

Dr. Roger Green, American Christianity, Session 20, The Social Gospel in America, Part 2 Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Green, American Christianity, Session 20, The Social Gospel in America, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Roger Green's lecture, "The Social Gospel in America, Part 2," continues his examination of this significant movement within American Christianity. The session begins by focusing on the works of Walter Rauschenbusch, particularly his books *Christianity and the Social Crisis* and *The Theology of the Social Gospel*, exploring Rauschenbusch's core ideas like the Kingdom of God and his analysis of societal evils. Green then outlines the theology of the social gospel, highlighting its emphasis on the Kingdom of God encompassing social transformation, the perfectibility of humanity (with noted nuances regarding sin), and the Church's alignment with the working classes against corporate evil. The lecture also discusses theological difficulties inherent in the movement, such as interpretations of the Kingdom and potential cultural biases. Finally, Green details the contributions of the social gospel to American Christianity, including its focus on social injustices, its influence on theological and ethical studies, the establishment of social ministries and institutions for the poor, and its impact on missionary work. The session concludes by briefly introducing Neo-Orthodoxy as a subsequent theological development.

2. 31 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Green, American Christianity, Session 20 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Church History → American Christianity).



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3. Briefing Document: Green, Session 20, The Social Gospel in America, Part 2

Briefing Document: The Social Gospel in America and Neo-Orthodoxy

Date: October 26, 2023 (Based on the "© 2024" in the source, assuming intended future use, but analyzed based on current date for briefing purposes) **Subject:** Review of Dr. Roger Green's Lectures on the Social Gospel in America (Part 2) and Introduction to Neo-Orthodoxy and the Social Crisis. **Sources:** Excerpts from "Green_AmerXy_EN_Sess20.pdf"

This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Roger Green in his lecture on the Social Gospel in America (Part 2) and the initial segment of his lecture on Neo-Orthodoxy and the Social Crisis.

I. The Social Gospel in America, Part 2

This lecture focuses on the works of Walter Rauschenbusch, the theology of the Social Gospel, and its contributions to American Christianity.

A. Walter Rauschenbusch and His Works:

- **Centrality of the Kingdom of God:** Rauschenbusch considered the concept of the Kingdom of God as central to Jesus' message and his own work. He aimed to "bring the kingdom of God's language into the modern world, into the 20th century" and help the church understand its relevance.
- **The Church as Instrumental:** Rauschenbusch believed the church ("the body of Christ") could be instrumental in bringing about the Kingdom of God by "alleviating evil in this world, fighting evil... to help usher in the kingdom of God." He saw more democratically oriented churches like Baptists and Methodists as better positioned for this.
- **Integration of Biblical Studies, Religion, and Ethics:** Rauschenbusch sought to "wed biblical studies or religion and ethics," emphasizing that "all good theology ends in ethics." He believed in identifying the ethical mandates within the biblical record and religion.
- **"Christianity and the Social Crisis" (1907):** This book is considered a key work where Rauschenbusch lays out his initial ideas. The lecture highlights his belief that the church can help bring about God's kingdom by addressing societal evils.

- **"The Theology of the Social Gospel" (1917):** Written during World War I, this book sees Rauschenbusch grappling with the reality of evil and the chaos of the war, leading him to revise some of his earlier optimism. He identifies the ultimate causes of corporate evil as the "lust for unearned gain" and "imperialistic powers," asserting that "all nations demonstrate lust for unearned gain" and share the desire for colonization.
- **Hope for the Future and Restoration of the Kingdom:** Despite the war, Rauschenbusch held onto hope for the future and the restoration of God's kingdom. He emphasized that "the Bible is a story of God winning over evil," offering a hope lodged in scripture. He also envisioned Christians playing a role in this restoration, particularly in "Christianizing international relations."
- **Influence of Others:** While Rauschenbusch is considered the father of the Social Gospel in Protestantism, the lecture mentions the influence of Washington Gladden, Adolf von Harnack, and Joshua Strong, all of whom believed that Christian values could influence individuals and, through them, the broader society.

