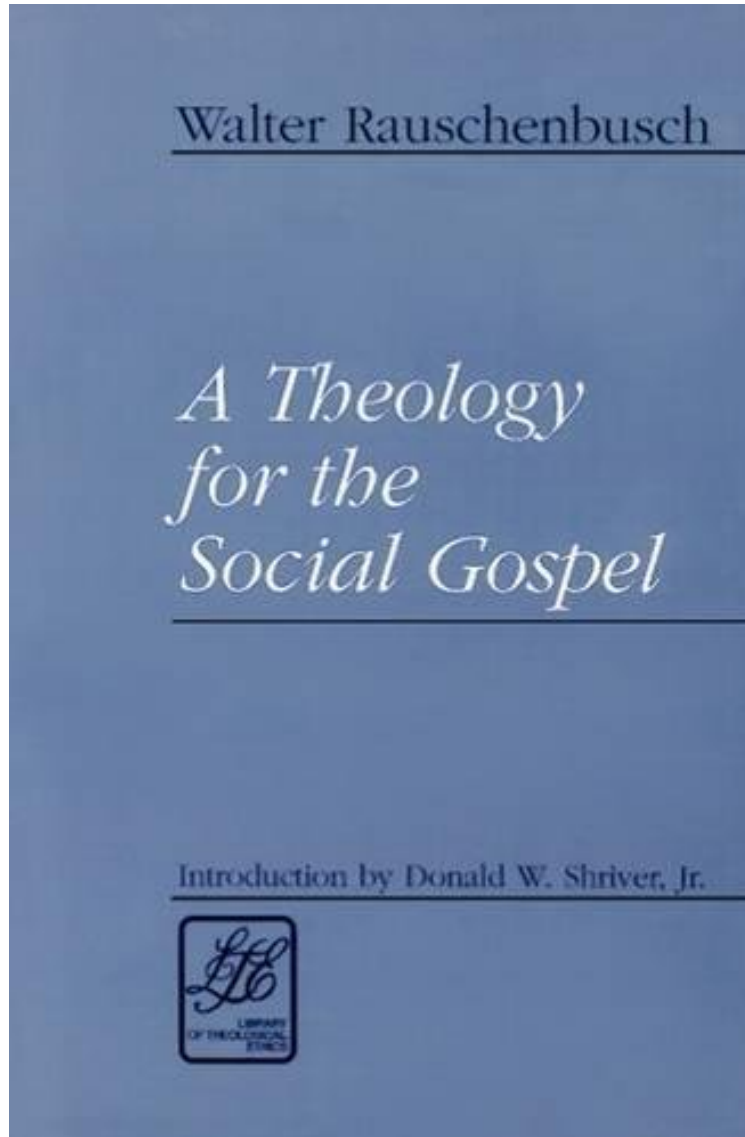


(Download pdf) A Theology for the Social Gospel (Library of Theological Ethics)

## A Theology for the Social Gospel (Library of Theological Ethics)

Walter Rauschenbusch

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#1101229 in Books Walter Rauschenbusch 1997-08-01 1997-08-01 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.00 x .78 x 6.00l, 1.02 #File Name: 0664257305312 pages A Theology For The Social Gospel | File size: 30.Mb

**Walter Rauschenbusch : A Theology for the Social Gospel (Library of Theological Ethics)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Theology for the Social Gospel (Library of Theological Ethics):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. It helps to have some background in the historical time ...By Darling ClementineIt helps to have some background in the historical time this book was written. But it is not dated, and the insights are still relevant.0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Vella+++++++1 of 1 people

