GOD IN THE GILDED AGE
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This course is about the way movements in American religion addressed the human dilemmas that resulted from the social and intellectual developments in the United States during the period between the Civil War and World War I, what has been termed the “Gilded Age.”

The Gilded Age was marked by severe human dislocation and disorientation, most of which has been traced to four major developments: industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and new knowledge. Religion had its own developments, and some of these—which we have delineated as Liberal Theology, Fundamentalism, ethnic religious groups, Revivalism, and the Social Gospel—addressed this dislocation and disorientation.

The suggestion drawn out in this series, admittedly too neatly, is that the Social Gospel was developed in response to industrialization and the alienation it caused; ethnic religious groups and revivalism spoke to the loss of social identity brought on by immigration and migration; and Liberal Theology and fundamentalism, each in its own way, addressed the social isolation or anomie occasioned by urbanization, as well as the issues related to new knowledge.

The lectures and essays to be furnished draw on three books, still in print: Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, especially Chapters 44-51; Martin E. Marty, Pilgrims in Their Own Land, especially Chapters 13-16; and Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, The Religious History of America. Ahlstrom’s work won the National Book Award in 1973, and is broad and deep in his treatment. As always, Marty is an easy read, but well-informed; its distinction is in its biographical treatments. The Gaustad-Schmidt work is the most recent, and itself very readable.

The Gilded Age

In this period, 1865-1914, Americans dealt with what Sydney Ahlstrom characterized as “The Ordeal of Transition.” If all times and places are characterized by change, this particular time and place experienced rapid change on a grand scale. Historians use four developments to track this experience: industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and new knowledge. These have been adopted as a way of examining the period in question for this course, and as a context for understanding certain developments in American religion during these years.

Of course they do not tell the whole story of the period. In choosing these developments, for example, the focus is on the northeast and midwest, generally to the exclusion of the south and west. In the case of the south, the story is largely about Reconstruction and the aftermath of Reconstruction, particularly in its impact on former slaves. The controversial D. W. Griffith film The Birth of a Nation appeared in 1915. In the west, it is principally about expansion (in fact, the influential 1893 essay by Frederick Jackson Turner interpreted the development of the American identity in relation to the westward movement of the frontier) and the effect on Native Americans.

There is also the emergence of American imperialism, marked especially by the Spanish-American War (1898), which was seen by some as the coming of the kingdom of God—especially by Protestants, and especially by Methodists (President McKinley was himself a Methodist). Ahlstrom (p. 879) quotes E. L. Godkin of The Nation (1898, from Kenneth M. McKenzie, The Robe and the Sword: The Methodist Church and the Rise of American Imperialism):
The fervent Methodists, at the beginning of the war, resolved that it was going to be a righteous and holy war because it would destroy “Romish superstition” in the Spanish West Indies.

Ahlstrom writes (p 880):

Never have patriotism, imperialism, and the religion of American Protestantism stood in such fervent coalescence as during the McKinley-Roosevelt era.

Moreover, this was an era of attempted social reform. An interesting example is the great temperance movement. It was in many ways anti-urban (a struggle of rural and town values versus those of the city), and had an anti-immigrant dimension.

There was an element of utopianism in reform efforts. Edward Bellamy’s novel, *Looking Backward* (1888), was extremely popular in its time and spawned its own national movement of 162 “Bellamy Clubs.” The novel used the literary device of a young man awakening from a one hundred -thirteen year sleep to find himself in the same place, but with startling improvements in social and economic relations.

It was a time when women increasingly became politically involved. Many had raised their consciousness on abolition, and became interested in a range of other social reform issues. They were active in the temperance movement from its beginnings (for example, the work of Frances Willard and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union). They sought expanded education (including education for women), limitations on child labor, protection of women from spousal abuse, expanded property rights for women, and women’s suffrage.

Also, even though our interest is in their impact on the psyche of Americans as a context for discussing movements in American religion, there are other ways of discussing these four developments (industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and new knowledge). There was the emergence of nativism (in response to immigration, and especially to increased numbers of Roman Catholics), populism and progressivism (in the context of industrialism). Historians wrote the story of the United States from the perspective of economic interests and developments (e.g., Charles A. Beard). Sociologists, especially at the University of Chicago, worked on the impact of the city on its inhabitants. Jane Jacobs studied American cities of this era to propose urban theories (e.g., *The Economy of Cities*, 1969). Novels that were more significant as social criticism than as literature appeared. The most enduring is Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906), narrating the plight of the immigrant workers in the meatpacking industry. It was credited with the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. (Sinclair is quoted as saying that he aimed at America’s heart and hit it in the stomach).

*Industrialization*

While industrialization, urbanization and immigration are interrelated developments defining this era, it is the development of industry that can be seen as the prime driving force. Put too simply, multitudes immigrated or migrated to work in the factories and they lived in rapidly growing cities.

The story of industrialization includes the expansion of transportation (especially the railways, and notably the invention of the refrigerated car); new sources of power and illumination (electricity; Edison’s light bulb was invented in 1878); improvements in machinery and means of production (the assembly line, used widely in the meatpacking industry, was adapted and used by the Ford Motor Company in 1913); innovation in communication (the telephone was invented in 1876); new ways of capitalization; enterprises in oil and steel; and new methods of organizing industry along vertical lines (controlling a product from raw materials to its sale).
Characteristic of the age was the emergence of big business. John D. Rockefeller (1839-1937) organized the Standard Oil Company in 1870 and by 1880 controlled ninety per cent of American oil production; in 1882 he formed the Standard Oil Trust, the first mega corporation organized as a trust, a business entity formed with intent to monopolize business, to restrain trade, or to fix prices. By 1895 Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) dominated the steel industry, and sold his holdings to J. P. Morgan (1837-1913) for the creation of U. S. Steel in 1901, the first billion-dollar corporation. In communication, the American Telephone and Telegraph was formed in 1885. In meatpacking, Swift & Co. was created by Gustavus Swift (1839-1903) the same year; and Swift joined three other packers to form the National Packing Company in 1902—with the goal of fixing prices, dividing up markets, and suppressing unions. The American Tobacco Company, itself a trust, was established in 1890.

This was the era of government’s serving the interests of business, of the trusts and monopolies, and of efforts at reform (including the Progressive Movement). The Sherman Anti-Trust Act was passed in 1890. The Interstate Commerce Commission established in the same year. The Pure Food and Drug Act came in 1906, followed by the Franklin Anti-Trust Act in 1914. The Supreme Court became increasingly involved in industrial matters: the National Packing Company was ordered disbanded in 1905, and Rockefeller’s Standard Oil was dismantled in 1911.

