenbusch announced that the major fact of American life was crisis-crisis born of industrialism. "The American Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789," he wrote, "were the birth of modern democracy. But about the same time another revolution set in beside which these great events were puny." [1] This was, of course, the industrial revolution. It had whirled the individual up and away from his established customs and habits, it had smashed the old economic institutions by which he had lived, it had destroyed his security. Alone, isolated man was sinking to the animal level. This was the crisis. Continuing the parallel with the views of Lloyd and Cooley, Rauschenbusch held the crisis to be both a mortal danger to man's future and the opportunity for man's total salvation. "Our civilization," he declared, "is passing through a

great historic transition, we are at the parting of the ways. The final outcome may be the decay and extinction of Western Civilization, or it may be a new epoch in the evolution of the race, compared with which our present era will seem like a modified barbarism.”[2] And he, too, could assure his readers that, in spite of the possibility of failure, a successful resolution of the crisis was almost inevitable, because an optimistic and hopeful attitude toward the crisis was supported by two principles based on the sociological doctrines of the day.

The first was the fact that man was a social animal with a plastic nature molded by his social environment, and that society was an autonomous body, free from the control by fixed physical laws which was argued by the defenders of the status quo. Thanks to the efforts of the social scientists, he declared, we are “now coming to realize that within certain limits society is plastic.” He reiterated, therefore, that man is free to create his own future, free to choose his destiny and end the crisis.

Then Rauschenbusch offered his troubled generation the even greater support of sociology in its promise to provide a free humanity the knowledge by which it could end the chaos without the possibility of failure. Sociology revealed the laws of progress that were working through society, laws that must inevitably bring about the Heavenly City on Earth. Translating Baldwin’s theory of stages of social evolution in economic terms, he wrote, “...three economic orders are combining to make up the total of modern life: the pre-capitalistic which is passing away, the capitalistic which is in the flush of its strength, and the collectivistic which is still immature.”[3] Knowing the details of social evolution through the science of sociology, man was able to cooperate with progress to usher in the perfect social integration of the collectivistic order. Men could enter the present battle with the confidence born of self-knowledge, because “For the first time in religious history, we have the possibility of so directing religious energy by scientific knowledge that a comprehensive and conscious reconstruction of social life in the name of God is within the bounds of human possibility.”[4]

It was, perhaps, even more natural for Rauschenbusch to synthesize this contradiction of social freedom and social inevitability within the framework of religious belief than it had been for his predecessors. Victory was assured for the forces of social perfection, and yet there could be no automatic coming of utopia because man’s social nature was not truly the product of his immediate society. Mundane society, in its physical manifestations, was not to be equated with the coming “Society,” which was essentially spiritual. Present society did not work to bring man to perfection; he could reach the social millennium only through his allegiance to the spiritual process of progress. He must fight to allow his true nature to

emerge from its bondage to immediate social forces. "No man," Rauschenbusch warned, "can help the people until he is himself free from the spell which the present order has cast over our moral judgment ... we need a religious faith to inspire and guide us in that task of redeeming the social life of humanity which is clearly laid upon our generation." [5]

Americans, Rauschenbusch believed in 1907, were lacking this religious faith, this faith in the perfect society of the Kingdom of God on Earth. But by 1912, when *Christianizing the Social Order* was published, something wonderful, in Rauschenbusch's estimation, had occurred." When *Christianity and the Social Crisis* was published in 1907, "he declared in the later work (p. vii), "I thought I had said all that God had given me to say on our social problems.... But meanwhile the social awakening of our nation had set in like an equinoctial gale in March." Americans had come to believe in the religion of progress and humanity. Rauschenbusch now visualized the tremendously swift transformation of America. All of the areas of life but economics were socialized, and this last remaining citadel of the past must rapidly capitulate to the irresistible pressure. Rauschenbusch had ended his first book with these hopeful lines (p. 422): "Perhaps these nineteen centuries of Christian influence have been a long preliminary stage of growth and now the flower and fruit are almost here." His second book was based on the belief that his hope had become a certainty.

With each year after 1900 the tempo of reform movements quickened and carried with it the enthusiasm of progressive thinkers; the assurance of the sociologist, Cooley, and of the theologian, Rauschenbusch, that at last the millennium was appearing came to be shared by many contemporaries, one of whom was the political philosopher, Herbert Croly."

[Noble, D.W., "The religion of progress in America, 1890-1914", *Social Research*, vol. 22, No. 4 (Winter 1955), pp. 433-437]

[1] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York, 1907) p. 214.

[2] Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York, 1912) p. 40.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 384.

[4] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, p. 207.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 349-50.

[1] “At the heart of many discussions of disparities among individuals, groups and nations is the seemingly **invincible fallacy** that outcomes in human endeavors would be equal, or at least comparable or random, if there were no biased interventions, on the one hand, nor genetic deficiencies, on the other. This preconception, which spans the ideological spectrum, is in utter defiance of both logic and empirical evidence from around the world, and over millennia of recorded history.” Sowell, T., *Discrimination and Disparities*, Basic Books, New York, NY, 2018, pp. 100—101.

[2] Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press

Share this:

- [Click to share on X \(Opens in new window\) X](#)
- [Click to share on Facebook \(Opens in new window\) Facebook](#)