

all other sins, they should repent in dust and ashes. One only is pure and spotless—the great Head of the Church, who redeemed it with his precious blood.

But the historian finds, on the other hand, in every age and in every Church, the footprints of Christ, the abundant manifestations of his Spirit, and a slow but sure progress toward that ideal Church which St. Paul describes as “the fullness of him who fill[s] all in all.”

The study of Church history, like travel in foreign lands, destroys prejudice, enlarges the horizon, liberalizes the mind, and deepens charity. . . . The study of history—“with malice toward none, but with charity for all”—will bring the denominations closer together in an humble recognition of their defects and a grateful praise for the good which the same Spirit as wrought in them and through them.

Seagar, Catholics who spoke at the Parliament were able to “gain a wider hearing in the Protestant dominated mainstream”; while the Jewish delegation “emphasized the contributions of Judaism to western religion and theology, Jewish views on social issues, and Jewish/Christian relations.”³ Even though the Parliament of Religion was shaped by Anglo-American Protestants who sometimes treated representatives of non-Christian groups as exotics, it nevertheless marked a growing awareness of global religions.

Christians in the Progressive Era

The Columbian Exposition with its World Parliament of Religion was the crowning glory of the progressive era. In light of its many achievements since Columbus, America seemed poised to lead the world into an age of peace and prosperity. In reality, however, industrialization confronted the U.S. with a daunting set of problems. Millions of factory workers lived in poverty, while a few business tycoons grew spectacularly rich. Several big-city governments were corrupt “machines” run by “bosses” who dispensed favors in return for votes. Rural life also had its problems; farmers tried to adapt to a changing economy, only to find themselves

at the mercy of railroad companies to ship their produce to faraway markets. During this era, three presidents—Theodore Roosevelt, Robert Taft, and Woodrow Wilson—sought reforms; but the “progressive era” was by no means limited to politics. Historian Robert Crunden describes progressivism as a “climate of creativity, religious to the core.” Progressivism tried to “restore the proper balances among Protestant moral values, capitalistic competition, and democratic processes, which the expansion of business in the gilded age seemed to have changed in alarming ways.”⁴ The religious dimension of the progressive era was the “Social Gospel,” and it expressed Christian themes.

Some Christian leaders sought to reform society at the national level. They supported labor unions, worked to pass laws prohibiting child labor, and lobbied to secure public education for all children. But the two great pillars of progressive reform at the national level were Prohibition (the attempt to ban alcohol from society) and women’s suffrage. Many reformers believed that a national ban on alcohol would help to alleviate urban poverty and that extending the vote to women would instill compassion and virtue into public life.

At the local level, city churches were on the front lines of the battle with urban poverty. Although some churches sold their downtown



Fig. 6.1 This image shows the 1893 Chicago World's Fair (also called the Columbian Exposition) for which a "White City" of exhibit halls and fairgrounds was constructed. The World Parliament of Religion was part of this grand spectacle, showcasing progress and innovation. Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

property and fled to the new suburbs, many of those who stayed in the city were committed to serving in poor neighborhoods. A new Protestant strategy in the progressive era was the "program church," which offered programs such as English language training and various forms of recreation to make city life more humane. Food pantries, clothing shelves, and shelters for the homeless were among the ministries of city Protestant churches.

Catholic parishes also responded vigorously to urban poverty. For emergency relief, they ran charities—such as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul—that gave food and clothing to the destitute. Anticipating the modern insurance companies, Catholic mutual benefit societies offered a shelter against poverty by having families "pay in and take out" for medical or funeral expenses. Catholic parishes improved their neighborhoods by building

hospitals and schools. Thanks to prodigious fundraising and to nuns who worked for next to nothing, these institutions offered education and health care to those who would not have been able to afford it.

Catholic workers needed labor unions but were at first forbidden to join them. In the late nineteenth century, a great many Catholic immigrants worked in factories, in mines, and on the railroads. A growing American labor movement sought fair pay and safety for workers. "Catholic laymen and women, the Irish especially, were heavily committed to this call for reform."⁵ But Catholic labor activism was blocked by an 1884 Vatican pronouncement barring Catholics from joining the Knights of Labor. The pope saw labor unions as secret societies, whose rituals competed for the devotion of the faithful. Moreover, the Vatican at that time condemned socialism, with which labor

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unions were associated. American Catholic leaders, however, saw that their people needed the labor movement, just as the labor movement needed the Catholics.

A breakthrough came when several American bishops, led by James Cardinal Gibbons, persuaded Pope Pius to change his position and allow Catholics to join labor unions. Another milestone occurred in 1891 when Pope Leo issued the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (Latin for "of Revolutionary Change," often called in English "On the Condition of the Workers"). This document declared that the church has a duty to speak on social and economic issues. It defended workers' rights to receive fair pay and to organize into unions; and it encouraged Catholics to address social problems, particularly the conditions of workers in an industrial society.

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