Great individual fortunes were amassed. By the time he retired in 1911, Rockefeller was worth one billion dollars (roughly thirty billion in 2010 dollars). Thorstein Veblen in 1899 could speak of the life style of the wealthy as “conspicuous consumption,” and the stories of social events at Newport and other places are startling in their excess. There was also staggering poverty, which makes the image of the Gilded Age so suggestive and apropos: the appearance of gold was merely plating over a stronger base metal, in this case the workers. It is also worthy of note that many of these vastly wealthy people were generous philanthropists, in a time when there was no income tax and no tax benefit to giving money away: Carnegie at his death had given away some 350 million dollars, over ninety percent of his wealth; and Rockefeller gave away over half a billion.

A part of the story of industrialization is the emergence of organized labor. There were trade unions prior to the Gilded Age, but industrial unions appeared after the Civil War. The National Labor Union was organized in 1866, and the Knights of Labor were influential in the 1880’s. The American Federation of Labor dates from 1886. Long and bitter strikes in textiles, coal and railroad occurred in reaction to the depression of 1873. Government troops played a role in suppressing two famous strikes: in 1892 at Carnegie’s steel mill at Homestead, Pennsylvania, and the 1894 Pullman strike.

Urbanization

Cities grew where goods were exchanged and, more and more, where goods also were produced. The United States, once a nation of farmers and small town trades people, gradually then dramatically, became a nation of urban dwellers during the period we are studying. Chicago is the most startling example, growing from seventeen houses in 1833 to a population of 1,698,575 in 1900. Old eastern seaboard cities grew apace as well (for example, New York City grew from just over one million in 1860 to three and a half million in 1890).

Urbanization also has its own story. It is about innovations in local transportation (from the cable car to the subway, introduced in Boston in 1897); using new metal framing and elevators to build skyscrapers (beginning mainly in the 1880’s); developing an urban architecture (the so-called Chicago school of architecture, led by Louis Sullivan); urban planning (for example, Daniel Burnham’s Plan of Chicago, 1909); providing public parks (notable is the work of Frederick Law Olmstead on New York’s Central Park, 1858); establishing public libraries, museums, opera companies, and symphonies; creating and hosting world fairs (Chicago’s Columbian Exposition in 1893 and St. Louis in 1904); along with the appearance of urban mansions,
overcrowded slums and ethnic neighborhoods. Interwoven with every aspect of the urban story is the formation of machine politics (such as Tammany Hall in New York City), and the many efforts at reform.

**Immigration**

Immigration, until it was curtailed in the 1920’s, was the principal way the population of the United States increased. The numbers were large. During the Gilded Age, twenty-five million people came from Europe alone, first from the north (Great Britain, Ireland and Germany), later from the east (Poland and Russia) and south (Austria-Hungary and Italy). They came in waves, depending on the needs of America and the problems in Europe. But the most important part of the story lies beyond the gross numbers in the experience of the various specific language groups, how they redefined themselves with national identities (when in some periods no such nation existed in Europe), their mutual aid, the creation of newspapers in their own languages, the way their cultures (often highly local in nature) were transferred to and altered by America.

**New Knowledge**

The new knowledge was in large measure imported from Europe, and principally from Germany. Included were the findings of the emerging social sciences and historical studies, and the coinciding of scientific discoveries with ideas of evolution (especially, and obviously, Darwin’s work). American production of knowledge resulted largely from the universities adopting, then adapting, the German model of the university, featuring graduate and research programs. In 1876 Johns Hopkins University was the first to take this step, followed by Stanford in 1891 and Chicago in 1892. To this period also belongs the development of American pragmatism as a philosophical movement—the work of (among others) Charles Peirce (Johns Hopkins), William James (Harvard), George Herbert Meade (Chicago), and John Dewey (Chicago, then Columbia).

**The Impact of the Gilded Age**

The dislocation and disorientation that resulted from these four developments can be characterized as alienation (from the effects of industrialization), social isolation or anomie (from the effects of urbanization and, in its own way, new knowledge), and loss of social identity (from the effects of immigration).

**Industrialization and Alienation**

Industrialization can be described as the transfer of the production of goods from homes and shops to factories. Factories utilized expensive machinery and the division of labor expressed in the assembly line to gain efficiency, produce en mass, lower prices, and create wealth. But, as a number of commentators observed, in this system the worker was so divorced from the end product that the worker’s sense of achievement could only be measured by wages. Labor itself became a commodity.

As businesses developed into big businesses, with family-owned factories becoming large corporations, the relationship between the owners or managers and the workers became strained. As Marx pointed out, alienation occurred at several levels. As a result of this estrangement, and particularly given the inordinate wealth of the owners, fairness became the controlling concern. One result was that workers began to organize, and a number of large, disruptive, violent strikes dotted the historical landscape.

**Urbanization and Anomie**

Cities were overcrowded and unhealthy, but the resulting problems went beyond the need for decent housing and a healthy environment. Human interactions in the city tended to be functional rather than personal. As a result, individuals tended to be anonymous rather than known. In fact, there was a loss of communality.
and an experience of individuality. The city dwellers had difficulty knowing who they were and how they were expected to behave. The sociologists could statistically show that juvenile delinquency and suicide, for example, were responses to this experience, and increased the closer one lived to the inner city. Whereas alienation is a word used to indicate the situation among industrial workers, the nascent social sciences, especially sociology, identified the situation of the urbanite as anomie (without norms) or as social isolation.

Immigration and Loss of Social Identity

All of this was compounded by the fact that those living in the city were largely those who migrated from towns and farms within the country to the city or immigrated from abroad. There was fear that these immigrants would remain loyal to their origins and not become Americans. Many immigrants had the opposite concern: whether they could become Americans without losing their ethnic and cultural identities. Or whether, so far from home and in a strange land, they could find the kind of personal standing and assurance that their homeland had given them. In one sense, they were threatened by loss of social identity. They were, one might say, homesick or psychologically homeless. (This was wonderfully discussed by Oscar Handlin in his 1951 Pulitzer prize winning *The Uprooted.*)

Many individuals were affected by the impact of all three developments: alienation resulting from industrialization, social isolation from urbanization, and loss of social identity from immigration.

New Knowledge and the Challenge to Religious Tradition

The fourth development was new knowledge that challenged traditional religion and elicited a response from it. One instance was in the areas of geology and biology, including the theory of evolution connected especially with the published work by Charles Darwin (On *The Origin of Species* appeared in 1859). The other was the conclusions of historical inquiry into the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

The discussions of the earth’s age and of the way species evolved through natural selection presented serious challenges to traditional religious teaching on creation. For example, geologists now held that the earth was much older than calculations based on the Bible suggested. At the same time, Darwin’s conclusions about the biological world did not require or posit a Creator, and was counter to the biblical account of creation and the special status of the human species. This new knowledge undercut the authority of the Bible—if the creation story is inaccurate, where does the questioning stop?