B. Theology of the Social Gospel:

- **Kingdom of God as Preeminent Theme:** The Kingdom of God is identified as the "one preeminent theme from the social gospel movement." This included not just the community of the redeemed but also "the transformation of society, to bringing society and bringing culture back under the umbrella of the kingdom of God."
- **Social Reform and Political Action:** Social Gospelers saw social reform and political action as two inseparable sides of the coin in working towards the Kingdom of God. They believed signs of kingdom work could be seen in government, commerce/business (when oriented towards the common good), and family life.
- **Perfectibility of Humanity:** Social Gospelers generally believed in the "perfectibility of humanity," seeing the progress of Christianity since the Reformation, particularly in America, as evidence of this. The lecture notes that later generations may have overemphasized this aspect, potentially downplaying the reality of sin, a nuance Rauschenbusch maintained.
- **Association with the Working Classes:** The Social Gospel advocated for the Church to "ally themselves with the working classes," believing that societal

transformation would come through their efforts, undergirded by religious and moral strength. They shifted focus from solely personal sin to addressing "corporate evil" and "systemic evil," including issues like poverty, oppression, injustice, and racism.

C. Contributions of the Social Gospel to American Christianity:

- **Focus on Corporate Aspects of Life:** The Social Gospel brought attention to the "corporate aspects of evil and sin," moving beyond a purely individualistic understanding of the gospel.
- **Influence on Theological and Ethical Studies:** The movement influenced churches, seminaries, and colleges to initiate studies in theology and ethics across denominational lines.
- **Establishment of Denominational Social Ministries:** Whole denominations began to incorporate social ministry as a central biblical and theological project, establishing dedicated offices.
- **Development of Institutional Life for the Poor:** The Social Gospel was instrumental in establishing schools, daycare centers, hospitals, and housing initiatives aimed at helping the poor. Dr. Green emphasizes the historical role of churches in these areas, contrasting it with modern ignorance of this history.
- **Impact on Missionary Work:** The movement broadened the understanding of missionary work to include "agricultural missions, medical missions, and educational missions" alongside saving souls. This reflected a "holistic gospel" that valued people's physical and spiritual needs, recognizing that neglecting either devalues the individual.

D. Theological Difficulties of the Social Gospel:

Dr. Green raises three potential theological difficulties:

- **Interpretation of Jesus' Message of the Kingdom:** Questioning whether the Social Gospellers accurately understood Jesus' concept of the Kingdom, suggesting that Jesus may not have envisioned a political kingdom.
- **Denial of Individual Sin and Need for Grace:** Criticizing later generations of Social Gospellers who, in reaction against pietism, may have downplayed the reality of individual sin and the necessity of God's grace for individuals.

- **Association of the Kingdom with Western Culture:** Highlighting the tendency among some Social Gospel proponents to equate the advancement of Western culture with the advancement of the Kingdom of God, potentially leading to problematic views of non-Western cultures.

II. Neo-Orthodoxy and the Social Crisis (Introduction)

This lecture introduces Neo-Orthodoxy (the New Orthodoxy) as a 20th-century theological movement committed to the Bible, reacting against Protestant liberalism and American fundamentalism.

A. Definition and Core Beliefs:

- **Commitment to the Biblical Message:** Neo-Orthodox theologians were "committed to the biblical message," believing in its strength and criticizing Protestant liberalism for watering it down through extreme biblical criticism.
- **Reformation Lens:** They primarily used the Reformation, especially the theology of John Calvin, as a lens for interpreting scripture and understanding its relevance for the 20th century. This is characterized as a "third wave of Calvinism" in American Christian experience.

B. Response to the State of American Christianity:

- **Perceived Division and Gap:** Neo-Orthodox theologians saw American Christianity as "seriously divided" between bankrupt Protestant liberalism (on the left) and rigid, narrow American fundamentalism (on the right), both failing to fulfill their promises.
- **Strategy of Appeal:** Their strategy was to appeal to the "broad middle Protestants" disaffected by both liberalism and fundamentalism.
- **Emphasis on Sound Biblical Theology and Intellectual Engagement:** Their appeal centered on offering a "sound biblical theology" presented in a "very carefully prescribed intellectual way," emphasizing critical and careful interpretation of the Bible using their minds.

C. Allowances and Embrace of Certain Cultural Developments:

The Neo-Orthodox movement allowed for or embraced the following:

- **Scientific Freedom:** Believing "all truth is God's truth," they saw science not as an enemy but as a separate pursuit of truth.

