

# Adventists and Welfare Work: A Comparative Study

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The studies of Schwarz and Butler<sup>1,2</sup> make it evident that the social endeavors carried on by Seventh-day Adventists in Chicago around the turn of the century constituted an important chapter in the life of John Harvey Kellogg and a crucial phase of the developing social consciousness of Adventism in general. The question that remains is how these developments relate to the larger picture of social work during the same time. This article attempts a comparison of Adventist welfare activities in Chicago with general welfare activities at the turn of the century, focusing on three areas in particular: (*a*) contextual details of place and time, (*b*) specific welfare activities undertaken, and (*c*) philosophical presuppositions.

## I. TIME AND PLACE

It is difficult to imagine a more auspicious setting for social endeavors at the turn of the century than Chicago, the great city whose broad shoulders and brawling laughter Carl Sandburg eulogized, and whose stench Upton Sinclair fanned across the land. In the first place, the problems of that metropolis were enormous; and in the second place, the social welfare programs begun there were among the most significant in the world. By 1910 Chicago had become the sixth largest city in the world, its population having grown in the space of just sixty years from a mere 4,500<sup>3</sup> to over two million.<sup>4</sup> The major cause of this rapid increase was immigration on a

grand scale, with the result that fully three-fourths of the city's inhabitants were either foreign-born or of foreign-born parentage.<sup>5</sup> The widespread inability to speak English coupled with their Old World naiveté rendered the immigrants pathetically defenseless to the "Jungle's" beasts of prey, as Sinclair's classic of social reform graphically portrays.

Because its central location and its vast industries attracted thousands of unskilled and unemployed workers from all over the country, Chicago became the reservoir of an enormous floating population. Estimates of the number of homeless men in the lodging house districts of the city in 1910 alone range from 40,000 to 60,000.<sup>6</sup> Because of the massive influx of workers hoping for employment at the World's Fair, unemployment was especially critical during the early 1890's, just when Adventist work in the city was getting underway. When the exposition closed in October 1893,<sup>7</sup> it left thousands out of work.

No doubt because of its massive problems, the city of Chicago saw a variety of social endeavors begin at the same general time. It was there that Albion W. Small, an eminent American sociologist, founded the *American Journal of Sociology*.<sup>8</sup> Chicago was the home of Jane Addams' Hull House, the most important settlement house in the world. The National Organization for Public Health Nursing was founded in Chicago in 1912.<sup>9</sup>

The time as well as the place of the early Adventist welfare programs contributed to their significance. Seventh-day Adventists were actively engaged in welfare work in Chicago during the twenty-year period from the summer of 1893, when the Chicago Medical Mission first opened its doors,<sup>10</sup> to the fall of 1913, when the free dispensary closed.<sup>11</sup> The general period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was characterized by a flurry of social concern, including the founding of the American Red Cross, the first strides toward humane treatment of the mentally ill, the beginning of prison reform, and a host of other humanitarian endeavors. The early twentieth century saw the beginning of the great philanthropic trusts by which Andrew Carnegie would dispose of 350 and John D. Rockefeller of 530 millions of dollars.<sup>12</sup> Social concerns of a more general character were also beginning at the same time, as indicated by the emergence of sciences such as sociology and public health.

The Adventist welfare endeavors were thus part of a general mushrooming of welfare programs throughout the country during the last decades of the nineteenth century. They were, nevertheless, a relatively early phase. In the year that the Chicago Medical Mission opened (1893), for example, only two settlement houses were already established in Chicago, a number

which increased to twenty-two during the next eleven years.<sup>13</sup> It seems, then, that, in working in Chicago at the time when they did, early Seventh-day Adventist welfare workers were among the pioneers on the new frontier of awakening American social consciousness.