Historians, studying at the Bible with recently developed methods used on other historical texts and materials, raised a similar challenge. For example, using literary analysis they identified three earlier sources that had been woven together to create the Book of Genesis. Each of these earlier sources was created to respond to needs in distinct social and historical settings. The needs of a later group resulted in the compilation of the three into the one book found in the extant biblical text. These historians isolated two creation stories, and dated the second before the first. They found that the creation story in Genesis 1 was similar to and derivative of a Babylonian text, as was the flood story. They identified three authors of three historically distinct sections of the Book of Isaiah. In the New Testament, they dated the Gospel of Mark as the earliest gospel, and showed it to be the basis of Matthew and Luke. They demonstrated that certain of Paul’s letters could not have been written by him. The underlying assumption was that each part of the Bible could be shown to be the product of a distinct historical setting. This scholarship clearly challenged the idea that the Bible was of divine origin.

These new ideas were a threat to the claim of religion to be an anchor of stability in the turbulent waters of change.
Movements in Religion

Religious ferment characterized the Gilded Age. During this period numerous new religious movements gained institutional expression—the better known are the Seventh Day Adventists (1868, but with a prior history), the Jehovah’s Witnesses (1872), and the Church of Christ, Scientist [“Christian Science”] (1879). In addition, there were a variety of religious developments within religious traditions that addressed the human dilemmas caused by the social and economic changes in this period. We will deal with five: Liberal theology, Fundamentalism, ethnic religious groups, Revivalism, and the Social Gospel.

The relation of religion to social and economic change is complex and dialectic. In short, religion both affects social and economic change and is affected by it. Its affect on social change has been discussed in a famous essay by the German Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-05). An interesting example is H. Richard’s Niebuhr’s *The Kingdom of God in America*, written in 1937, as a kind of companion piece and corrective to his *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (1929). But it is also possible to understand religion functionally, as a reflection of social need. This is probably the predominant approach in scholarly circles.

In this series, we discuss only the way religion addressed social and economic changes during the Gilded Age. In dealing with the social and economic changes, we do not attempt to show how religion may have influenced them. In like manner we do not discuss how the social and economic changes influenced religion. Our goal is to indicate how religious movements addressed the impacts of these changes.

*Liberal Theology and Fundamentalism*

Liberal Theology and Fundamentalism developed, each in its own way, in response to the challenges of new knowledge—specifically evolution and historical criticism. At the same time, being in themselves views of the world, they provided antidotes to the disorientation caused by urban life.

**Liberal Theology**

Liberal Theology was predominantly a Protestant school of thought, though there were Catholic and Jewish versions of it. It developed out of the Enlightenment and classical European liberalism. Like its European counterparts, Liberal Theology had as its goal to liberate the human enterprise from older parochial views of self and society imbedded in traditional religion. This did not mean, as it did for others of the period...
(e.g., agnostics like Robert Green Ingersoll), a rejection of religious tradition, but rather a recasting of it in light of current needs. It did mean a liberation from anything that tied religion to certain philosophical thought; for example, metaphysics. The early creeds, it was shown, were cast in classical Greek philosophical thought forms and were not binding in other contexts. Historians of this school sought to rediscover earlier forms of Christian thought, before it took on this later Greek casting. This was the focus of the work of Adolph von Harnack, whose conclusions reached American audiences in the English translation of his Das Wesen des Christentums appeared in 1901 as What is Christianity?

In the United States, Liberal Theology was developed under European influence principally at seminaries—and those located in the northeast (including Yale, Harvard, Union in New York, and Andover) and at the University of Chicago. At the Divinity School at Chicago, Shailer Mathews was the foremost spokesman for “modernism,” serving as dean from 1908 until 1933, and producing books such as The Faith of Modernism (1933).

Mathews openly embraced the role of scientific inquiry and argued that religion had nothing to fear from advances in science. "We hope to make the technique of religion as intelligible as arithmetic," he once wrote, "to learn what God means to man, man to God. We take nothing for granted." Because he saw religion and science addressing distinctly different questions, he avoided the perplexity afflicting so many when scientific findings contradicted Biblical history. As indicated by the title of one of his books, The Contributions of Science to Religion, he easily incorporated evolutionary theory into his religious views, arguing that the Bible did not exclude evolutionary possibilities.

His belief in higher criticism and the contextual analysis of biblical texts was attacked by literalists who claimed that Mathews had rejected the very essence of the Christian faith. Unintimidated by such controversy, Mathews engaged all comers in a lively and pointed debate over issues of interpretation, doctrine, and implementation of the Gospel. His ultimate concern lay with the present and not the hereafter. In what may have been Bond Chapel's shortest sermon, Mathews said of the afterlife: "What worries me is not if I shall have immortality, but if I have it, what I'll do with it. Shall we pray?" (The University of Chicago Centennial Catalogues, internet)

The first president of the University, selected by its founder John D. Rockefeller, was William Rainey Harper, himself a scholar in Semitic languages who advocated and exercised higher criticism of the Old Testament.

At Union Theological Seminary in New York, the voice of theological liberalism was William Adams Brown (who taught there from 1898 until 1930). He wrote The Essence of Christianity (1902), an influential Christian Theology in Outline (1906), and Modern Theology and the Preaching of the Gospel (1914). A. C. McGiffert taught theology from an historical point of view, and Charles Augustus Briggs espoused higher criticism as applied to the Old Testament and the Bible as a whole. Heresy trials of Briggs and threatened moves against McGiffert led in part to the Seminary’s breaking with the Presbyterian Church, completely by 1912.

Liberal Theology spoke to those who embraced the changes that were occurring and of which they were a part. It addressed those who were seeking or adjusting to new norms for their lives in the urban setting without completely abandoning the old. It was decidedly this worldly rather than otherworldly, was marked by an openness to change, and was optimistic about the future.

This meant that Liberal Theology affirmed the methods and conclusions of science, rather than being threatened by them and opposing them. This was true of the fruits of historical study, the insights of the social sciences, and especially the conclusions of Darwin. Darwin’s thought was considered as a threat to religion by many, as we shall see in the discussion of Fundamentalism. But for others it was defended and adapted. What
they liked was the idea of evolution, that the gradual change in things was natural and good and resembled the kind of social endeavor of which they were a part.

On the question of evolution, Washington Gladden, from 1882-1918 pastor of the First Congregational Church in Columbus Ohio, saw no conflict between science and religion. If one could see the mind of the Divine in a static order of nature, how much more could the power of the Divine be present in a changing universe?

