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**SPECIAL ISSUE:  
HISTORY, SOCIAL WORK AND CHRISTIANITY  
INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE**

*James R. Vanderwoerd, Guest Editor*

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"To Give Christ to the Neighborhood": A Corrective Look at the Settlement Movement and Early Christian Social Workers

**REVIEWS**

**PUBLICATIONS**



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# “To Give Christ to the Neighborhood”: A Corrective Look at the Settlement Movement and Early Christian Social Workers

*T. Laine Scales and Michael S. Kelly*

*Two case studies of early settlement house (SH) work in Louisville and Chicago are described and analyzed in this historical article. Using primary historical documents, the authors offer new perspectives on the tension between Christian missionary work in American urban centers and the burgeoning field of supposedly “secular” social work in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This article shows that early American urban social work practice was begun in a context where many early practitioners didn’t separate their religious motivation from secular professional goals. Implications for social work education and practice are offered with an eye towards deepening the discussion between secular and Christian social work practitioners.*

**T**HE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL WORK IS LONG-STANDING, dense, complicated, contested, and ever-evolving, all the way up to the present day. This article will certainly not settle all the myriad debates about the proper role of Christian belief in social work practice, nor will it attempt to comprehensively survey this nearly 130-year old history of Christianity and social work in the United States. Rather, by focusing on the early history of social work in the United States in two cities (Louisville and Chicago) we hope to show just how long-standing and complicated the relationship between Christian mis-

sionary work and social work practice has been, from the outset of social work's early attempts to identify its own professional identity.

In addition to discussing the efforts to address the needs of the poor in Louisville and Chicago, these diverse approaches to Christian and secular social work practice show how hard it was in those early years to draw strong distinctions between Christian and secular social workers in what they did, why they did it, and how they explained their work to others. Indeed these distinctions, while not unimportant to Charity Organization Society and settlement house workers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to be sure, have only become more sharply drawn in the last century, as our profession writes its own history into a reality that may not resemble much of what actually was happening in those early years.

We start this article with two brief overviews of the Charity Organization Society (COS) movement and settlement house (SH) movement; then move into a discussion of two Christian settlement houses: a Protestant example in Louisville, Kentucky, and a Catholic example in Chicago. Finally, we consider what these histories (largely unwritten or marginalized in social work scholarship and textbooks) tell us about the role(s) of Christians in social work practice.

### **Overview of Early U.S. Social Welfare History 1870-1920**

Most introductory social work courses address some facet of our profession's early history, usually by discussing two early movements that largely predate what we consider now to be "professional" social work practice: the Charity Organization Society (COS) movement and the settlement house (SH) movement. Our recent content analysis of seven commonly-used introductory social work textbooks found that without exception, these two movements were addressed separately and often used to draw distinctions between the two different ways that early social workers were involved in helping the poor and changing society.

Indicative of the need for the kind of corrective emphasis we undertake in this article, none of the textbooks characterized the Christian roots of social work history in its actual complexity, preferring to identify COS workers as religiously-motivated and SH workers as secular change agents. While the focus of this article will be on settlement houses, a brief overview of the two movements will provide an important context for our claim that the story of our development as a profession is more complex than what is typically reported.

## The Charity Organization Movement

The charity organization movement that emerged in the United States in the late nineteenth century was inspired by a similar movement in Great Britain, in reaction to a perceived proliferation of charities that practiced almsgiving without investigating the circumstances of recipients. The movement's followers sought changes in the way charities responded to need based on three key assumptions: that urban poverty was caused by the moral deficiencies of the poor, that poverty could only be eliminated by the correction of these deficiencies in individuals, and that various charity organizations would need to cooperate to bring about this change (Ginzberg, 1990).

The COS movement flourished in the United States. In fact, by the 1890s, over a hundred American cities had charity organization societies. Journals like *Lend-a-Hand* (Boston) and *Charities Review* (New York) were created to promote ideas and annual meetings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections (one of the ancestors of today's National Association of Social Workers) provided opportunities for leaders to discuss common concerns (Boyer, 1978). Fearing misuse of resources, Charity Organization Societies typically did not give money to the poor; rather they coordinated various charitable resources and kept records of those who had received charity in order to prevent "duplicity and duplication" by "having the wealthy keep an eye on the poor" (Ginzberg, 1990, pp. 196-97).

