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TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE SOCIAL GOSPEL IMPACT BAPTIST THEOLOGY AND
PRACTICE IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY?

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HISTORY OF THE EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT

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In 1907, Baptist activist Walter Rauschenbusch published *Christianity and the Social Order*, articulating a movement that had been bubbling in Protestantism now known as the Social Gospel. In just five years after this publication, Rauschenbusch believed that the call for action had “won popular opinion beyond [his] boldest hopes”; in short, he believed the movement had won the battle for the future of Protestantism¹. Almost immediately, however, another group of American Protestants, the Fundamentalists, gained prominence, with a very different paradigm on faith’s role in social progress. There were Baptists on both the Social Gospel and Fundamentalist side of this debate. After a turbulent twentieth century of depression, world wars, cold wars, terrorism, and the explosion of digital technology, how much did this early twentieth century movement truly impact Baptists in America? Was this just one of many passing fads in American religion as the country entered the twentieth century, or as Rauschenbusch envisioned, was this swelling movement in Evangelicalism a larger force for change? Several arguments for an ineffective Social Gospel movement, and several for a highly effective Social Gospel movement will be considered, with an emphasis on how important elements of Baptist faith and practice have been impacted today, and to what degree.

Before proceeding, several terms must be defined. Historian Susan Curtis defines the Social Gospel in two ways: the religious expression of the socially concerned politics of the early twentieth century, and as a Christian response to the urban problems of late nineteenth century

¹ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (Basingstoke, UK: MacMillian Publishing, 1912), vii.

America: immigration, industrialization, urbanization, etc². In general, proponents of the Social Gospel felt their faith called them to care for their neighbor both individually, and through conforming the “fundamental structure of society” to “the moral demands of the Christian Spirit”³. Though it is not the subject of this essay, Fundamentalism will be addressed, insofar as it impacts Baptist faith and practice in conjunction with and in response to the Social Gospel. Though fundamentalism is not always diametrically opposed to the Social Gospel, there is evidence that it has often been a reactive force against the movement. It is hard to define fundamentalism with much precision. Fundamentalism can be described in several ways, including the famous “five fundamentals” of scriptural inerrancy, the virgin birth of Christ, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection, and the authenticity of miracles. For the purposes of this essay, Fundamentalists will usually be defined as zealous adherents to these fundamentals, or those who ascribed the label to themselves in history. In general, Fundamentalists unite around conservative faith which they believe to be preserving of the Christian tradition, often in contrast to the more innovative thinking of the Social Gospel.

In order to fully consider the extent to which the Social Gospel impacted Baptists, it is important to consider arguments against a large effect. One argument against the impact of the Social Gospel comes in the failure of postmillennialism to remain the prevailing eschatological view of Baptists into the mid twentieth century. The Social Gospel could perhaps be viewed as the ultimate realization of a long-held Protestant belief in postmillennialism: believers were bringing about the Kingdom of God in the lives of their neighbors, in preparation for Christ.

² Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1991), 2-3.

³ Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, viii.

Most of the intellectual weight behind the Social Gospel, including Walter Rauschenbusch, held postmillennial views. As the Social Gospel movement was growing to prominence, however, a newly held premillennial dispensationalist view began to grow. Unlike postmillennial Social Gospel adherents, these premillennialists had to prove the validity of their view. In so doing, they successfully made the claim that they were “not speculating when prayerfully studying prophecy”, but that their interpretations were the simple, plain, literal meanings of Scripture⁴. Such assertions convinced many Evangelicals who would have normally questioned the validity of such a recent theological development. Dr. William Moorehead of United Presbyterian Seminary, was even able to claim that premillennial views were held by “Old-fashioned Christians”, who had “for centuries believed that the glorious advent of Christ will be accompanied by the most majestic tokens of the Divine Presence”, in direct opposition to the gradual recognition of the millennium recognized by Rauschenbusch and Social Gospel supporters⁵. Rauschenbusch openly admitted that Social Gospel eschatology was fairly broad, and the product of “an historical mosaic combining fragments of non-Christian and pre-Christian systems with genuine Christian ideas.”⁶ When facing a choice between a blatantly described “mosaic” of beliefs and a system that claimed to be the simple reading of the Scriptures, the answer seemed obvious to many believers. The premillennial position grew through heavyweight figures such as Dwight Moody, and through the popular and affordable Scofield Reference Bible, which explained the dispensationalist view, verse by verse, as the proper interpretation of Scripture. Premillennial Dispensationalism has so impacted Protestantism that popular books and

⁴ William E. Blackstone, *Jesus is Coming* (Chicago, 1908), 19.