found the following review helpful. Worthy of being called a Classic By Howard Pepper "A Theology for the Social Gospel" is a particularly important and fascinating book. However, I've found it hard to plan an adequate review for. It is so packed with great content that I'd wanted to do a chapter-by-chapter review. But even if that would hold interest (possible), it's more than I want to take on right now. So this review will be observations of interest, a number of profound quotes and a very broad summary. To me it is both amazing and sad that the book is so little read or referenced anymore. I don't know just how popular or influential it was in the years following its publication in 1917. I do know that the author, Walter Rauschenbusch, was already broadly respected, particularly for his well-known classic, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907). Now 1917 may ring a bell for you as an important year. It should! That is the year the United States entered World War I and the last full year of the war. Rauschenbusch makes references to the US entry so he must have finalized the text late in the year. (It was mostly from special lectures he'd given in April, 1917.) The presence of the war figures into the content of the book in several ways and places. So some familiarity with world conditions and the nature of the war's first three years (to 1917) is helpful for keeping the book in proper context. Similarly, the context of the few previous decades in terms of American Christianity is important... things like the effects of "higher critical" study of the Bible, which went back at least 150 years prior to Rauschenbusch's work. "Higher criticism's" more detailed and "rational" (not hemmed in by Church dogma) look at the nature and content of the Bible had already provoked the Deist views of a distant clockmaker God and subsequently the warmer, Jesus-oriented liberal Christianity of the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. This was the period in which both the now-archaic term "Social Gospel" and the pathos of the "movement" behind it were born. In *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, Rauschenbusch seems to date its momentum period from about the 1880s. This may seem a few years early if one is not very aware of the post-Civil War era, as I wasn't. Becoming more knowledgeable of historical religious developments and their impact is an important thing for us all in our history-and-context-starved culture. This book can be one small step in that direction. But caution is in order: it could be misleading in places for people without some background in the Bible, Church and secular history and theology. One small example: certain now emotionally-loaded terms such as socialism and communism were used differently then. So, it's about time to define "social gospel", right? Well, yes.... However, the author never really does that himself, that I noticed (and I was looking). I think that may be because even then there was no agree-upon definition of just what it was (and wasn't), in simple, brief terms. But in reading one gets a pretty good idea of the main concepts, goals and processes of the social gospel. The main focus seems to have been a shift from an individual's salvation and spirituality to the welfare of masses of people together, both physically/materially and spiritually, and the "social" scene (i.e., society overall). Rauschenbusch makes clear the many places the perspectives and emphases of the social gospel differed not only from fundamentalism (which was largely a reactionary movement to the development of both "social gospel" and general progressivism) but also from older forms of orthodox theology and practice in Christianity - American and global. In this effort, Rauschenbusch deals, chapter-by-chapter, with most of the key categories of Christian thought: The "Consciousness" and "Nature" of Sin, The "Fall of Man" [gender-neutral or inclusive language was not yet in use, even by progressives], The "Kingdom of Evil", The "Social Gospel and Personal Salvation", The "Church as the Social Factor of Salvation", The "Social Gospel and the Atonement" to name just a few. Here is an author who has a broad and deep grasp of many subjects... well qualified for his self-chosen difficult task. He had set out to suggest theological concepts drawn validly from the Bible and fitting for an approach to "The Gospel" that is clearly other-than-orthodox (or "heterodox"). I believe he's done it in such a way as to remain relevant and well worth reading today, nearly 100 years later. As to his aim, he leads the book off thus, "We have a social gospel. We need a systematic theology large enough to match it and vital enough to back it." He quickly adds, "... a readjustment and expansion of theology, so that it will furnish an adequate intellectual basis for the social gospel is necessary, feasible, desirable and legitimate.... The social gospel needs a theology to make it effective; but theology needs the social gospel to vitalize it." (p. 1) My opinion is that Rauschenbusch here provided excellent theological basis and explanation to potentially make Christianity "effective" on a social as well as personal level. Whether or not, in America, this has happened is a debatable subject I suppose. What was "social gospel" has morphed into various forms and certainly has had continuity in mainline Protestant churches (his original context). Might it be said that his type of theology also influences the "Emerging/Emergent" and related movements within or coming out of Evangelicalism as well? I personally think so, although not directly through this book or even Rauschenbusch's larger body of work.... But it has been an influence. Others have "taken up the mantle", not all of them mainline or "liberal" Christians. Many of his concepts continue as prominent in various circles, conservative to liberal, such as the battle of Kingdoms in opposition (that of God and of "Evil"... not a personal devil in his view, but a "super-personal" force). Might it even be said that the teachings of this leader and many others of the late 19th to mid 20th centuries, which propelled many liberal Christians into activism in politics and social causes, indirectly led to (perhaps as a reaction) the surge of evangelical conservative social/political activism beginning in the 1970s? It seems clear that the divide we see in politics these days has a close parallel in theology... orbiting largely around how "social" is the gospel vs. how "individual". It is fascinating to see how many of today's issues and controversies are foreshadowed in *A Theology for the Social Gospel*.

A *Theology for the Social Gospel* is undoubtedly Walter Rauschenbusch's most enduring work. It is here that Rauschenbusch, the father of the social gospel in the United States, articulates the theological roots of social activism that surged forth from mainline Protestant churches in the early part of the twentieth century. Skillfully examining the great theological issues of the Christian faith--sin, evil, salvation, and the kingdom of God--Rauschenbusch offers a powerful justification for the church to fully engage society. The Library of Theological Ethics series focuses on what it means to think theologically and ethically. It presents a selection of important and otherwise unavailable texts in easily accessible form. Volumes in this series will enable sustained dialogue with predecessors through reflection on classic works in the field.

**About the Author** Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) was a Christian theologian and Baptist minister, and a key figure in the Social Gospel movement in the United States.