Privileged women from the middle and upper classes (precursors of professional social workers) volunteered to establish relationships as well as investigate the circumstances of families in need. They employed the technique of "friendly visiting" which stemmed from their conviction that individuals in poverty could be uplifted through association with middle and upper class volunteers. Friendly visitors were primarily Protestant women and their emphasis on the moral uplift of individuals was reinforced in Protestant churches by regarding the value of work to the soul and a focus on individual rather than communal relationship to God (Ginzberg, 1990).

As the movement grew, an insufficient number of volunteers led COS agencies to employ "agents," trained staff members who were the predecessors of professional social workers. Leaders like Mary Richmond of the Boston COS and Edward T. Devine of the New York COS led the movement to train workers, which led to the professionalization of social

work in the early twentieth century. In 1898, Devine established and directed the New York School of Philanthropy, the first formal training for workers, which eventually became Columbia School of Social Work. The case method, later used by the social work profession, is rooted in charity organization philosophies which were taught by Devine and his colleagues and focused on the individual, change through relationship, and investigation (Connaway & Gentry, 1988).

### **Charity Organizations and Christianity**

Many leaders in the COS movement were Christians and some were clergy. In spite of their commitment to Christianity, leaders cautioned against mixing evangelism with charity. Stephen Humphreys Gurteen, a clergyman and COS leader, warned workers in his *Handbook of Charity Organization* (1882), not to use their position for “proselytism or spiritual instruction.” Edward T. Devine, leader of the New York City Charity Organization Society was willing to include church-related organizations in charity work although he insisted that “friendly visiting should be done strictly for the sake of the family rather than as a means of winning converts, however desirable that also may be” (Devine, 1901, p. 99).

### **The Settlement House Movement**

Social work introductory textbooks often oversimplify descriptions of COS and SH movements as completely separate and opposing movements. In reality, Christian workers were involved in both the COS and SH movements, often at the same time, and leaders were not as opposed to one another’s philosophies as is often described in social work textbooks. In fact, some leaders, like Devine, carried out both COS and SH activities.

While supporters of the charity organization movement emphasized changing individuals, the settlement movement stressed societal reform and attempted to help those in need by changing institutions. Like the COS movement, the SH movement spread to the United States from England in the late 1800s in the midst of immigration, industrialization, and urbanization. Leaders of the movement like Stanton Coit, Robert Woods, and Jane Addams created settlements after visits to London’s first and most important settlement, Toynbee Hall, located in East

London. Toynbee and some of the first American settlements relied on collaboration with local universities. Students lived among the poor while professors visited to offer lectures and stimulating discussions. Although the movement in England was largely masculine, settlement leadership in the United States included both men and women. In 1889, a group of women, many of them graduates of Smith College, founded the College Settlement Association in New York City. In that same year, Jane Addams and Ellen Starr opened Hull House in a poverty-stricken area of Chicago.

Like charity organizations, settlement houses were established in urban areas, and particularly immigrant neighborhoods. The primary purpose of a settlement was to establish communication and relationships between the well-to-do and the working class. At the forefront of the SH philosophy was a democratic ideal or, as Jane Addams expressed it, settlements were based “on the theory that the dependence of classes on each other is reciprocal” (Davis, 1984, p. 19). Settlements focused their energies not exclusively on reforming individuals but on addressing urban problems. Residents researched economic and social conditions that informed social action to improve the neighborhood. In fact, settlements carried out the first systematic attempts to study immigrant communities, using their insights to initiate reforms in the area of child labor, sanitation, and women’s working conditions. Education and recreation were important activities of the settlement, including college extension courses, English language classes, vocational training, demonstrations of domestic skills, kindergartens, and playgrounds, all designed to improve the lives of neighbors (Davis, 1984).

### **Settlements vs. Missions in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century: How Different Were They, Really?**

One of the first notions imparted in most social work introductory courses is that the COS movement focused on changing individuals (and maybe saving their souls too) and refused to engage with the larger macro-forces in society that might have made these individuals poor in the first place. While some of the COS literature bears this out, there is often a leap to assuming that all religiously-motivated mission-based work with the poor at this time was rooted in this view of the poor’s problems. Likewise, SH workers are identified so strongly with the secular focus of Addams and Starr at Hull House, that it becomes



hard to believe that many SH workers were themselves motivated by a desire to serve the poor based on a religious calling (Davis, 1984). This dichotomy, while helpful in identifying macro- and micro-practice distinctions that persist to this day (Specht & Courtney, 1993; Pryce, Kelly, Reiland and Wilk, 2010), is ultimately too limiting in characterizing what was happening in social work, Christianity, and urban America at this time in our history.