This modern science which has been supposed by some persons to have banished God from the universe, has not, then banished order from the universe; it has given us revelations of the order and system which pervades the whole far more impressive than our fathers ever saw. It has not banished purpose from the universe. For though it has set aside that somewhat childish notion of design in nature which Paley unfolded, it has opened to us vistas far down the ages, and has shown us how an increasing purpose runs through them all, shaping issues of organic life with Divine patience and unwearied power. Nature as Paley saw it exhibited intelligence, order, purpose. Therefore he believed in an intelligent Creator. Nature as Darwin saw it, exhibits a grander order, a more far-reaching and comprehensive purpose. Why, then, should we cease to believe in an intelligent Creator? (Gladden, *Burning Questions of the Life that Now Is, and of Which Is to Come*, 1889, pp. 28-29, quoted by Handy, p. 25)

They sought to find an accommodation of ideas of God with the ideas of evolution. They did this by ignoring for the most part Darwin’s idea of natural selection (which did not require God), while affirming the idea of evolution. This was possible because even in the scholarly world at the time, not all scientists accepted natural selection.

Historical criticism of the Bible and historical dogma, also considered a threat by some, was embraced by Liberal Theology. One reason was the insight, advanced by many secular and religious thinkers, that religion was the product and expression of social and economic developments. Another way of saying the same thing was that religion grew out of specific historical situations. Biblical criticism, the historical study of Christian doctrine, and comparative studies were able to demonstrate this phenomenon. Consequently, a given religious doctrine or practice was valid only in its specific social and historical setting, and a person in another situation should not be bound to them. It had to be evaluated not in terms of the source of authority (be it Church or Bible), but its appropriateness and use in a present situation. Reason prevailed over revelation.

It also involved a renewed interest in the ethical dimensions of religion. This coincided with a search through reason for universal ethical norms that were not dependent upon and would transcend particular religious traditions (another Enlightenment goal, epitomized in the thought of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant). One expression of this was the emergence of an interest in the historical Jesus as distinguished from the divine Christ. This meant that such teachings as the Virgin Birth were brought into question.

…the scriptural proofs on the doctrine of the virgin birth are rather dubious. In only two of the New Testament books is it referred to. The gospel of Matthew and the gospel of Luke contain allusions to it. The gospel of Mark, which is, by all, now admitted to be the earliest gospel, and the foundation of both Matthew and Luke, does not mention it. The Gospel of John, which is regarded as the chief proof of Christ’s divinity, has not heard of it. The apostle Paul, who is author of the twenty-eight books of the New Testament, never speaks of it….There seems, certainly, to be much justification for the conclusion of many great Christian scholars that the stories in Matthew and Luke are late legendary additions to these gospels. (Handy, p. 167 from Gladden, *Present Day Theology*, 1913, pp. 123-145)
It was the life and teachings of Jesus that interested them, in preference to Paul. And for them this centered on the Kingdom of God and the love of the neighbor. This aspect of Liberal Theology was popularized by Charles M. Sheldon’s novel, *In His Steps* (1896).

Significantly, Liberal Theology was preached principally from urban pulpits. Among the famous preachers who drew large crowds with this theology were Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887) at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) at Trinity Church in Boston, and Washington Gladden (1836-1918) at First Congregational Church in Columbus, Ohio.

Their sermons and books appealed to, among others, those who had embraced the values of the new urban-industrial-capitalist society and who were caught up in the excitement and benefits of change all around them, but who wanted assurance that they had not departed from religious tradition. To those who were experiencing the anomic and social isolation to which we referred earlier, if they were upper and middle class urbanites, Liberal Theology assuaged their guilt and helped them accommodate to their new lives.

**Fundamentalism**

Fundamentalism developed to counter the claims of liberal theology. It takes its name, more than likely, from the publication of a series of essays call *The Fundamentals* beginning in 1910, and entered into a full fledged struggle with “modernism” after the World War I. But its basic response was formulated during the Gilded Age, and offered an alternative to accommodation to the effects of the era on individuals.

There was a conviction, shared by many traditions over centuries, that the present age does not meet divine expectations, and must end before a better time can begin. One expression of this is millenarianism (the belief in a blessed thousand years). Some groups, by the way, believed the millennium was present (notably, but in different ways, the Seventh Day Adventists and the Jehovah’s Witnesses). The predominant view, however, was that the millennium is yet to come. This view was related to dispensationalism, the divine division of history into various periods leading up to the final or end time. One expression of this in Christian Fundamentalism is the belief in the Second Coming of Jesus.

All of this is made possible by a special reading of the divine texts, in this case the Bible. In this reading, the whole of the Bible has a single message, and that message is of the coming of the new age, preceded by a series of divine dispensations, anticipated by certain signs, and placing demands of belief and behavior.

In this respect, the most influential work was done by Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843-1921), who published the Scofield Reference Bible in 1909. In it, by notes and explanations, and by a series of cross references that unified the Bible’s message, Scofield systematized the Bible’s teaching on dispensationalism. For several generations, it became the primary biblical resource for theologically conservative Christians.

This set of beliefs is always combined with an emphasis on high moral demands. Hence, the believer has knowledge of a better age to come by divine intervention, in comparison to the inadequacies of the present time energized by human endeavor, and prepares for it by living a virtuous moral life.

Actually, it can be claimed that this view is not a form of Fundamentalism. Put another way, not all Fundamentalists are adherents of dispensationalism. Fundamentalism is more a movement to conserve traditional theological beliefs and values. Insofar as Fundamentalism was doctrinal in nature, it was largely the product of Presbyterianism. The academic work of defending the inerrancy of the Bible and the continued validity of historical doctrine as expressed in the Reformed tradition (for example, the Westminster Confession), was done mainly by the faculty of the Presbyterian Princeton Theological Seminary. Charles
Hodge (1797-1878) and Benjamin Warfield (1851-1921) were the most influential spokesmen; both were bright, well-educated and sophisticated thinkers. Hodge opposed Darwinism because he saw quite correctly that it could explain natural developments without God—that it was atheistic. As for the Bible, he put forth very subtle arguments that the Bible can be inaccurate in details, but never in error in its teaching.

Institutionally, it was within the Presbyterian Church that Fundamentalism found definition. In 1910 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA (the northern Presbyterian Church) adopted the Doctrinal Deliverance, which declared that five doctrines (later to be known as the “Five Fundamentals”) were “necessary and essential” to the Christian faith: (1) the inspiration of the Bible by the Holy Spirit and the inerrancy of Scripture as a result of this; (2) the virgin birth of Christ; (3) the belief that Christ's death was an atonement for sin; (4) the bodily resurrection of Christ; and (5) the historical reality of Christ's miracles.