## II. SOME PRECEDENTS

54 A common feature of all major social endeavors was the tendency toward a greater organization of philanthropic and charitable enterprises. The COS (Charity Organization Society) movement, which began in England in 1869 with a group of public-spirited citizens, epitomizes this trend toward organization. The COS movement saw in Thomas Chalmers, a Scottish clergyman of the early nineteenth century, its spiritual ancestor. What Chalmers contributed to social welfare was the concept that charity could and should be systematically organized and the proof that such an approach was far superior to the haphazard almsgiving that characterized earlier attempts to help the poor. He divided his parish of 8,000 into twenty-five districts for visitation and assigned to a board of deacons the task of distributing relief. As a result of his plan the local residents were able to carry the burden of poverty relief in their parish.<sup>14</sup>

Following Chalmers' precedent, members of the COS movement took organization as their watchword. Each society carefully investigated the recipients of aid, suggested assistance designed to meet their personal needs, and kept accurate records of all the benefits dispensed. The Buffalo COS, for example, the first in America, operated with a volunteer corps consisting preponderantly of wealthy young men. The city was divided into districts and each volunteer was assigned a number of families that he visited on a regular basis, offering them his friendship, counsel, and advice. No funds were distributed directly through the COS. Instead, clients were referred to the most appropriate of several social agencies.<sup>15</sup>

The inclination to organize all activities is reflected in the extensive records of the various Adventist welfare programs in Chicago. Tallies were run on even the number of baths taken and the number of people who used the laundry. The techniques of the COS movement were also employed, with the result that 9,000 persons were visited in the first three years the mission was in operation. Contrary to the practice of the city Charity Organization Societies, however, the Chicago Medical Mission directly ministered to the people by giving treatments, applying dressings, distributing garments, and making penny dinners available.<sup>16</sup>

Another important precedent followed by Adventists in Chicago was the settlement house movement, which accompanied the growth of the Charity Organization Societies. In general terms, a settlement house was a location — usually a large building in the slum or tenement section of a city — that provided a meeting place for the rich (relatively speaking) who worked there voluntarily and the poor who inhabited the surrounding area. The settlement houses served as social centers for inner-city ethnic minorities, provided classes along various lines, and organized young people into clubs. The first settlement house was Toynbee Hall, founded in London in 1884 by a group of Oxford students under the leadership of Canon Barnett.<sup>17</sup> Five years later, Jane Addams and schoolmate Ellen Gates Starr moved into the former Chicago residence of a real estate millionaire, Charles Hull, hoping to provide a social center for the impoverished working people of the surrounding area. Hull House subsequently became the most influential settlement house in the world.<sup>18</sup>

Adventist activities in Chicago also included a settlement house at which numerous programs were conducted: a kindergarten, a day nursery for working mothers, classes on various subjects, health lecture courses for adults and children, exercise programs, a women's club for instruction in homemaking skills, and so forth. It opened in 1896 when there were only six other settlement houses in the city. Since the number had increased to twenty-two by 1908,<sup>19</sup> it is evident that Adventist welfare workers were not reluctant to employ new ideas in social work and were among the first in Chicago to organize a settlement.

In addition to the settlement houses and Charity Organization Societies, with their noble objective of uplifting the social life of the impoverished, there were many humbler endeavors undertaken on behalf of the poor of society. The purpose of the lodging house, for example, was to provide a night's lodging at minimum expense. The need for such facilities has already been indicated, with the large number of homeless and unemployed who frequented the streets of America's great cities. In 1910 a writer noted that "all large cities and some small ones . . . have cheap lodging at a cost of from ten to 25 cents."<sup>20</sup> With the exception of New York City, Chicago's number of such houses was greater than that of any other city, and statistics indicate that they were heavily patronized. During the single winter of 1907-08, for example, the Municipal Lodging House, its annex, and two other houses which it operated gave a total of 79,411 lodgings to homeless men.<sup>21</sup>

Predictably, Adventists also ran a lodging house in Chicago. The Work-

ingmen's Home opened in 1896 and provided sleeping quarters for between 300 and 400 men for ten cents a night, including an evening meal. In one year's time the lodging house provided over 70,000 individual night's lodgings and served nearly 600,000 meals. In an industrial department operated in connection with the Workingmen's Home, the unemployed could support themselves temporarily by weaving rugs or making brooms.<sup>22</sup>

### III. DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS

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A cursory comparison of three major developments in the area of social welfare in general — Charity Organization Societies, settlements, and lodging houses — and the comparable activities conducted by Seventh-day Adventists reveals that the latter paralleled the work being done by the major welfare movements of the time. For example, it was the tremendous impression Kellogg received from visiting two city missions in New York that made him determine to enter that type of work himself.<sup>23</sup> The Chicago Medical Mission was the result, and its various activities were not unique in the light of all that was taking place at the time.