If we take, for example, one city, New York City, and examine the landscape of settlements around the first decade of the twentieth century, we see the religious influence on SH at its earliest point in the U. S. There were approximately 82 settlement houses in New York, with several maintaining a religious focus. For example, East Side House was headed by Clarence Gordon, who wrote *The Relation of the Church to the Settlement*. He argued, “Humanitarians, socialists, philanthropists, may do settlement work and do it well.... but only on the foundation of Christ... and His example, and grace to inspire and direct, can the settlement realize its highest possibilities. (Gordon quoted in Davis, *Spearheads for Reform* p 14).

In order to exemplify how settlement houses may embody Christian values, we now offer short case sketches of two settlements to illuminate the complex relationship between Christians in social work and SHs at this formative time in our profession’s history. We will describe two important sites of social work innovation—Louisville, Kentucky, a river city with large immigrant populations, including Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish immigrants, and Chicago, Illinois, home to a largely Catholic immigrant neighborhood.

### **Louisville, Kentucky: the Baptist Training School Settlement**

By the early twentieth century, Louisville was home to several settlement houses, including Neighborhood House, established in 1896, and the Baptist Settlement House. The Baptist house, later named Good Will Center, was opened in 1912 and will be the focus of our case study (Scales, 2000). It was established by a school opened in 1907 for Southern Baptist women studying social work and missions: The Woman’s Missionary Training School for Christian Workers. The school’s purpose was to train Baptist women as missionaries to serve overseas or in the United States, as well as social workers and Sunday School workers. Students studied missionary methods, social work, fine

arts, and domestic sciences, while also completing theological studies at the all-male Southern Baptist Theological Seminary a few blocks away (Scales, 2000). In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the school would narrow its focus to social work and in 1984 emerge as the Carver School of Church Social Work, the first school of social work located in a seminary to be accredited by Council on Social Work Education. The school survived 12 years before being closed in 1997 in the midst of conflicts among Southern Baptists. (Garland, 1999).

From the school's beginning, the first principal, Maude McLure, had a vision for reaching out to Louisville's immigrant and poor populations. In 1912, she set aside a summer to study in New York City with the famous Edward Devine in the New York School of Philanthropy (now the School of Social Work at Columbia University) and to live in a New York settlement house. Maude McLure brought back to Louisville a basic understanding of the settlement movement and ideas about activities and services that such an establishment might provide.

The settlement house she established in Louisville combined the typical methods of a settlement house, but did not emphasize the call for societal reform that undergirded many settlements. Instead, it became a site for students to practice a variety of missionary methods, including evangelism so important to Southern Baptist practices. The students and faculty of the Woman's Missionary Union Training School (WMUTS) worked to evangelize the neighborhood and, like Hull House and other settlements, to socialize Louisville immigrants into American life. Undergirded by a Protestant ethic emphasizing hard work, and a Southern Baptist emphasis on salvation of the individual, women of Louisville's Training School worked to change society, but also aimed to reform the individual. The phrase used by WMUTS faculty to describe their program of social welfare was "personal service," a term reflecting the focus on individual persons.

The Personal Service program preceded professional social work, and served as the Baptist Woman's Missionary Union's (WMU) response to social need. The program was launched by WMU in 1909, just three years before the Baptist Settlement was established in Louisville and called on women to invest in "the Christian up-building of their own communities, acknowledging a spiritual duty to the poor, neglected, and outcast of their own neighborhood" (Allen, 1987, p. 215). Personal Service included an evangelistic dimension and had "the gospel as its motive and conversion as its aim" (Allen, 1987, p. 216).

The Louisville women joined others in the settlement movement to “rebuild the diseased social climate” but, in contrast to Jane Addams and others, they focused on reforming individuals while drawing on settlement house methods. WMU women were warned against placing “the ministry to the body before or apart from the ministry to the soul” (Allen, 1987, p. 215). In these ways, they viewed the neighbors as whole persons with spiritual as well as physical and social needs.