⁵ William Moorehead, “The Millennial Dawn” *The Fundamentals Volume IV*, (Reprinted in Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 121.

⁶ Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1917), 209.

movies are made based on the concept, assuming its theological validity. Not only was this a theological displacement of postmillennialism, however; it questioned the very premises of the Social Gospel. Admonitions from Christ to humility and concern for neighbor found in the Sermon on the Mount were now relegated to the former “dispensation of the law”, not the current parenthetical “dispensation of grace.”⁷ Instead of using faith to justify social reform, dispensationalists would argue that the main goal of the Christian faith, because of eschatology, is to remain a holy remnant for Christ; God’s spiritual people. The prevalence of this premillennial worldview in modern Baptist theology could be a strong argument against a highly effective Social Gospel.

A companion to this eschatological change was the conservative assertion of the Bible’s “literal” truthfulness. The Social Gospel movement, on the other hand, generally utilized higher criticism in their reading of the Bible, contextualizing the author of a passage in the setting of “the social group which produced him,... the spiritual predecessors who inspired him, and... the audience which moved him.”⁸ Rauschenbusch spoke highly of this interpretive method, claiming that it allowed for a faithful, communal reading of the Scriptures. Fundamentalism, however, sought a highly individualized “high” view biblical inspiration, devoting large works to the denouncement of higher criticism. In fact, Sir Robert Anderson wrote that believers “must make a choice between Christ and Criticism”, reasoning that Jesus assumes the literal factuality of the Pentateuch⁹. This call for “biblical literalism” certainly did not win over all of Protestantism, but

⁷ C. I. Scofield, ed. *The Scofield Reference Bible*, (New York, 1917), 1002, 1089 in *Fundamentalism and American Culture* by George Marsden, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 52.

⁸ Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 190.

⁹ Sir Robert Anderson, “Christ and Criticism” in *The Fundamentals Vol. 1*, 120.

proved highly compelling for many Christians throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. As the century progressed, this assertion continued with books such as Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible* and theological works like the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy". The prominence of this movement rendered hollow Rauschenbusch's claim of higher criticism as the singular modern view in 1917. These conversations about how to interpret the Bible, or to what degree to admit interpretation continue in Baptist life to this day.

While issues of theology are important to understand in arguing against a highly effective Social Gospel movement, issues of practice also tell a compelling story. For example, though Social Gospel theology was certainly not opposed to personal attempts at sanctification, the Holiness movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were often characterized as more important to the Christian life than social reform. For example, Charles Trumbull argued that any Sunday School program bringing the good news of Jesus "lifts society as the usual Social Service program can never do."¹⁰ Through statements like this, influential Christians created an imagined dichotomy between social action and evangelism the framers of the Social Gospel never intended. Walter Rauschenbusch never denied the importance of evangelism, stating that "salvation of the individual is, of course, an essential part of salvation."¹¹ The Social Gospel movement as a whole, pushed for an involved church who found their role in the "social factor" of salvation. This differing emphasis was shocking to the Holiness movement, with their ultimate emphasis on personal salvation and experience with the Spirit. This personal salvation

¹⁰ Charles Trumbull, "The Sunday School's True Evangelism" in *The Fundamentals Vol. III*, 215.

¹¹ Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 95.

priority has persisted in the faith, practice, and revivalist instinct of Baptists in America since this time.

