

The Social Gospel Movement

- Liberalism had many sides and the Social Gospel Movement was one.
In the U.S. this was a response to the new society (and not merely a result of adjusting Christian thought to the impact of science and biblical criticism)
It comes in response to the Industrial Revolution and the influence of the theology of Evangelical Liberalism.
- **A Major Theological Assumption** that inspired the movement
Salvation had a social as well as an individual dimension and that social institutions had to be "saved" as well as individuals.
This means:
 - All economic problems had a moral dimension
 - In addition to charity, the church should be concerned about social justice and social structures
 - And...the individual morality of workers and business people.
- **Walter Rauschenbusch** (1861-1918)
His career as a pastor was in "Hell's Kitchen" NYC. And raised questions about the adequacy of the individualistic approach of Protestantism
They failed to comprehend that sin and salvation were social facts not just theological
Three concepts that King will draw from this: prophetic model of religion, Relationships between the church and the world, the kingdom of God and human community.

The Social Gospel Movement –cont.

- **The Prophetic Model – Religion as Ethical and Social**
- The essence of this principle: *the affirmation of historical relativity.*
 - *Everything in history stands under the judgment of God.*
 - *So...the prophet cannot put a stamp of approval upon anything "as it is."*
 - *The prophet must always point out the gap between the will of God and the present order of things. So...there's no accepting things as they are.*
- ***This will include: religious fervor, a democratic spirit, a strong social conscience, free utterance of one's belief***
 - As in the form of the Hebrew prophets and all radical Christian movements.
- A corollary: ***the inseparability of religion and ethics*** – any method of cultivating the spiritual life...must have an ethical outcome.
- A corollary: ***the affirmation of the fundamental social character of religion.*** This is the major norm for judging religion. Ex: Israel's prophets were not isolated – but an integral part of the covenantal community.
- Evils condemned: injustice & oppression.
- The Prophets greatly influenced MLK (after Sermon on Mount)
 - MLK had a prophetic insight to discern the difference between false and true peace. (Montgomery boycott – revealed surface peace, false peace.)
 - MLK was disheartened that the Church often supported false peace.

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- **The Relationship between Church and Society**
- Essential position toward society & church that Rauschenbusch fought:
 - *That the world (society “as it is”) is essentially evil and that withdrawal from it is the only way to practice the authentic Christian life.*
- There are only two alternatives to this position:
 - Condemn the world and seek to change it.
 - Tolerate the world and conform to it.
 - **He favored change – following the teachings of Jesus**
 - Christians are to be subject to the law of Christ in both their personal and social relationships.
- **MLK's** way of using this thought:
 - *It has always been...the responsibility of the church to broaden horizons, challenge the status quo, and break the mores when necessary.*
 - He disagree strongly with those who held that the church should not become involved in social issues.
 - Ie; combat injustice (housing, education, employment, legal problems... be the peacemakers
 - MLK was somewhat embarrassed by the “silk stocking” image of Dexter Ave. Bapt. Ch., so he was anxious to open up its doors when he first arrived.
- A remark to those who did not want the church active in social issues. P.38

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- **The Kingdom of God and Human Community**
- Rauschenbusch's thoughts on the ideal community is essential to MLK's conception of the Beloved Community.
 - The doctrine of the Kingdom of God was how he concluded that the Christian religion is essentially corporate and communal in character.
 - Kingdom of God = a transformed and regenerated society.
- Primary purpose of Christianity is to transform human society into the kingdom of God
 - By regenerating all human relationships in accordance to the will of God
 - Kingdom of God is seen as: a social and collective hope within history.
 - The organized fellowship of humanity acting under the impulse of love.
 - An inclusive community.
- This is not Utopianism...it is both present and future.
 - The kingdom of God is always in the making.
- Some thought R. was too optimistic about this being a historical reality...MLK agreed to a point.
 - MLK saw it as part of the 19th cent. 'cult of inevitable progress'
 - MLK is indebted to R. For his dream for the future...(I have a dream....)