Nevertheless, several features of the Adventist work in Chicago did set it apart from the welfare movement in general. One was the tremendous scope of activities being conducted under the aegis of a single organization. In 1909 it was noted by Dr. Lena Kellogg Sadler, sister of Kellogg, that since its beginning the Chicago Medical Mission had comprised some eight institutions and twenty-five distinct lines of work, with about 200 people engaged in the various departments.<sup>24</sup> A dispensary, a settlement, a lodging house, along with numerous aspects of reclamation work, all operated within the same rather closely structured organization.

In addition, the coordination of the study of medicine with the operation of numerous welfare programs seems to have been unique. As a result of the decision to integrate the clinical activities of the American Medical Missionary College with the work of the Chicago Medical Mission, the Adventist welfare program in Chicago was greatly expanded. Besides working in the dispensary, AMMC students organized over seventy clubs among newsboys, bootblacks, and street urchins and began a visitation program to the city's jails.<sup>25</sup> It was perhaps this unusual concept of combining medical training and welfare work that led Dr. Stephen Smith, a founder of the American Public Health Association, to call the AMMC "the most important educational institution in the world."<sup>26</sup>

Another distinguishing feature of Adventist welfare work was the extent to which rescue work was carried on among the city's prostitutes. No

single phenomenon reveals more graphically the moral and social conditions prevalent in Chicago at the turn of the century than does the extent of prostitution, or, as it was commonly called, the "social evil." In 1893 the World's Congress on Social Purity, which met in Chicago, estimated the number of prostitutes in the city at 10,000 to 25,000;<sup>27</sup> and although New York City rivaled its total number, Chicago was without peer in the openness and extent of the practice. The writer of a famous article in 1907 estimated that 20 million dollars annually were made on prostitution in Chicago. He tallied 292 disreputable hotels and 350 good-sized houses of prostitution and estimated that no less than 2,000 women were plying their trade in small flats throughout the city.<sup>28</sup>

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The Adventist welfare work that pertained to the "rescue" work conducted for the thousands of girls who had fallen into prostitution involved three programs in Chicago: a maternity home, the Life Boat Rescue Service, and the Rescue Home. The maternity home was established in 1896 and was ultimately able to provide shelter to twenty girls at a time.<sup>29</sup>

A more daring enterprise, the Life Boat Rescue Service, began with four women who ventured into the red-light districts of Chicago by night to do personal work among streetwalkers, supposedly the most desperate class of prostitutes. Operating in teams of two, these crusaders worked from 12:00 to 1:30 a.m. and were successful during their first year of operation in persuading seventy-five girls to leave the street and return to a better life.<sup>30</sup> In this way, the person-to-person encounter that constituted the procedural backbone of the Charity Organization Societies was carried to an extent that the original participants in those organizations probably never foresaw.

Comparable nerve was required for work in the Life Boat Rescue Home for girls, first located in a large converted barroom surrounded by brothels. The following statement reflects the attitude of its spirited staff toward their surroundings: "There was a den of iniquity on each side of us, but that did not matter; we were down in the thickest of the fight and that is where we wanted our snatch station to be."<sup>31</sup> In harmony with the gospel injunction as to whom Christians should invite to a feast, these determined ladies on one occasion gave a dinner to which every girl on the street was invited, along with some of the most prominent women in Chicago's churches. Thirty prostitutes responded, two of whom changed their way of life as a result of the experience.<sup>32</sup>

After several years the rescue home was moved to Hinsdale, Illinois, and located in permanent quarters. At the dedication of the new Life Boat

Rescue Home, which served both as a halfway house for former prostitutes and as a home for unwed mothers, the uniqueness of this phase of Adventist welfare work was publicly acknowledged by Judge H. A. Parkin, the Assistant United States District Attorney for Chicago. In his dedicatory speech on July 25, 1909, he described the work of the rescue home as "the first in this district at least, that I know of in the United States, that is meeting the need . . . possibly the greatest need in the suppression of this great evil."<sup>33</sup>

Thus, in spite of numerous parallels to most of its endeavors, the Adventist welfare program in Chicago was noteworthy for the wide range of projects undertaken and the extent to which many of its participants went in their efforts for the unfortunate.