Perhaps the strongest argument against a highly effective Social Gospel movement, however, is the catastrophic impact of World War I and World War II on the progressive movement and the Social Gospel. The hopeful postmillennialism of the Social Gospel no longer made sense in the presence of modern warfare. The Church had failed to prevent the horrors of world war, so how could the Church take a role in social salvation? Despite Rauschenbusch's excitement that social religion had overtaken Protestantism in the 1910s, it became obvious that conservative evangelicalism was becoming increasingly prevalent in the mid-century. In place of a Social Gospel focus on the oppressed, Harold J. Ockenga boldly declared to the students of Fuller Seminary that "the greatest proof that there is a God upon the throne... is the fact that God brought to pass a judgment on Europe and particularly upon the German people."¹² To this new brand of American conservative religion, the destruction of Europe and the genocide of the Jews in the horrors of war were not the results of the unexplainable darkness of original sin, but a direct punishment for their ungodliness and lack of faith. To these conservative American Protestants, things were not, and would never be, getting any better. This darker, more exacting narrative proved more compelling to many Baptists. After the initial fervor of the Social Gospel, many mainline denominations saw a decline by the 1930s, with Lutheranism and Mainline Episcopalianism in America seeing 5 and 6.5% decreases between 1926 and 1936,

¹² Harold John Ockenga, "The Challenge to the Christian Culture of the West: Opening Convocation, October 1, 1947." Republished in Fuller Studio. April 22, 2016. Accessed November 5, 2017. [<https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/the-challenge-to-the-christian-culture-of-the-west-opening-convocation-october-1-1947/>].

respectively¹³. Because Fundamentalism generally had no denominational label in this time period, it is harder to quantify exactly how much the more conservative view was growing, but Moody's Successor R. A. Torrey insists in the four-volume edition of *The Fundamentals* that his material was in high and growing demand around the nation¹⁴. In the following decades, a more conservative Protestantism would take root in America, consistently outgrowing their mainline, more Social Gospel prone, counterpart denominations. If Social Gospel theology and practice had been starkly tied to the success of mainline denominations, it would have ceased in the mid twentieth century.

The Social Gospel did not find its success in ardent denominationalism, though. While some compelling evidence against an effective Social Gospel movement is available, other evidences point toward a lasting movement within Protestantism and Baptist practice. For example, there is some evidence that Social Gospel theology began to impact more traditional missionary agencies as time went on. To demonstrate this trend over time, reports from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board were closely examined from the years 1912 and 1928¹⁵. Upon close inspection of all available reports from 1912, a banner year for the Social Gospel, one cannot find approved extra-budgeted expenditure for any need not directly related to personnel, Bible printing, or evangelism¹⁶. The missionaries and the Board were surely aware of

¹³ US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Religious Bodies, 1936, vol. 2 *Denominations* (Washington D. C.: US Government Publication, 1941) 1386, 1478.

¹⁴ R. A. Torey, "Preface", *The Fundamentals*, i.

¹⁵ All reports from 1912 and 1928 were read, giving a sixteen-year span for the diffusion of Social Gospel ideas into the praxis of this large missionary agency. This time span purposely includes a major milestone in Southern Baptist social consciousness: the founding of the Social Services Commission.

¹⁶ All Foreign Mission Board reports and account balance sheets before 1979 are available through the International Mission Board's archival web site at: [<https://solomon.imb.org/public/ws/OLDMIN/WWW2/MINUTESP/SearchForm>].

social needs of the communities in which they worked, but would either deny unplanned funding to social projects, such as a hospital expansion in China,¹⁷ or suggest that funds be raised through individual fundraising efforts¹⁸. In contrast, however, social needs of foreign communities were more seriously considered for unplanned funds by 1928. The Board began approving small expenditures for non-evangelistic expenses such as mosquito netting for a Mexican village, school funding in South America, and a large unanticipated grant of \$2,500 for famine relief in China¹⁹. Over time, Baptists have grown more comfortable with these expenditures, to the point that they now seem commonplace. It is also important to note that in the November 1928 minutes, the Board notes that “after two trials the readers of the manuscripts submitted upon *Evangelical Christianity: An Alternative for a Lost or Decaying Religious Faith* have failed to find a satisfactory manuscript.”²⁰ Not only was the board beginning to expend unexpected funds on

¹⁷ Point 6 under the China report of the Board Meeting for July 10, 1912 stated they “cannot provide funds for the enlarging of the Warren Memorial Hospital.” Large expenditures for personnel issues, however were approved at this meeting.