What was accomplished was the preservation of an explanation of things and of values that provided an alternative to Liberal Theology. One could live in the changing world without being of it, to use a biblical distinction.

**Ethnic Religion and Revivalism**

Both ethnic religious groups and Revivalism offered forms of social identity to persons seeking an experience of home. The ethnic religious groups (principally Catholicism, Lutheranism and Judaism) addressed the needs of immigrants, whereas Revivalism typically spoke to the individuals who migrated from small towns in America.

**Ethnic Religion**

Most immigrants found no help in either Liberal theology or in Fundamentalism. They tended to bring their ethnic religious traditions with them from Europe and reestablish them on American soil. This was especially true of Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Jews.

The story of Roman Catholicism in America is perhaps the most important, principally because of its numbers (when the census asked for religious affiliation for the first time in 1890, the Catholics were the largest religious group in America). It is an interesting story as well, partly because of its ethnic variety. As Catholic immigrants arrived, they found a home in the Catholic Church. In the early years, American Catholicism was dominated by Irish Catholics. When large numbers of German Catholics immigrated and came to dominate certain parishes, the differences between the two cultures within a common faith appeared. The most important difference, of course, was language. The Germans wanted to preserve their own theological tradition, which was more intellectually sophisticated than that of the Irish, and they wanted to retain German as the non-liturgical language of their parishes and parochial schools. They wanted German-speaking priests. Another instance of this difference, unimportant perhaps to outsiders but pertinent at the time and to those involved, came with the appearance of German Catholic monasteries, which traditionally produced beer. The Irish hierarchy was generally for temperance, the Germans for beer. The Irish hierarchy prevailed when appeals were made to Rome. These tensions persisted.

There was also what has been called the “Americanization” issue. Certain of the American hierarchy—principally Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore (1834-1921), Archbishop Ireland of Saint Paul (1838-1918), and Bishop Keane of Richmond (1839-1918)—sought to define Catholicism in ways that were friendly to the American experiment in democracy and pluralism. Gibbons even participated in the World Parliament of Religions at the Chicago Columbian Exposition in 1894, giving the Lord’s Prayer in the Protestant version and emphasizing Catholicism’s social service contributions to society. They founded the Catholic University in Washington, with Keane as the rector, which became a center for progressive Catholicism. In addition, because
so many Catholics were workers, the hierarchy was generally if also carefully supportive of labor. Others of the American hierarchy were more uneasy with this position. Despite the influence and effort of the “Americanizers,” Rome eventually rejected their effort to create an American form of Catholicism. In Longinqua Oceani, section 6 (1895), Pope Leo XIII wrote to the American Archbishops and Bishops:

…it would be very erroneous to draw the conclusion that in America is to be sought the type of the most desirable status of the Church, or that it would be universally lawful or expedient for State and Church to be, as in America, dissovered and divorced. The fact that Catholicity with you is in good condition, nay, is even enjoying a prosperous growth, is by all means to be attributed to the fecundity with which God has endowed His Church, in virtue of which unless men or circumstances interfere, she spontaneously expands and propagates herself; but she would bring forth more abundant fruits if, in addition to liberty, she enjoyed the favor of the laws and the patronage of the public authority.

In the following year, Ahlstrom notes (p. 837), Keane was replaced as rector of Catholic University. In 1899 the Pope addressed the question of “Americanism” in Testem Benevolentiae, written to Cardinal Gibbons:

From the foregoing it is manifest, beloved son, that we are not able to give approval to those views which, in their collective sense, are called by some "Americanism." But if by this name are to be understood certain endowments of mind which belong to the American people, just as other characteristics belong to various other nations, and if, moreover, by it is designated your political condition and the laws and customs by which you are governed, there is no reason to take exception to the name. But if this is to be so understood that the doctrines which have been adverted to above are not only indicated, but exalted, there can be no manner of doubt that our venerable brethren, the bishops of America, would be the first to repudiate and condemn it as being most injurious to themselves and to their country. For it would give rise to the suspicion that there are among you some who conceive and would have the Church in America to be different from what it is in the rest of the world. (Quoted by John Tracy Ellis, Documents of American Catholic History, pp. 553-562, and cited by Ahlstrom, 839)

The conservatives prevailed, though the progressives persisted as a presence in American Catholicism.

The Lutherans—by 1890, the fifth largest group in the country -- were generally more oblivious to the need to accommodate to American values and more intent on preserving their identity as Lutherans. Gradually Synods (geographically or doctrinally oriented organizations) were formed—and when they were, they proliferated. At one time, Ahlstrom notes, there were sixty-six independent Lutheran organizations, though there was always a countervailing movement toward unity. And though these synods had geographic designations (e.g. Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio), many were in fact national churches. Their energies flowed in the direction of church organization and the preservation of distinctly Lutheran tradition. In the former case, there were differences over ordination and congregationalism. In the area of preserving their Lutheran heritage, they grappled with an issue they brought with them—the relative place of pietism and confessionalism within their tradition: the relation of personal and experiential faith as trust and of correct doctrine as expressed, for example, in the Augsburg Confession. It is an overwhelmingly complex story, complicated by the question of union with the Reformed tradition and the attitude to the official use of the English language.

This story played out in a striking way in the development of the Missouri Synod, by the time of World War I the largest single synod in American Lutheranism. Its leader during important decades of the nineteenth century was Carl F. W. Walther (1811-1887), who sought to lead Lutheranism in a recovery of its distinctive heritage, principally through the influence of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis.

The Jewish immigrants engaged life in America in various ways, all rooted in developments in Germany in the mid twentieth century. Many sought to reinstitute traditional Judaism on American soil, with strict
adherence to Jewish law and dietary restrictions. They showed no interest in accommodating to American values. Harassed in Europe, they welcomed an opportunity to live out their ethnic tradition in greater freedom in America. They came to be called simply Orthodox Jews.

Others sought a form of Judaism that attempted to move beyond tradition to a form of Judaism that was American and accommodated to modern values. It was a form of Judaism similar in some aspects to Unitarianism. Under the leadership of Rabbi Isaac Wise (1819-1900) and centered in Cincinnati (where he founded Hebrew Union College in 1875), this group became the American version of Reform Judaism. An interesting example of their thinking comes from the so-called “Pittsburgh Platform” of 1885:

3. We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and today we accept as binding only its moral laws, and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization.
5. 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. 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.
4. We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas entirely foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.
7. We reassert the doctrine of Judaism that the soul is immortal, grounding the belief on the divine nature of human spirit, which forever finds bliss in righteousness and misery in wickedness. We reject as ideas not rooted in Judaism, the beliefs both in bodily resurrection and in Gehenna and Eden (Hell and Paradise) as abodes for everlasting punishment and reward.