- **Biblical Criticism:** They advocated for engaging with biblical criticism intellectually, finding a middle ground between liberal embrace and fundamentalist rejection.
- **Development of Urban Culture:** Unlike some Christians, they did not shy away from urban life but sought ways for the church to engage and minister within it.
- **Criticism of American Socio-Economic Structures:** They allowed for and engaged in "pretty heavily, pretty strongly critical" analysis of the social and economic structures of American public life, viewing some aspects as unbiblical.

Conclusion:

Dr. Green's lectures provide a detailed overview of the Social Gospel movement, highlighting its key figures, theological underpinnings, and significant contributions to American Christianity while also acknowledging potential theological challenges. The introduction to Neo-Orthodoxy sets the stage for understanding a subsequent theological movement that emerged in response to the prevailing religious landscape and social crises of the 20th century.

4. Study Guide: Green, American Christianity, Session 20, The Social Gospel in America, Part 2

The Social Gospel and Neo-Orthodoxy in American Christianity

Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. Who is considered the "father of the social gospel" and what were his main motivations for promoting this movement?
2. Describe Walter Rauschenbusch's concept of the "kingdom of God" and how he believed the church could contribute to its realization in the 20th century.
3. What were the two primary "corporate evils" that Rauschenbusch identified as contributing to the chaos of World War I in his book *The Theology of the Social Gospel*?
4. According to the lecture, what were the three key areas of community life where social gospelers looked for signs of the kingdom of God at work, beyond the church itself?
5. While social gospelers emphasized the "perfectibility of humanity," how did Rauschenbusch himself maintain a more nuanced view regarding human nature?
6. What were the three major theological difficulties or criticisms associated with the development of the social gospel movement, as discussed in the lecture?
7. Name three specific social injustices that the social gospel movement helped to bring to light in American society.
8. Beyond saving souls, what three types of missions were emphasized by those influenced by the social gospel, reflecting a more holistic understanding of missionary work?
9. Define Neo-Orthodoxy and identify the primary lens through which its theologians interpreted the Bible.
10. According to the lecture, what was the "gap" in American Christianity that Neo-Orthodoxy sought to fill, and what was their primary strategy for appealing to American Protestants?

Answer Key

1. Walter Rauschenbusch is considered the father of the social gospel. His main motivations stemmed from his experience ministering in impoverished areas of New York City and a desire to apply Christian principles to address social injustices and transform society.
2. Rauschenbusch viewed the "kingdom of God" not just as a community of the redeemed, but also as the transformation of society and culture to align with God's will. He believed the church could help bring this about by alleviating evil, fighting injustice, and working for social reform and political action.
3. The two primary "corporate evils" identified by Rauschenbusch were the "lust for unearned gain," which he believed all nations demonstrated, and imperialistic powers, reflecting a universal desire for colonization and domination over others.
4. The three key areas were government, where even secular leaders might work for kingdom results; commerce and business, which should operate for the common good; and family life, seen as the foundation for a kingdom society.
5. While recognizing the potential for human perfectibility, Rauschenbusch, unlike some of his successors, maintained an evangelical perspective that also acknowledged the reality of individual sinfulness and the need for God's grace.
6. The three difficulties were whether their interpretation of Jesus' message of the kingdom was accurate (particularly regarding its political nature), the tendency of later generations to deny individual sin and become overly reactive against pietism, and the problematic association of the kingdom of God with the advancement of Western culture.
7. Three social injustices that came to light were the bad working relationships between capital and labor, unfair wages for workers, and poor and exploitative working conditions including long hours.
8. Beyond saving souls, the social gospel influenced the emphasis on agricultural missions, medical missions, and educational missions, reflecting a recognition of people's holistic needs beyond the spiritual.
9. Neo-Orthodoxy, or the New Orthodoxy, was a 20th-century theological movement committed to the Bible and critical of Protestant liberalism and fundamentalism. They primarily used the lens of the Reformation, particularly the theology of John Calvin, to interpret scripture.

10. The "gap" was the perceived unsatisfactory options of Protestant liberalism (seen as bankrupt) and American fundamentalism (seen as too rigid and narrow). Their strategy was to appeal to broad middle Protestants disaffected by these movements by offering a sound biblical theology presented intellectually.