The emphasis of WMU on dual purposes of conversion of the individual and societal uplift was in line with the thinking of most Southern Baptists of the early twentieth century. However, a few Southern Baptists embraced the Social Gospel movement, clearly operating in the activities in and around Hull House in Chicago. The Social Gospel movement promoted the general improvement of society through church action. The minority of Southern Baptist leaders who believed that societal reform goals were proper religious concerns envisioned social improvement as a method of advancing the kingdom of God on earth (Sumners, 1975).

These leaders, both men and women, became involved in social reform groups such as the Southern Sociological Congress. Created in 1912, the Southern Sociological Congress brought together Southern leaders in education, social work, religion, and government. Its social program called for prison reform, the abolition of child labor, compulsory education, and solving of the race problem. In the 1913 Congress meeting, Walter Rauschenbusch, the best-known theologian of the Social Gospel movement, and a Baptist, urged Southern leaders to involve churches in reform efforts. A few Southern Baptist women leaders, including Maude McLure, founder of the Baptist Settlement in Louisville, attended congress meetings and may have been influenced by the drive to balance secular social reform efforts with decidedly evangelical aims (Allen, 1987). As we will see, this particular Southern Baptist theological stance contrasted with the Catholic theology of Madonna House in Chicago.

Although WMU did not embrace the aims of progressive social reform, leaders used the methods developed by reformers, social scientists, and settlement house workers in striving for evangelistic goals. Agencies in which WMUTS students did field work were typically missionary in purpose. Organizations such as the Hope Rescue Mission and the Salvation Army provided students with experience in personal evangelism to people in poverty.

While local agencies provided some opportunities for field work, Training School faculty and the school's board of managers wanted the school to have an agency of its own. Therefore, after her summer of study in New York, McLure created the Baptist Training School Settlement in 1912. Its purpose was twofold: to provide service to the community through the settlement house, while training students in missionary and social work methods (McLure, 1913). It is interesting to note that the Training School chose the term settlement to describe the new enterprise, thus aligning itself with the SH movement. However, the evangelical purposes of the new venture also echoed the purposes of the charity organization movement—reform of the individual.

For these reasons, we chose the Baptist Settlement to exemplify how problematic the dichotomized descriptions of the SH and CO movements in current social work textbooks can be. These narrow descriptions deny the reality of organizations like the Baptist Settlement that combined the two philosophies of SH and COS along with a dose of their own theological understandings. The Baptist Settlement emerged as a hybrid, using the methods of the settlement movement to reach objectives that were commonly held by charity organization supporters. In 1913 McLure described the aims of the Baptist Settlement:

1. To reach the little children that their tiny feet may be started in the upward path.
2. To inspire the older boys and girls with ideals that shall help them to improve their environment and shall give them strength against the awful temptations that sweep over them.
3. To interest the young people in sane and wholesome pleasures that their energies may be rightly directed
4. To help the women to be better home makers, more careful wives and mothers, better Christians
5. To give Christ to the neighborhood.

To attain such ends, the settlement house, even without resident workers, remained open every day of the week and several nights.

McLure (1913, p. 2) wrote that the settlement was “opened in the belief that, with Christianity as a foundation, a settlement may be a feeder to the church and a mighty force in the coming of the Kingdom.”

### **The Training School: A Settlement or a Mission**

Southern Baptist women were not the only workers to form a settlement with clear missionary aims. Other groups, including Methodist women's missionary societies, were inspired by religious motives to create similar neighborhood centers, making it difficult to distinguish between a religious settlement and a mission. This is also clear from the activity going on at various religious settlements around the famed Hull House, including Madonna Center a few blocks away.

Allen Davis notes that the majority of settlement workers in the nation were religious persons. In 1905, a poll of 339 settlement workers showed that eighty-eight percent were active church members and nearly all stated that religion had been a major influence on their lives (McClure, 1913). Therefore, the discussion about the relation of the settlement work to religion was kept alive in the settlement literature. (Davis, 1984). In the early 1920s, Mary Simkovitch argued from the Christian perspective that a settlement cannot be a mission because its purpose is not to pass on a particular conviction to others, as missions do, but to work out its own common conviction: a faith in democracy (Simkovitch, 1950). In a discussion entitled "Problems of Religion," Arthur Holden (1922) advised that settlements did not need to talk about religion or attempt to teach it. He argued that by simply living a life in service to others, the settlement worker embodied Christian principles.