Some of the most radically Reform congregations dropped many of the rituals and customs. Some held "Shabbat" on Sunday. By 1880, more than 90% of American synagogues were Reform.

Even so, a Reform Jewish scholar, in evaluating the work of higher criticism on Jewish Scripture, could write in 1919:

They have failed to realize and to stress that the Old Testament, and particularly the Torah…is entirely a Jewish work, written by Jewish authors and edited by Jewish thinkers, the product of Jewish religious genius and a unit of Jewish religious thought and doctrine…and can, in the final analysis, be correctly understood only when interpreted from a positive Jewish standpoint. (Julian Morgenstern, The Book of Genesis: A Jewish Interpretation, quoted in A Documentary History of Religion in America since 1877, 2003, edited by Gaustad and Noll, p 359)

A third group, Conservative Judaism, was determined to retain traditional Jewish teachings and practice, but in a way less strict than the Orthodox, while affirming its place in American life. In this they were somewhat similar to the Protestant liberal theologians. Their leader had been Isaac Leeser, and in 1886 they founded the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Eventually, it became the largest American Jewish denomination.

Threatened by loss of identity in the new land, these groups of immigrants gravitated toward transplanted versions of their various European religious traditions. Especially the Catholics and the Jews entered into a vicious cycle: the more they drew together in their ethnic religious communities, they more they...
were suspected (and feared) by the Anglo-Saxon Protestant establishment as being “foreign” and disloyal to America. And the more they were attacked by the “nativists,” the more they drew together.

**Revivalism**

Revivalism has several related characteristics. The most important is that it requires personal response. It involves personal decision, rather than divine election or predestination. It is experiential: religious truth is not so much something to be believed or agreed to (faith as assent), as it is to be experienced (faith as trust or as a feeling of assurance). It is more a matter of the heart than of the mind.

Its European roots lie in what is called pietism, especially in the Lutheran tradition and in its impact on English religiosity (for example, in the influence of Moravianism on John Wesley). Pietism was a reaction to orthodoxy, or the insistence on correct doctrine. It is akin to Romanticism’s later reaction to Rationalism.

The American version of Revivalism initially occurred in the Great Awakening, principally in New England, in the first part of the eighteenth century. It was characterized not so much by a change of message, as by a spontaneous change in response. People were moved, and one thing they were moved to (according to Jonathan Edwards) was love and joy. It was intensified by the preaching of George Whitfield (1714-1770), “the Great Itinerant,” who made four trips (1740-1764) from England to America, with startling results.

The Second Great Awakening in New England began in 1801, largely under the influence of Timothy Dwight, President of Yale University, which became its center. It was, like the First, transformative in nature, but less given to emotional excesses. An increased emphasis on personal decision was manifest. Also, while its results were seen in increased spiritual growth and moral reform, it was grounded more in traditional Reformed (Calvinistic) theology: the absolute sovereignty of God, the total depravity of human beings, and the atoning love of Christ. What is of interest is that this form of the Second Great Awakening had an impact on the movements espousing temperance, abolition of slavery, and women’s rights.

**The Social Gospel**


There were certainly differences between a revivalist like Moody and a liberal preacher like Beecher, but they shared one thing in common: an indifference to the social issues raised by industrialism. Both thought that poverty resulted from sin. Indeed, their views were considered by the business establishment, which often financed their work, as encouraging a diligent work force.

That Beecher, the great liberal preacher who addressed social issues and especially opposed slavery, could write:

Looking comprehensively through city and town and village and country, the general truth will stand, that no man in this land suffers from poverty unless it be more than his fault—unless it be his sin….There is enough and to spare thrice over; and if men have not enough, it is owing to the want of provident care, and foresight, and industry, and frugality, and wise saving. This is the general truth. (Quoted by Sydney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America*, p. 160, and repeated by Ahlstrom, p.789.)
shows that Liberal Theology differed from the Social Gospel. Ahlstrom comments:

Liberalism and the Social Gospel movement must not be identified...because liberalism often encouraged complacency and self-satisfaction. It thrrove mightily among the most socially conservative classes of people. The Social Gospel, on the other hand, was always a prophetic and unpopular impulse. Social Gospelers were usually theological liberals; but the statement cannot be reversed. (Ahlstrom, p.788)

The Social Gospel developed in direct response to the effects of urbanization and, more especially, of industrialization. It held that a person’s sense of worth was radically affected by external circumstances. It considered individualism the root problem, and placed emphasis on social solidarity—that the benefit of any is dependent upon the benefit for all. Espousing the biblical idea of the kingdom of God, the Social Gospel contended that God was vitally interested in social issues. The Church in this view is not the Kingdom of God, but an instrument for its implementation. This movement was not so much interested in changing hearts, as it was in changing social and economic structures and systems. It focused on such things as urban building and sanitary codes, child labor, and safe and humane working conditions. Conscious especially of the tensions between management and labor, it was often supportive of organized labor and friendly toward the values of socialism. In this connection, Walter Rauschenbusch wrote in 1907:

It is entirely misleading to frighten us with the idea communism involves a complete abolition of private property. Even in the most individualistic society there is...a large ingredient of communism, and in the most socialistic society there will always be a large ingredient of private property...It will never be a question of having either private property absolute or communism absolute; it will always be a question of having more communism or less. (Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century, edited by Paul Rauschenbusch, 2007, p. 319.)

An important distinction is that the Social Gospel was not so much interested in acts of compassion, as it was in achieving social justice.

The movement was greatly influenced and enhanced by the social sciences that were emerging in Europe and making their way to the United States, especially economics and sociology. One thinker who set the tone was Lester Ward (1841-1913), who in an early essay on sociology challenged the idea that social structures were fixed or natural—rather, they reflected the creative ability of persons and groups. Hence there was possibility of purposive social change by societies.

Ward was not a religious man, but two other American social scientists were explicitly Christian in their work: Albion Small (1854-1926), who founded the first department of sociology in the United States at the University of Chicago, and Richard Ely (1854-1943), an influential professor of economics at Johns Hopkins and, after 1892, at the University of Wisconsin. Both were trained in Germany, were capable of sophisticated social and economic analyses, held that social and economic structures were historical in nature, and were committed to improving the human condition as well as studying it. Both were active in the Social Gospel movement.