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#### IV. UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY

The most prominent characteristic of the leaders in various phases of the welfare movement was a profound sense of personal responsibility for the well-being of their fellow men. This is evident in activities ranging from the philanthropy of John D. Rockefeller to the settlement work of Jane Addams. It was by direct person-to-person ministrations to the unfortunate and impoverished that these crusaders sought to fulfill this responsibility. Thus, the underlying purpose of the settlement program, for example, was to form friendships that transcended social boundaries. This conviction was expressed by Barnett: "Toynbee Hall exists that individuals may tell on individuals, that the knowledge accumulated in the Universities and the experience accumulated in industry may move public opinion through the friendships formed between University men and the inhabitants of industrial neighborhoods."<sup>34</sup>

In an even more explicit way, the participants of the Charity Organization Societies, who went from home to home befriending the underprivileged, sought to discharge what was regarded as a personal responsibility. This was the advice of Octavia Hill, a founder of the first COS, to its visitors:

You want to know them, — to enter into their lives, their thoughts; to let them enter into some of your brightness; to make their lives a little fuller, a little gladder. You who know so much more than they, might help them so much at important crises of their lives. You might gladden their homes by bringing them flowers, or, better still, by teaching them to grow plants; you might meet them face to face as friends; you might teach them; you might collect their savings; you might sing for and with them; you might take them into the parks or out for quiet days in the country, in small companies, or to your own or your friends' grounds, or to exhibitions or picture galleries; you might teach and refine and make them cleaner by merely going among them.<sup>35</sup>

Evidences of the same feeling of personal responsibility are not difficult to find in the various activities of Adventists in Chicago. The relocation of the American Medical Missionary College from Battle Creek to the heart of Chicago might be viewed as resulting from the conviction that students should be involved with the diseased on a personal basis, by practicing the healing arts where they actually were most needed. John Harvey Kellogg's trips to Chicago to treat the sick himself indicate the same concern felt by leaders of all the major welfare endeavors. It was not enough simply to have his plans carried out; he had to become personally involved. The work of the Life Boat Rescue Service dramatically illustrates the personal nature of the concern felt for the unfortunate. In this first important respect, then, the philosophy of Adventist welfare work coincided precisely with that of the welfare movement in general.

It goes without saying, perhaps, that this personal concern was felt for the poor on the part of those who by comparison were wealthy. This is revealed not only by the presence of the Rockefellers and the Carnegies in the sphere of social concern but also by participants on a less auspicious level, the members of a local settlement, for example. A case in point is Toynbee Hall, established by a group of comparatively well-off university students anxious to help the poor of London. Wealthy young men who donated their time to visiting the unfortunate comprised most of the membership of the first COS in America. Jane Addams was born into a family of substantial means, as was Josephine Shaw Lowell, the principal founder of the New York COS.<sup>36</sup> By and large the early phases of the welfare movement were inaugurated by members of the upper classes.

In view of this understanding of social responsibility as primarily personal in character, the observation has been made that the members of the social welfare movement were reformers, rather than revolutionaries, seeking not the transformation of society but the reformation of individuals. It appears that here, as always, the wealthier classes were politically conservative. Although there is some evidence that these early welfare leaders recognized a need for corporate action, they seem to have viewed society as comprising primarily individuals, rather than institutions, and the character of their endeavors (personal visitation, for example) reveals that they thought in terms of individuals rather than institutions.<sup>37</sup> It remained for the social gospel movement to provide a theological rationale for social action and to amplify the concern for corporate responsibility.

As a result of this general frame of mind, men regarded poverty not as a problem of society, but as a problem of the individual. More precisely,



it could be said that the early welfare movements were not really concerned for poverty per se, but rather for the poor person. Poverty was attributed to moral defects — to weaknesses of character, body, or intellect — rather than to undesirable social conditions. Since lack of money was not the cause of the problem, then neither would the provision of money be the solution.