Foreign Mission Board, *Minutes of the July 10, 1912 Board Meeting*. Accessed November 10, 2017: [https://solomon.imb.org/public/ws/oldmin/www2/minutesp/Record?parenttreeid=374139&sessiondepth=2&parentreeid=374139&sessiondepth=2&w=NATIVE%28%27MIN_DATE+%3C%3D+%27%271%2F1%2F1937%27%27%27%29&upp=0&order=native%28%27MIN_DATE%2FDescend%27%29&rpp=10&r=1&m=317].

¹⁸ The September 10, 1912 meeting records that Board members voted to “allow Brother C. G. McDaniel to raise in America \$600 to furnish the Boys' School in Soochow.”

Foreign Mission Board, *Minutes of the September 10, 1912 Board Meeting*. Accessed November 10, 2017: [https://solomon.imb.org/public/ws/oldmin/www2/minutesp/Record?parenttreeid=374139&sessiondepth=2&parentreeid=374139&sessiondepth=2&w=NATIVE%28%27MIN_DATE+%3C%3D+%27%271%2F1%2F1937%27%27%27%29&upp=0&order=native%28%27MIN_DATE%2FDescend%27%29&rpp=10&r=1&m=314].

¹⁹ Foreign Mission Board, *Minutes of the April 5, 1928 Board Meeting*. Accessed November 10, 2017: [https://solomon.imb.org/public/ws/oldmin/www2/minutesp/Record?parenttreeid=220530&sessiondepth=2&w=NATIVE%28%27MIN_DATE+%3E%3D+%27%2701%2F01%2F1928%27%27%27%29&upp=0&order=native%28%27MIN_DATE%2FDescend%27%29&rpp=10&r=1&m=595].

²⁰ Foreign Mission Board, *Minutes of the November 27, 1928 Board Meeting*. Accessed November 11, 2017: [https://solomon.imb.org/public/ws/oldmin/www2/minutesp/Record?parenttreeid=5578877&sessiondepth=2&w=NATIVE%28%27MIN_DATE+%3C%3D+%27%2703%2F01%2F1929%27%27%27%29&upp=0&order=native%28%27MIN_DATE%2FDescend%27%29&rpp=10&r=1&m=2].

social causes, they were finding formal arguments for an “alternative” faith to the mainline Social Gospel expression unsatisfactory. Denominational minutiae aside, these trends suggest that though there were continuing articulations of the primacy of evangelism in church programs and missions, the praxis of at least one Baptist denomination in the South began to incorporate Social Gospel teachings into their normal practice within a few years of the dawn of the Northern movement. Such shifts in a missionary agency might lead one to believe that evangelism was being devalued in the push for a Social Gospel, but it should be remembered that Rauschenbusch defined “secular education,” “philanthropic effort” and “denominational propaganda” as secondary concerns within missions²¹. Any distortion of the original Social Gospel definition of missions is in error; the presence of Baptist missions with a primary emphasis on evangelism, and a secondary emphasis on social issues are exactly as Rauschenbusch intended. These denominational social efforts within missionary agencies, though sometimes challenged by opponents, remain an integral fixture in Baptist groups.

If the changes in denominational missions need to be closely studied to be found, the increased social concern within denominations is much more evident in the creation of new institutions for social action within American Protestant life. For example, in a striking move that one editorial from the time dared to “venture to think will be declined”, the Methodist Episcopal Church adopted a creed in 1908, including a social creed²². This creed exists, in adapted form,

²¹ Walter Rauschenbusch, “Conception of Missions” *The Watchman* November 1892 quoted in “The relationship of Walter Rauschenbusch to foreign missions: the social gospel and cultural change”. By Charles Weber. *American Baptist Quarterly* 33, no. 2, (Ipswich, MA: American Baptist Historical Society, 2014), 215-228.