Richard T. Ely was a founder of both the American Economic Association (1885) and the Christian Social Union (1891). He combined his skill as an economist with his commitment as a Christian. As an economist he was of the emerging historical school that studied economies as creatures of national experiences and interests, to be analyzed and judged solely as such. It was as American questions that Ely addressed the questions of strikes, government control, and monopolies
A German professor, with experience in public life in his own country, tells me how successfully in some instances this control [public control over private property] has been exercised in Germany; but I reply: “America is not Germany. Can you, with American conditions, expect similar results? If you do, it seems to me you do not know our country. We have to deal with American farmers and American workingmen. Whatever you may think of them, they are facts, very real, very important. (Handy, p. 215, from Ely, “Fundamental Beliefs in My Social Philosophy,” 1894)

Ely in like manner considered socialism something worthy of study, but not workable for America.

As a Christian he saw in the teachings of Jesus the standard by which to judge these economies and the motivation to change them. He was wont to cite Jesus on the two commandments, love of God and love of neighbor (Matthew 22.34-40) and on the nature of the Last Judgment (“Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these…you have done it unto me,” Matthew 25.31-46).

There is one law, and only one, taught by the Christian religion and on its manward side; that is, the law of love, which finds expression in the social law of service. Christianity and ethical science agree perfectly. Social welfare is the test of right conduct. All right laws which regulate human relations have in view the well-being of society, and they are all one. (Handy, p. 224, from Ely, The Social Law of Service, 1896.

He assumed that the churches would be informed and motivated by its own teachings, but he was disappointed.

Nothing so disheartens one as the failure of Christians to engage in positive work for the masses. One would at least suppose that such a question as freedom from toil on Sunday would concern the clergy. Yet it does not seem so. Scarcely a question is more alive today among all labor organizations than compulsory Sunday work…Yet the pulpit is silent. (Handy, p. 207, from Ely, Social Aspects of Christianity, and Other Essays, 1889)

From within the church, the names most prominently mentioned are Washington Gladden (1836-1918), Josiah Strong (1847-1916), and Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918). Gladden was minister for thirty-two years at the First Congregational Church in Columbus, Ohio. In sermons, addresses and over forty books, he combined a commitment to Liberal Theology with a deep concern for social issues, especially the conflicts between employers and labor.

Gladden’s works show him as a member of the clergy who was astute in discussing social issues with an even hand and little or no reference to sectarian or religious perspectives. In one address (“Is It Peace or War?”), given to a mass meeting of employers and laborers, and published the same month as the Haymarket riots of May 1886 in Chicago, Gladden addressed the current state of affairs between capital and labor:

The question of peace or war between capital and labor includes several questions: whether there is at the present time peace or war between these two great powers, and if it is war, what are they fighting for; whether war is better than peace, and if not, how the war is to be brought to an end and peace is to be made—whether by capital subjugating labor, or by labor subjugating capital, or by finding some way of uniting their interests. (Handy, pp. 49-50)

The state of the industrial world is a state of war. And if war is the word, then the efficient combination and organization must not all be of the side of capital; labor must be allowed to make the combinations necessary for the protection of its own interests. While the conflict is in progress, labor has the same right that capital has to prosecute the warfare in the most effective way. If war is the order
of the day, we must grant labor belligerent rights. The sooner this fact is recognized, the better for all concerned. (Handy, p. 61)

If peace is better than war, the employer’s first problem must be to find a way of getting his enterprise on a peace basis. He can only do that by identifying his men with himself in the hopes, the prospects, the rewards of their joint undertaking. It begins to be evident to many employers that industrial partnership in some form is the next step in the evolution of our industrial system. (Handy, pp. 66-67).

He was convinced that cooperation must replace competition in the management of industry. He felt that some businesses should be cooperatively owned by management and labor, that others should be owned by the state. This is a far cry from Henry Ward Beecher’s liberalism.

Josiah Strong was the author of the highly influential Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis. He was the movement’s foremost organizer, implementing great interdenominational congresses on social Christianity in 1885, 1887, 1889, and finally at the Chicago Columbian Exposition (World’s Fair) in 1893.

It is Walter Rauschenbusch who is considered the major voice of the Social Gospel. Moving from his experience as a pastor in Hell’s Kitchen in New York City to a professorship in church history at Rochester Seminary, Rauschenbusch combined social and economic analysis with an exposure of social ethical themes in the Bible and church history. Throughout his widely read books—including Christianity and the Social Crisis (1907) and A Theology for the Social Gospel (1917), he stressed especially the “Kingdom of God on earth.”

Rauschenbusch, like all others in the Social Gospel movement, had to deal with a special problem: Christianity typically focused on the individual. Sin and salvation were conceived individually. He set about, among other concerns, to refocus the human dilemma and the Christian response to it, from the individual to society. Seeking authority for this shift of emphasis, he turned to the Bible—and specifically to the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible and to the teachings of Jesus.

He saw in the Prophets a number of significant features, including (1) the conception of religion as essentially ethical, rather than as a way of influencing the deity; (2) the object of ethical activity being the poor and oppressed; and (3) the focus of ethics on the nation, rather than individuals or families.

…the prophets insisted on a right life as the true worship of God. Morality to them was not merely a prerequisite of effective ceremonial worship. They brushed sacrificial ritual aside altogether as trifling compare with righteousness, nay, as harmful substitute and a hindrance for ethical religion. “I desire goodness and not sacrifice,” said Hosea (6.6). (Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century, edited by Paul Rauschenbusch, 2007, p. 4.)

…the sympathy of the prophets, even the most aristocratic among them, was entirely on the side of the poorer classes. (Rauschenbusch, p. 8)

…the morality which the prophets had in mind in their strenuous insistence on righteousness was not merely the private morality of the home, but the public morality on which national life is founded. They said less about the pure heart for the individual than of just institutions for the nation….They conceived of their people as a gigantic personality which sinned as one and out to repent as one. (Rauschenbusch, p. 6)
As Rauschenbusch understood him, Jesus taught and acted within this prophetic tradition. He was indifferent to ritual and focused on human conduct (for example, the well known teaching on the Sabbath). He identified with the common folk and the unpopular. His teaching always assumed the importance of society, but his focus moved from the nation to humankind. His basic point of view was governed by the concept of the Kingdom of God.