Graham Taylor (1950), Congregationalist minister and founder of a Chicago settlement, noted that while religious individuals may be involved in settlements, the church and the settlement have two very different purposes. Taylor believed that a church must press the tenets of its faith, and if it does not, it ceases to be a church of that faith. A settlement, on the other hand, may not embrace any cult or creed lest it forfeit its place as being a common ground for all.

But what about a settlement that attempted to be both a spiritual home and a source of social and political support? Did these settlements "count" as actual settlement houses in this new era of secular social settlement house activity, or were they somehow assigned a different and possibly lower status? It's clear from the historical record that nearly 120 years later, social work history has emphasized the secular quality of SH activism over any spiritual and religious activity and has perhaps set up an over-determined dichotomy between a SH like Hull House and the religious missionary work going on in Louisville and

Chicago. Embedded in Taylor's idea that settlements should be "common ground for all" is an assumption that this is the only way to effectively reach and serve the disadvantaged. While it is certainly arguable that religious organizations could proselytize or even coerce people while providing social services and support, it is unclear that this was going on in Louisville or Chicago in our case examples. Rather, it appears that in both cities the religious social workers had assumed an ethical commitment to their clients that resembled in many ways the efforts being adopted by Addams and her colleagues, to be sure emphasizing spiritual uplift but also civic engagement and social progress (Davis, 1984; Dobschuetz, 2004).

Still, some important differences in theology and behavior can be noted in looking at the Madonna Center in Chicago. In contrast to the work going on in Louisville and other SH related to Protestant denominations, Catholic SH workers in Chicago perceived the population they served as fellow believers who simply needed the same Catholic sacraments and services that they were already enjoying in their parish community. This theological/service distinction was crucial in understanding the diverse SH activity going on in the area around Hull House. It is also helpful in explaining why Jane Addams' team was able to coexist so peacefully with the Catholic SH workers around her: the heavily Catholic area was in no need of evangelizing to find more Catholic souls, and Addams herself was clear that part of Hull House's mission was to avoid any proselytizing of their neighbors (Addams, 1912). If anything, as we shall see, the Madonna Center was founded to minister to and protect the Catholic traditions of the Hull House area immigrant population, in part as a reaction to the Hull House presence (Skok, 2004).

### **The Catholics of Chicago's Nineteenth Ward: Setting a Context for Madonna 1889-1898**

In 1889, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr opened the social settlement Hull House on Halsted Street in the midst of one of Chicago's most dense and diverse neighborhoods. Their neighborhood, the nineteenth ward located on Chicago's near west side, was home to a wide array of recently-arrived European immigrants, including Poles, Italians, Russians, Jews from Eastern Europe, Germans, and Irish. Most, though not all, of these new immigrants were Catholic (Skerret 2001). Many of these

immigrants arrived poor and found their American urban circumstances to be marked by severe economic and health hardships (Linn, 1935). The social settlement Hull House went on to earn worldwide attention for its efforts with the poor of the Hull House neighborhood. Jane Addams, in her tireless advocacy for immigrant rights, social justice, and labor, established herself as one of the preeminent social activists of her time. She was also an accomplished writer and used her skills as an essayist to argue for the plight of the poor in Chicago. In 1931, the cumulative efforts of Addams' life work were recognized by the Nobel organization, and she won the Nobel Peace Prize (Elshtain, 2002).

By 1898, the top five ethnic groups noted in Addams' 19<sup>th</sup> Ward by the Chicago school census were:

Irish	13, 065	(27%)
German	6,721	(14%)
American (Native-born citizens)	6, 184	(13%)
Italian	5,784	(12.5%)
Russian (including Russian Jews)	4,980	10.5%)
Other (Bohemian, English, Canadian, African-American, Greek, etc.)	11,400	(23%)

(Chicago Tribune, 1898)

With the exception of most of the Germans, the Americans, and some of the Irish, the majority of the 19<sup>th</sup> Ward were recent immigrants and most did not speak English (Chicago Tribune, 1898; Linn, 1935). This attracted Addams and her colleagues, as they were eager to use their Italian (Starr and Addams were both fluent in Italian from all their trips abroad) and they also wanted to focus their energies on helping these new Americans adapt to American urban life (Brown, 2004).