²² “A New Methodist Creed.” *The Independent ...Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts*, Vol. 64:3103. (New York: The Independent, May 21, 1908), 1155.

today and guides much of the work of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society²³. Baptists, of course, didn't adopt explicit social creeds, but did create social organizations with hefty political weight. In 1913, the Southern Baptist Convention created the Social Service Commission citing "the Christian's responsibility in social relations with special reference to marriage and the family, crime and juvenile delinquency, industrial relations, race relations, beverage alcohol, [and] Christian citizenship."²⁴ These issues, especially race relations and the concept of Christian citizenship would seem wildly out of place to proponents of an individualistic faith, and the impact the commission had on these issues in early days is debatable, but the presence of the group is a definite sign of a strong impact of the Social Gospel. The creation of a commission to address these issues is impressive by itself, but the enduring history of this commission, transitioning to the Christian Life Commission and today's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission show that, even if some of the issues have changed, the denomination has committed to an enduring Social Gospel ethic of concern for the society around them. These institutions and commissions endure strongly, with little opposition, in Baptist life today.

Beyond denomination-wide national efforts, the Christian concern for others characteristic to the Social Gospel began to permeate the daily lives of many individual Baptists. The true degree of impact this permeation caused is evident however, because this Christian concern did not only impact Northern believers, but also Southern Christians. Though the Social Gospel was in many ways a characteristically Northern phenomenon, historians such as Wayne

²³ The United Methodist Church, "Our Social Creed" *The Book of Discipline Online* (United Methodist Publishing House, 2016). Accessed November 24, 2017. [<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/our-social-creed>].

²⁴ Quoted by A. C. Miller in "The Christian Life Commission", *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, Vol. I, Ed. Norman Wade Cox, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 260.

Flynt have been discovering that the Social Gospel influenced Southern believers too, albeit in smaller ways, without a formal title. For example, the articulate, urban Social Gospel concern of the North once diffused into a rowdy push for populist reform in Milam County, Texas as pastor J. D. Shelton railed against anyone returning to Democrat party politics as one who would “crawl up to them like a lick-spittle, and lick the nasty political democratic snot off their feet.²⁵” Beyond this explicit political involvement, however, there is evidence that some individuals in the South were rethinking their involvement with the poor as part of their understanding of Christian commitment. These Southern voices often began to echo Social Gospel conclusions, with a writer in one state newspaper going so far as to name the “soullessness of corporations” in describing the conditions of laborers²⁶. This editorial was sent to Baptists in North Carolina, and the sentiment no doubt impacted many individual readers. One Baptist seminarian even went as far as to say in a 1919 dissertation that the church “must preach the gospel to the poor in a far richer way than she has ever yet done. She must proclaim liberty to those who are bound and make as her supreme social task the elevation of human society.²⁷” Though there was definite push back against such concerns, and attempts by some to focus only on evangelistic efforts, the impact of emphases similar to these two examples are still felt in Baptist practice today. These personal political efforts and social commentaries are early examples of endeavors still at work

²⁵ J. D. Shelton, quoted in Greg Cantrell, “Populism to Progressivism in Milan County, Texas,” paper presented in November, 1989, to Southern Historical Association, Quoted by Wayne Flynt, “Not an island unto itself: Southern Baptists and the new theological trends (liberalism, ecumenism, and the social gospel), 1890-1940.” *American Baptist Quarterly* 22, no. 2, (Ipswich, MA: American Baptist Historical Society, 2002), 158-179.

²⁶ J. W. Bailey in the *Biblical Recorder* of North Carolina, quoted in Carl D. English, “The Ethical Emphases of the Editors of Baptist Journals Published in the Southeastern Region of the United States, 1865-1915” (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1948), quoted by Wayne Flynt, “The impact of social factors on Southern Baptist expansion, 1800-1914.” *Baptist History And Heritage* 17, no. 3 (Macon, GA: Baptist History and Heritage Society, 1982) 20-31.