All the teaching of Jesus and all his thinking centered about the hope of the kingdom of God. His moral teachings get their real meaning only when viewed from that center. He was not a Greek philosopher or Hindu pundit teaching the individual way of emancipation from the world and its passions, but a Hebrew prophet preparing men for the righteous social order. The goodness which he sought to create in men was always the goodness that would enable them to live rightly with their fellow-men and to constitute a true social life. (Rauschenbusch, p. 55)

...Jesus worked on individuals and through individuals, but his real end was not individualistic, but social, and in his method he employed strong social forces. He knew that a new view of life would have to be implanted before the new life could be lived and that the new society would have to nucleate around personal centers of renewal. But his end was not the new soul, but the new society; not man, but Man. (Rauschenbusch, p. 50)

Jesus, like all the prophets and like all his spiritually minded countrymen, lived in the hope of a great transformation of the national, social and religious life about him. He shared the substance of that hope with his people, but by his profounder insight and his loftier faith he elevated and transformed the common hope. He rejected all violent means and thereby transferred the inevitable conflict from the field of battle to the antagonism of mind against mind, and of heart against lack of heart. He postponed the divine catastrophe of judgment into the dim distance and put the emphasis on the growth of the new life that was now going on. He thought less of changes made *en masse*, and more of the immediate transformation of single centers of influence and of the social nuclei. The Jewish hope became a human hope with universal scope. The old intent gaze into the future was turned to faith in present realities and beginnings, and found its task here and now. (Rauschenbusch, p. 53)

The institutional manifestations of the Social Gospel included the Christian Socialist Fellowship (1906)—from which emerged Norman Thomas, a Presbyterian minister who was later the Socialist candidate for President—and numerous efforts within the northern Protestant Churches. The Northern Baptists (Rauschenbusch’s denomination) was the first to give it formal recognition (in 1908) and the Methodist Church (North) adopted the Federation for Social Service as an official agency and a very liberal “Social Creed” the same year.

**1908 Methodist Social Creed**

The Methodist Episcopal Church stands:

For equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life.

For the principles of conciliation and arbitration in industrial dissensions.

For the protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupational diseases, injuries and mortality.

For the abolition of child labor.
For such regulation of the conditions of labor for women as shall safeguard the physical and moral health of the community.

For the suppression of the "sweating system."

For the gradual and reasonable reduction of the hours of labor to the lowest practical point, with work for all; and for that degree of leisure for all which is the condition of the highest human life.

For a release for [from] employment one day in seven.

For a living wage in every industry.

For the highest wage that each industry can afford, and for the most equitable division of the products of industry that can ultimately be devised.

For the recognition of the Golden Rule and the mind of Christ as the supreme law of society and the sure remedy for all social ills.

To the toilers of America and to those who by organized effort are seeking to lift the crushing burdens of the poor, and to reduce the hardships and uphold the dignity of labor, this Council sends the greeting of human brotherhood and the pledge of sympathy and of help in a cause which belongs to all who follow Christ.

Like so many movements of this period, the Social Gospel was always interdenominational, and in 1908 the founding of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ gave it an institution that adopted its goals and became active in its concerns.

There were efforts, some more explicitly religious than others, to address the experiences of those migrating to the cities and immigrating to the United States. One was the work of the YMCA and YWCA, "established to provide low-cost housing in a safe Christian environment for rural young men and women journeying to the cities." The first known YMCA dormitory was Farwell Hall in Chicago, completed in 1867. The YMCA "combined preaching in the streets and the distribution of religious tracts with a social ministry. Philanthropists saw them as places for wholesome recreation that would preserve youth from the temptations of alcohol, gambling, and prostitution and that would promote good citizenship." (J. William Frost)

The first YMCA in the United States opened on December 29, 1851, in Boston, Massachusetts. It was founded in 1851 by Captain Thomas Valentine Sullivan (1800–1859), an American seaman and missionary. He was influenced by the London YMCA and saw the association as an opportunity to provide a "home away from home" for young sailors on shore leave. The Boston chapter promoted evangelical Christianity, the cultivation of Christian sympathy, and the improvement of the spiritual, physical, and mental condition of young men. ("YMCA," Wikipedia)

The first YWCA in the United States was in New York City, and dates from shortly after the Civil War.

The settlement house was another monumental response, directed especially to immigrants. Inspired and informed by settlement houses in England, by 1913 there were 413 settlements in 32 states. One mark of the settlements was that university educated men and women moved ("settled") into the neighborhoods being served—"It seemed to us that, as early settlers, we had a chance to grow up with the community and affect its
development,” wrote William Adams Brown, Theology Professor, Union Theological Society (1892–1930) and President, Union Settlement Association (1915–1919).

The first in the United States was University Settlement House in New York (1886); the most famous was Hull House in Chicago, founded by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Star in 1889. The charter of Hull House read: "to provide a center for a higher civic and social life; to institute and maintain educational and philanthropic enterprises, and to investigate and improve the conditions in the industrial districts of Chicago."

By 1907 Hull House was comprised of a cluster thirteen buildings on the near west side of Chicago. It provided a wide range of services and programs for persons in surrounding neighborhoods. These included a variety of activities, practical and cultural, designed to affirm ethnic backgrounds and to equip people for living in the city. By January 1895, for example, the following classes and activities were offered at Hull House: arithmetic, beginning Latin, chemistry, Cloak Makers’ Union (women), club lectures, dancing class, English and letter writing, geometry, gymnastics (men and women), Italian class, Italian reception, Italo-American Club, Jolly Boys’ Club, mandolin club, parliamentary law, physics, singing, Social Science Club, Young Citizens.

The range of problems Hull House sought to solve is impressive. The residents under Florence Kelley’s direction surveyed the neighborhoods to map ethnic concentration and income levels, producing in 1895 a beautiful set of color coded maps (published as part of the Hull House Maps and Papers). They pushed for improved sanitary conditions, child labor laws, establishment of a juvenile court system, and women’s suffrage. Julia Lathrop served as director of the United States Children's Bureau from 1912 to 1922. In 1893 Florence Kelley was appointed the Chief Factory Inspector for the state of Illinois.

Epilogue

The phrase “Gilded Age” (first coined by Mark Twain) insinuates that this period in American history was characterized by a superficial layer of gold over a base metal. It is a highly suggestive image, and is especially pertinent for the relation of the extreme wealth and extreme poverty that was apparent, or the disparity between appearance and substance. But, as we have suggested, it hardly conveys the complexity of the period, and perhaps Ahlstrom’s “the ordeals of transition” is a more accurate interpretative phrase.

It was a time of exceptionally high energy and expectation, often realized and often not. People migrated and immigrated to the cities seeking a new life, which they found, and found full of promise and problems. Most people thought science could, if properly harnessed and directed, solve every problem—including social problems. It succeeded, it failed, it created new problems. Some thought that at last the full flowering of history was imminent. But it was not. There was continued sowing and reaping, all within cycles no one could predict. The stories went on. There were old and new crises and responses.

Among the responses were those of religion. Some religious responses embraced the changes; others resisted them. Some were open to the larger American experience; others sought to create enclaves within it. The variety of religious experiences was itself typically American, and was not atypical of the longer history of humankind.