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the key theological tenets of the Social Gospel movement as presented by Dr. Green, focusing on the concept of the Kingdom of God and its implications for social action and the role of the church.
2. Compare and contrast Walter Rauschenbusch's perspective on social change and the nature of evil in *Christianity and the Social Crisis* with his views expressed in *The Theology of the Social Gospel* in light of World War I.
3. Evaluate the contributions of the Social Gospel movement to American Christianity, considering both its positive influences on social awareness and action, as well as the theological criticisms it faced.
4. Explain the emergence of Neo-Orthodoxy as a response to the perceived shortcomings of both Protestant liberalism and American fundamentalism, highlighting its key characteristics and its approach to interpreting the Bible and engaging with modern culture.
5. Discuss the lasting legacy of the Social Gospel movement on contemporary American Christianity and its ongoing relevance in addressing issues of social justice, poverty, and the role of faith in public life.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Social Gospel:** A Protestant intellectual and reform movement prominent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that applied Christian ethics to social problems such as poverty, inequality, crime, and injustice.
- **Kingdom of God:** A central concept for Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel movement, referring not only to a spiritual realm but also to the transformation of society to reflect God's justice and righteousness.
- **Corporate Evil:** Systemic or structural forms of evil that exist within institutions, societies, and nations, beyond individual sin, as emphasized by Social Gospel thinkers.
- **Perfectibility of Humanity:** The belief, held by many Social Gospellers, that human beings and society are capable of progressive improvement and eventual perfection, often linked to the advancement of Christian values.
- **Pietism:** A Christian movement emphasizing personal devotion, inner religious experience, and practical Christian living, sometimes criticized by Social Gospellers for neglecting social concerns.
- **Hermeneutics:** The theory and methodology of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts.
- **Neo-Orthodoxy:** A 20th-century theological movement that sought to recover the authority of scripture and the transcendence of God in response to liberal theology, using Reformation theology as a primary interpretive lens.
- **Protestant Liberalism:** A theological movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that emphasized reason, experience, and the immanence of God, often employing higher criticism of the Bible.
- **American Fundamentalism:** A conservative Protestant movement that arose in the early 20th century in reaction to liberal theology and higher criticism, emphasizing the literal inerrancy of the Bible and other traditional doctrines.
- **Social Ministry:** Activities undertaken by religious individuals and organizations to address social needs and injustices, reflecting a practical application of faith to societal problems.

5. FAQs Green, American Christianity, Session 20, The Social Gospel in America, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: The Social Gospel and Neo-Orthodoxy in American Christianity

1. Who was Walter Rauschenbusch and why is he considered a significant figure in American Christianity?

Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) was a Baptist minister and theologian who is widely regarded as the father of the Social Gospel movement in American Protestantism. Spending eleven years ministering in a poor parish in New York City profoundly shaped his understanding of the systemic nature of social problems. He sought to connect Christian faith with social justice, arguing that the Kingdom of God was not just a future hope but a present reality that Christians were called to actively bring about through social reform and ethical living. His influential books, particularly *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907) and *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (1917), articulated this vision and critiqued the social injustices of his time. Rauschenbusch's work significantly reshaped Christian thought by emphasizing the corporate dimensions of sin and salvation and calling the church to address issues like poverty, unfair labor practices, and inequality.

2. What were the key themes of Walter Rauschenbusch's book, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*?

Rauschenbusch's *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907) centered on several key themes. Firstly, he emphasized the **concept of the Kingdom of God** as the central message of Jesus, arguing that the church should actively work to bring its principles into the modern world and alleviate evil. Secondly, he believed that the **church could be instrumental in ushering in the Kingdom of God** by fighting against social evils. Thirdly, Rauschenbusch sought to **wed biblical studies, religion, and ethics**, believing that all good theology should lead to ethical action and that the Bible contained ethical mandates for social life. He also held a favorable view of more **democratically oriented churches** like Baptists and Methodists, seeing them as better positioned to enact social change compared to hierarchical structures.