By 1890, the parish community of Holy Family near Hull House numbered 20,000 parishioners, leading James Sanders to call it "the single great Irish workingmans' parish" (quoted in Meagher, 1986). The parish hosted numerous social and cultural events, and provided social services and education through numerous Catholic schools and settlement houses like the Madonna Center, housed nearby at the Guardian Angel Mission on Forquer Street (Lord, 1914). The economic, cultural, and political power of Irish Catholicism only increased with the arrival of new Catholic immigrants from Italy, Germany, and other parts of Europe. Irish Catholics, who, because of immigration patterns and facility with English were the dominant clerical class in Chicago,

saw an opportunity to reach out to fellow Catholics and share their Irish Catholic culture with these new Americans. As Dobschuetz (2004) writes about the sisters and laywomen of the Madonna Center (a Catholic Settlement House) in the 19th Ward:

Chicago Catholics, however, saw the world differently from Addams and the Hull-House community. The settlement, for Addams, was a social experiment that did not foreground the religious dimension.... Catholic settlements sought to sustain a Catholic identity and affiliation that was more than a response to the social, physical, and educational needs of the poor. Catholic settlements would be a location for the exercise of a vigorous lay spirituality (Dobschuetz, 2004).

As we shall see, this strand of lay-Catholic social justice ministry formed one of several competing ideas about what it meant to be American in Chicago in the late 19th century.

### **Madonna Center Settlement House 1898-1962: A Competing (and Complementary) Vision Blocks Away from Hull House**

In 1898, Agnes Ward Amberg was attending a church retreat at the Academy of the Sacred Heart on Taylor Street, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Ward of Chicago, roughly half a mile away from Hull House (Skok, 2001; Amberg, 1976). A prominent German-Irish Catholic social activist, Amberg heard the Jesuit priest J. R. Rosswinkle exhort her and the other well-heeled Catholics at the retreat that to assure their own salvation in heaven, wealthy Catholics had to do more than pray and take care of their own families; they must recognize that “prayer must result in spiritually productive action” (Amberg, 1976, p. 40). After that day, in collaboration with her husband (who supplied financial backing) a new lay apostolate was born to minister to the poor Italian Catholic immigrants living among the more populous (and prosperous) Irish Catholics in the 19<sup>th</sup> ward. Fellow Jesuit Daniel Lord recounts the scene as Father Rosswinkle spoke:

If these ladies could be interested in the poor neglected strangers, of whose existence they hardly knew, if they could bring into the lives of these poor Italians something



of the spirit of Catholicity that made peaceful their own lives; if they could teach the immigrants home-making, health-protection, true Americanism, a great stride would have been taken toward the solution of a mighty social problem. It was worth a trial. He (Rosswinkle) spoke to them, and they responded generously... That was fifteen years ago. A small group of these ladies, diffident, uncertain of themselves and of their strange protegees [sic], entered the heart of the Italian district and gathered the first class of forty dirty, unkempt little youngsters for Catechism. To-day, the Guardian Angels' Mission [717 W. Forquer Street], with its flourishing clubs and Sodalities and catechism classes, counts two thousand Italian children as its members... (Lord, 1914, 285-86).

The success of the mission in offering Catholic education and other social services had an immediate impact on the Chicago Catholic hierarchy; just as they had done 40 years earlier with Holy Family, a church was constructed by 1899 (Holy Guardian Angel Church) to become the first church in the community ministering to Italian Catholic immigrants.

### **Jane Addams's Hull House and Its Response to a Neighboring Catholic Settlement**

As we have argued, social work textbooks have ignored settlements like the Madonna Center and emphasized secular SHs such as Hull House. With these two SHs located within a half mile of one another, we might wonder what interactions these two SHs may have had with one another. For her part, Amberg thought that Madonna Center and Hull House coexisted peacefully. Amberg and her mother both reported knowing Addams and her colleagues well, and that they had a friendly sense of spirit and competition with Hull House: "All of us had looked upon Hull House as a challenge, but we never experienced anything but kindness and cooperation from Jane Addams (Amberg, 1976, p.83)."