An important feature of each COS was the fact that its members themselves distributed no financial assistance to the poor. “No Relief Given Here,” announced signs at the entrance to the Buffalo COS, and the New York COS readily assured prospective donors that “all the organization’s funds went for administrative expenses and not one cent to the poor.”<sup>38</sup> In addition, there was a strong aversion to public welfare.<sup>39</sup> “Outdoor relief,” the practice of supporting the impoverished through funds raised by taxation, was widely opposed and was voted out in Brooklyn and Philadelphia. It was felt that such assistance actually encouraged, rather than alleviated poverty, and that withdrawal of public support would encourage the poor to become self-sufficient.<sup>40</sup>

In this light, Kellogg’s aversion to outright charity, seen in his practice of charging a nominal amount for help given (as penny dinners) and in providing the unemployed with work rather than money (as at the Workingmen’s Home) was in harmony with the sentiments of all leading social reformers of his time.

Another noticeable aspect of the welfare movement was the religious character of the social concern its leaders manifested. Jane Addams, for example, regarded the settlement movement as an outlet for the sentiments of universal brotherhood, and she appealed to persons to express in terms of social service and action the spirit of Christ.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, the welfare movement was characterized by a noticeable lack of institutional church involvement. Many church members were involved in the welfare endeavors, and no doubt most of the welfare workers were church members, but the churches as organizations did not take a major role in welfare endeavors. Here again it appears that the personal responsibility which undergirded the entire movement was felt to be incumbent on individual persons rather than on organizations. At any rate, sectarianism was firmly resisted. This is illustrated by Jane Addam’s refusal to comply with Kellogg’s request to operate a dispensary in connection with her work at Hull House.<sup>42</sup> Knowing his religious affiliation, she no doubt feared that his work would bring an undesired denominational flavor to the work of the settlement.

Kellogg himself took a decided stand against any insistence on the part

of Adventist church leaders that the work in Chicago be given a distinctive denominational color. He saw the work of the International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association (official name of the Adventist welfare organization) as representing the nondenominational side of Adventist work, stating that "when a man helps the poor in his neighborhood he does it as a Christian, and not a Baptist, a Methodist, or a Seventh-day Adventist. We can join hands with other denominations in that work as Christians."<sup>43</sup> It is evident that here again Kellogg was in full harmony with the sentiment shared by all welfare leaders of the time.

Kellogg's interest in social welfare also appears to have been motivated by the same religious concern for his fellow man that other leading reformers expressed. In fact, the essence of Christianity to him consisted of disinterested service rendered to the less fortunate. He is quoted as saying, "The man who is closest to God is the man that tries to do what God is doing in lifting up humanity, who runs the quickest to help the helpless, who is most ready to assist the weak and succor the afflicted, who sympathizes with the suffering, and comforts the comfortless."<sup>44</sup>

#### V. A PART OF A LARGER MOVEMENT

This comparison of trends in activity and thought in the social welfare movement around the turn of the century with Adventist welfare activity in Chicago makes possible a tentative conclusion as to the relative significance of the latter. In retrospect it appears that the predominant influence was in one direction, that Adventist welfare work did not contribute any novel ideas or techniques that were influential in other welfare organizations. For one thing, the entire program lasted only twenty years, in contrast with that of Hull House, for example, which is still in operation today. The endeavors undertaken by Adventists were thus largely imitative rather than innovative in character. Even the philosophy that undergirded the Adventist projects, as it was expressed by Kellogg, did not set it apart from the welfare movement at large. What unusual features there were (such as the large number of diverse activities that were conducted by the single organization, and the extent to which there was implementation of some of the techniques begun by other welfare leaders, as the Life Boat Rescue Service demonstrates) were not of such a character as to set the Adventist work in a class by itself.

It seems evident that the welfare work done in Chicago by Seventh-day Adventists at the turn of the century was not essentially different *from*, either in terms of endeavors undertaken or underlying philosophy, but per-

haps somewhat distinctive *within* the general welfare movement of which it was a part.

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