²⁷ W. R. Meroney *The Old Church in the New Era* 1919, quoted in “The impact of social factors on Southern Baptist expansion.”

in Baptist faith; from the inclusion of “social justice” in some form in denominational missionary agencies, to the budgets of most local Baptist congregations including some money for social efforts, to the current invocation of religion into national politics.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of an effective Social Gospel movement, however is the enduring presence of Fundamentalism in American religion. Though some adherents to fundamentalist theology have come to their position proactively, it is most often a reactive position; decrying the ills of culture, and, though they may not use the term outright, reacting against the Social Gospel. Fundamentalists viewed Christian efforts to reform and save the already damned world as ineffective at best, or at worst, delaying Christ’s return and encouraging the work of Satan. For example, Isaac Halderman wrote of prohibition that allowing the world to indulge in sinful drunkenness would rush the appearance of Christ, while “the Devil would be glad to see prohibition successful.²⁸” Such reforms were after all, only outward attempts at holiness, not actual, Christ honoring conversions. One could argue that without a distinctively Christian push for holiness and morality in the public sphere, Halderman would not have had as fiery of a topic with which to defend his fundamentalist beliefs. Because of their premillennial dispensationalist eschatology, fundamentalists would always be convinced of the downward spiral of society, but having distinctively Christian social efforts against these perceived “signs of the times” showed an even greater level of apostacy in the Church. At its core, the Social Gospel is about engaging with culture at a deep level, allowing the Gospel to impact society at spiritual and physical levels. Fundamentalism, on the other hand, had proponents such as A. C. Gaebelein declaring that “God’s greatest call is separation” from the

²⁸ Isaac M. Halderman, *The Signs of the Times*, Seventh Edition (Philadelphia: Philadelphia School of the Bible, 1919), 199.

culture and that God's "people are to have no fellowship with the works of darkness."²⁹ The very presence of this sentiment in Baptist theology shows that the engagement of the Social Gospel with society, as well as the movement's insistence on newer methods of Bible study and postmillennial eschatology were detestable to fundamentalists. Their increased zeal in defending what they felt to be the fundamentals of the faith to this day shows the prominence of the movement to which they are reacting.

In conclusion, there are some who cite several reasons to believe that the Social Gospel did not leave enough of an impact on Baptist faith and practice to remain relevant today. When discussing these evidences, it is important to note that postmillennialism, the primary eschatological view of the Social Gospel, has not survived in large numbers within American Christianity today. In response to the Social Gospel, a plea for so called "biblical literalism" has arisen in evangelicalism and Baptist life, proving more compelling in many contexts than the more nuanced views of Scripture held by the Social Gospel's proponents. Another factor to consider in evaluating a weaker view of the impact of the Social Gospel is the prominence of Holiness movements since the early twentieth century and their emphasis on personal, rather than societal issues. This personal emphasis devalues much of communal emphasis the Social Gospel supports. The strongest evidence in opposition to a highly effective Social Gospel movement is the triumph of more conservative Baptist denominations in the American midcentury in comparison to the declining Protestant mainline. If the impact of the Social Gospel were to only be measured by the current population of the denominations with which it was originally associated, it would be highly ineffective indeed.

²⁹ A. C. Gaebelein, "The Present Day Apostacy" *The Coming and Kingdom of Christ: A Stenographic Report of the Prophetic Bible Conference Held at the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago Feb. 24-27, 1914*, Ed. James M. Gray, (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1914), 154.

In opposition to these evidences, there are also reasons to contend for a more highly effective Social Gospel. Missions agencies of Baptist denominations, in defiance of fundamentalist appeals to only spread the Gospel through evangelism, began to fund social endeavors as a matter of mission and Christian practice. In response to the Social Gospel, Baptists formed organizations to promote social change with a Christian purpose. These commissions remain alive, vibrant, and increased to this day. Beyond these national bodies and statements though, there is ample evidence that the Social Gospel impacted not just the theology of nationwide Baptist denominations, but the practice of individual Baptists, calling some to political action, and others to view the current systems in a new light. The strongest argument for a highly effective Social Gospel movement, however, is the enduring opposition to it. Fundamentalist belief thrives in disagreement with diverging cultural positions, and to this day fundamentalists decry the social involvement and explicitly Social theology and practice of many Baptists.

To what degree did the Social Gospel impact Baptists? The evidence shows that the movement left an enduring concern for individuals and societal structures in not just the theology, but the practice of both large denominational groups of Baptists and individual believers. The transformation seems total, permanently impacting Baptists in the United States, and consistently admonishing them to love their neighbor. The presence of opposition does not mean that this movement failed; no, the continual voice of disagreement shows that the Social Gospel has left an everlasting mark on Baptists.

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