This distinction between the secular thrust of Hull House activities and religious sites like Guardian Angels/Madonna Center could be tracked not just in what they did with their time, but with what they built. While Hull House wanted to build a "Cathedral of Humanity,"

(Addams, 1912, p. 35) clearly Amberg and her colleagues were interested in building actual churches and bringing a heightened sense of Catholic identity to their immigrant clients.

It appears that many of the initial residents and lay leaders of the Guardian Angels Mission (later renamed the Madonna Center) were, like Addams, women of privilege. The first head resident of the Mission certainly was: she was Mary Agnes Amberg, the young adult daughter of the Ambergs (Amberg, 1976). Amberg lived and worked at the Mission most of her adult life, living there with her friend Catherine Jordan from 1913-1962 (Skok, 2004). Again, unlike the Training School Settlement in Louisville, most of the activities conducted at Guardian Angels were led by (mostly female) teachers who lived at the mission and/or who attended the parish in the community. Additionally, it's clear from the writings and works of Amberg that the Catholic social justice teachings embedded in Pope Leo's 1891 Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* resonated through the work that she and her colleagues did:

The ideas of *Rerum Novarum* were appropriated by Catholic laywomen as a basis for expanded activity through the creation of lay apostolates. The 1891 papal encyclical made the ideal of "stewardship" or consecrated benevolence a part of the League's focus and contributed to the desire on the part of middle-class Catholic women to express their faith and maintain loyalty to the church through their ministering to the poor (Dobschuetz, 2004, para. 9).

Amberg writes repeatedly in her autobiography about the urgency of physical, spiritual, and citizenship needs of the immigrants she served. Indeed, it can be said that her efforts to "Americanize" her immigrant neighbors had as much to do with establishing Catholics as a legitimate group in American life as it did about helping them survive their rough new surroundings. Again and again in her autobiography, she strikes a chord of solidarity with the Italian-American Catholic immigrants she is serving, viewing them as needing social and religious support to avoid unwittingly selling out their "Roman Catholic birthright for a mess of proselytizers and humanists' pottage" (Amberg, 1976, p. 39). She writes of the many established and prosperous Chicagoans (Catholic and non-Catholic alike) that came to serve at the mission:

In another way the influx of such assistants from all walks of life... and many from the higher strata of the city's social and business life was a blessing for the mission. Mother often said that these people helped Father Dunne [the clergyman who helped lead the mission] impress upon our Italian Americans that Roman Catholics were as American as any of the social workers in the Protestant or secular social settlements hard by the mission (Amberg, 1976, p. 54)

Clearly it was not enough for Madonna Center to minister to the needs of Italian immigrants through Catechism and building a church where they could worship; the offering of citizenship courses, athletic teams, and scouting programs was all part of a concerted effort to help Madonna Center clients become more fully American while still retaining their Catholic identity in a place that a local Catholic writer characterized as one of "the parts of Chicago that are not Chicago" (Prindiville, 1903, p. 452). In this way, Madonna Center was similar to the Baptist Settlement and many secular settings. Americanization was an important objective.

### **Why isn't Madonna House more Recognized as a Pioneer Settlement House?**

The Irish-American priest and sociologist Andrew Greeley has devoted a large part of his career to documenting the gradual assimilation of the Irish and other immigrant Catholic groups into American life. He writes about the late 19th century battles between reformers like Addams and Irish politicians like the corrupt Irish politician John Powers:

From the Irish point of view, reform was merely an attempt on the part of native-born Protestants to take what they had lost to the Irish in a fair fight. Laments of reformers like Jane Addams in Chicago merely amused the Irish. The native-born reformers were at least as corrupt as the Irish and, in addition, they were hypocrites. All they were interested in were jobs for their own people, which meant taking back the jobs which the Irish had won in the polling place (Greeley, 1981, p. 110).

The Irish of the 19th Ward and the reformers of Hull House had a relationship that cannot be described fully, as it remains largely undocumented. However, we do have some facts. We know that over 13,000 Irish lived within the boundaries of the neighborhood that Jane Addams and her ambitious group of social reformers documented in 1895, but thanks to Addams and her colleagues, we know little about what the Irish population of the 19th Ward needed from Hull House at the time. As Skerrett (2001) has pointed out, it's entirely possible that we don't know much about how Hull House viewed their Irish neighbors because Addams decided that the Irish didn't "need" them (Skerrett, 2001). And while far from a prosperous neighborhood, it appears that at least for the Irish of the 19th Ward, life wasn't constantly marked by the same poverty and oppression that they had fled from in Ireland in the 1840s. (Skerrett, 2001).