3. How did World War I impact Rauschenbusch's thinking, as reflected in his book *A Theology for the Social Gospel*?

The devastation and chaos of World War I significantly influenced Rauschenbusch's perspective in *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (1917). The optimism present in his earlier work was tempered by the stark reality of global conflict. He grappled with the problem of evil on a corporate level, identifying the **"lust for unearned gain" and "imperialistic powers"** as root causes of the war, arguing that no nation was exempt from these tendencies. Despite this acknowledgment of widespread evil, Rauschenbusch **maintained hope for the future and the restoration of God's kingdom**, emphasizing the biblical narrative of God's ultimate victory over evil. He also urged Christians to actively participate in this restoration, particularly by **Christianizing international relations** in the post-war era.

4. What were the core tenets of the theology of the Social Gospel movement beyond Rauschenbusch's individual contributions?

The theology of the Social Gospel, which Rauschenbusch significantly shaped, held several core tenets. The **Kingdom of God** remained a central concept, understood not just as a spiritual reality but as a force for the **transformation of society and culture**. Social Gospelers believed in the **perfectibility of humanity**, seeing the progress of Christianity and the Christianization of American culture as signs of this. They emphasized the **church's alignment with the working classes** as crucial for social transformation and focused on **corporate and systemic evil** (like poverty, oppression, and injustice) alongside individual sin. Social reform and political action were seen as inseparable means of advancing the Kingdom's work in areas like government, business, and family life.

5. What were some of the major criticisms or theological difficulties associated with the Social Gospel movement?

Despite its positive contributions, the Social Gospel faced several theological criticisms. One major concern revolved around its **interpretation of the Kingdom of God**, with critics arguing that it overly politicized the concept and deviated from Jesus's emphasis on a spiritual kingdom. Secondly, some believed that later generations of Social Gospelers **downplayed or denied the reality of individual sin and the necessity of personal redemption** in their focus on social reform, sometimes becoming more of a reaction against pietism. Thirdly, the movement was criticized for its tendency to **associate the Kingdom of God with the advancement of Western culture**, potentially

leading to a lack of critical engagement with and inclusivity towards non-Western cultures.

6. What were some of the significant contributions of the Social Gospel movement to American Christianity and society?

The Social Gospel movement made several lasting contributions to American Christianity and society. It **focused attention on the corporate aspects of life**, highlighting social injustices such as poor working conditions, unfair wages and hours, and the plight of the poor. It **influenced major institutions** like churches, seminaries, and colleges to study theology and ethics with a social focus, often crossing denominational lines. Many denominations **established offices of social ministry** as a result. The movement was instrumental in **founding numerous institutions** like schools, daycare centers, hospitals, and housing initiatives aimed at serving the poor. Finally, it broadened the understanding of **missionary work** to include not only evangelism but also agricultural, medical, and educational ministries, emphasizing a holistic view of human needs.

7. What was Neo-Orthodoxy and what were its primary aims in the 20th century?

Neo-Orthodoxy, also known as the New Orthodoxy, was a theological movement that emerged primarily in the 20th century. Its adherents were **committed to the Bible and its central message**, reacting against what they perceived as the watering down of biblical truth by Protestant liberalism through extreme biblical criticism. They aimed to **return to the core message of the Bible** and often used the **Reformation, particularly the theology of John Calvin**, as a lens for interpreting scripture. Neo-Orthodox theologians felt that American Christianity was divided between a bankrupt Protestant liberalism and a rigid, narrow fundamentalism, and they sought to appeal to a broad middle ground with a sound biblical theology presented in a carefully intellectual manner.

8. How did Neo-Orthodox theologians view the relationship between Christianity and culture, and what were some of the positions they adopted?

Neo-Orthodox theologians held a nuanced view of the relationship between Christianity and culture. They **allowed for scientific freedom**, believing that truth was unified and that science was not inherently an enemy of religion. While critical of extreme liberalism, they **allowed for biblical criticism**, advocating for an intellectual engagement rather than outright rejection. Unlike some Christians who retreated from urban life, Neo-Orthodoxy **embraced the development of urban culture**, seeking ways for the church to minister within it. Crucially, they were **critical of the social and economic structures of American public life**, viewing some of these structures as unbiblical and advocating for social criticism and reform. This engagement with culture, while maintaining a strong commitment to biblical theology, distinguished them from both liberal and fundamentalist approaches.