The same could not be said for the Italian immigrants around Hull House, most of whom had recently immigrated, and many of whom suffered from extreme poverty and in the words of Amberg:

Here was a harvest [Italians in Chicago] that cried aloud for some practical Christians. But except for some devoted clerics and lay people, few cared to listen (Amberg, 1976, p. 29)

Interestingly, Amberg's writing is not complimentary of all Catholic lay and clergy leadership in their efforts to build parishes and minister to immigrant Catholics, and levies a strong critique that Catholic hierarchy missed a crucial opportunity to become more involved in Catholic SH work. Just as Addams did in criticizing the corrupt ward bosses in Chicago, Amberg writes about how social settlements were needed for Italian immigrants to fend off the undue influence of the "padrone" who would exploit Italian immigrants. She says that:

the social settlement could have been a valuable adjunct of Catholic immigrant Communities everywhere in America had there been fewer social intransigents among our clergy and laity and more pastors like Fathers Rosswinkle and Ponziglione [Clergy who led the first Madonna Center efforts] (Amberg, 1976, p. 45).

In some important ways, Addams may have struck a largely unspoken and unofficial "deal" with Amberg and the other Catholic lay

leaders of SH and missions in the Hull House community: she would “minister” to the perceived social needs of the same poor Italians, Irish, and Germans they served, while those groups could also attend to the spiritual and material needs of this population. While there is no written record of their working together (or even meeting), it’s clear that these two incredible women brought much-needed assistance to their community, and lived less than a mile from each other for most of their adult lives.

### **Reclaiming the History of Christians in Social Work**

In all of the major textbooks used in Social Work Policy courses, history like what we have recounted here is completely absent. This raises some important questions: 1) why is early Christian social work history so marginalized? and 2) why does there appear to be so much effort by writers of social work textbooks to draw sharp distinctions between COS mission social work and the secular social work of Jane Addams, even though serious SH scholars acknowledge the religious motivations of many SH workers (Davis, 1984)? Unpacking these questions helps us identify some implications for Christian social workers today.

As indicated by the historical case studies in this chapter, the early history of social work is deeply rooted in religious belief and social action. The very real and important tension created by the potential of social work being used to convert or proselytize has also always been with us. Rather than exploring (and to some extent, embracing) these tensions and celebrating our historical roots in Christian social work, the whole topic has been usually confined to the COS movement and then quickly shuffled off to the margins. This is neither historically accurate or particularly helpful for our present day, as social work students continue to report being motivated by religious calling in serving their clients (Canda & Furman, 2009; Graff, 2007) and as of 2011, there are approximately 675 MSW and BSW programs in the U. S., and many of them are housed in religiously-affiliated colleges and universities. This history is an important part of social work’s overall history and it needs to be reclaimed.

Secondly, the distinctions that have often been sharply drawn between the secular focus of proto-social workers like Addams and COS workers has often been overstated and discussed without the historical context we’ve attempted to provide here. While Addams herself eschewed

religious teaching at Hull House, she was herself religious (Knight, 2005) and cared deeply about integrating the cultural traditions of the people she served into the larger American mosaic (Elshtain, 2002). And while the Baptist workers at their Settlement House were openly religious, they modeled their work after early secular SHs in New York in terms of their activities and programs. While it will always be important to note the excesses and potential ethical violations of Christian social workers working with vulnerable clients, it's important to also note that the Italian Catholic immigrants at Madonna Center wanted services from "professionals" who brought a religious lens to their work together.

The tension between secular and Christian social workers working together has never been completely resolved, even to this day. When social work authors and teachers set up sharp distinctions that were neither historically accurate nor very important to the clients they served, it is counterproductive to the need for Christian social workers and secular social workers to continue struggling through the many challenges they may experience in their work together. One thing is clear from this corrective look at early social work history: without Christian social workers and their efforts to "give Christ to the neighborhood," it is hard to imagine our "professional" identity being as strong as it is today. ❖

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