Rabbi Morris Newfield and the Social Gospel: Theology and Societal Reform in the South

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Until recently, American religious historians have argued that the enunciation of a social gospel theology at the turn of the century was limited to progressive Christian ministers. However, historians of American Jews have, in the last decade, offered compelling evidence that various Reform rabbis developed ideas similar to those of liberal Christian theologians. As this paper will demonstrate, one of the rabbis who offered a social gospel theology from his pulpit was Dr. Morris Newfield, the spiritual leader of Temple Emanu-El in Birmingham, Alabama, from 1895 to 1940.[1]

Newfield's social gospel theology, however, is more significant because of his position as rabbi in the South, and more particularly in

Rabbi Morris Newfield, 1868–1940

Birmingham, which was then, and continues to be, a citadel of Protestant fundamentalism. As a consquence, this study will not only compare Newfield's social gospel theology with ideas expressed by liberal Christian ministers in and outside of Birmingham, but will explore the reasons why Newfield preached this theology. Also, it will show how and why Newfield translated his theology into social action.

Morris Newfield was born in Homonna (Humenne), Hungary, in 1868, the son of a talmudic scholar, Seymon Shabsi Neufeld, and Lena (Klein) Neufeld. Educated at a royal gymnasium, he came to the United States in 1891 to pursue rabbinical studies at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati under the tutelage of Isaac Mayer Wise. In 1895, Newfield received a B.A. from the University of Cincinnati and simultaneously was ordained a rabbi at Hebrew Union College. After his graduation, Newfield took a pulpit at Temple Emanu-El in Birmingham, which he served until his death in 1940.

Morris Newfield became one of the more important Reform rabbis in the South in this period for a number of reasons. First, after serving the Central Conference of American Rabbis in a number of important positions, he became president of that body from 1931 to 1933. Second, Newfield was one of the leading social workers in Alabama. He presided over the Alabama Sociological Congress and the Alabama Conference of Social Work from 1913 to 1921, and participated in the activities of the Jefferson County Tuberculosis Society, the Jefferson County Red Cross, and the Birmingham Community Chest from 1910 to 1938, when these privately funded institutions provided the lion's share of the relief funds that were administered in the Birmingham area. Third, he was also a leader in improving interfaith relations in Birmingham. In the early 1920's, Newfield founded an interfaith council, with a Presbyterian minister, Dr. Henry M. Edmonds, and a Catholic priest, Father Eugene L. Sands, to promote cooperation among various religious faiths in Alabama. In 1928, these same three men founded the Birmingham chapter of the National Council of Christians and Jews.

Newfield's Theological Views

From the time of his arrival in Birmingham in 1895, Morris Newfield's popularity with his congregants depended on his ability to develop a theology that both appealed to Jews and did not alienate Christians in

the largely Protestant community of Birmingham. Newfield recognized that Emanu-El's members wanted a rabbi who understood that Jewish congregations consisted of enterprising businessmen who wanted to assimilate into the larger American society, and, as a result, wanted a religion that would be free of daily ritual. On the other hand, he knew that his congregants expected their leader to work with, and develop friendships among, Christian ministers and businessmen. They wanted a leader who could effect harmony with open-minded progressive Christians and at the same time show more traditional Christians that Jews would not threaten the evangelical idea of moral and social order.[2]

The sermons that Morris Newfield preached indicate that he offered his congregants a number of reconciliations and accommodations. Having been thoroughly trained by Isaac Mayer Wise, he knew that the most important function of American rabbis of his generation was to define the relationship between Jews and their newly acquired American environment. The basis of Newfield's theology, as a result, was his insistence, in line with the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, that Jews had a unique mission to develop a "Kingdom of God" on earth, a society in which all men would live ethically. No longer did American Jews, claimed Newfield, accept the messianic goal of a national state of Israel and the physical return of the Jews to Palestine. Rather, they sought a spiritual fulfillment of this goal by disseminating the idea of the oneness of God. Nor did Newfield feel that Jews had been dispersed from Israel because they had sinned. He regarded the Diaspora as a tool which God employed to help Jews complete their mission "to lead the nations in the true knowledge and worship of God."[3]

Newfield's insistence that Jews had a unique mission to create an ethical "Kingdom of God" on earth provided the intellectual foundation for a number of different goals. First, because he wanted to give the members of his congregation a reason to remain Jews, he used this concept to suggest that Jews were different from other religious groups. In a sermon entitled "The History of the Jews," he observed:

> Where the Jew stands foremost, where his particular genius finds its best expression is in the sphere of religion. By his guidance, the world has been brought to God and righteousness. His ethics have become the foundation of all moral laws of civilization. He it was

> who first brought the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

On the holiday of Shavuoth in 1896, Newfield insisted that this mission was unique to Jews because they had accepted God's plea to spread His word after other nations had refused it.[4]

Various historians who have studied the development of religion at the turn of the century have observed that an unprecedented ecumenical atmosphere prevailed—so much so, in fact, that as Nathan Glazer has suggested, "it would not have been far-fetched for an intellectual historian of that time to predict a merger between Reform Judaism and progressive Christianity." Glazer adds, however, that "such a merger did not take place." It did not happen because classical Reformers like Newfield were afraid that an ecumenical movement stressing the universal reign of God, regardless of race or creed, would lead to the religious assimilation of Jews, and therefore threaten the very existence of the Jewish people.[5]

Second, because he accepted the Reform tenet that Jews had an historical commitment to a mission ideal, Newfield argued that the harsh, formalistic concepts and mass of creeds that had previously set Jews apart were unnecessary. Newfield equated blind acceptance of Mosaic laws with a continuation of the "meaningless sacrifices believed sufficient in the 8th century B.C." In 1914, he also explained:

> Religion has been made to suffer not by those who claim to be its most loyal devotees, [but by] those who would make it stand for all sorts of absurdities. . . . There are those who pose as friends yet are worse than the worst enemies. . . . There is the ceremonialist who makes religion to stand for a mass of forms and rules, in whose eyes the chief occupation of God is watching and keeping books on the number of glorifications a man makes in his prayers . . . how broad his phylacteries. [There is] the ceremonialist to whose mind the chief council of God is to persecute and punish men who neglect the ceremonies, no matter how upright their conduct.

Traditional Orthodox rituals, he further suggested, prevented Jews from fully exploiting their newly won freedoms in America.[6]

Not surprisingly, Rabbi Newfield also pointed out to his congregation of aspiring German-American Jews that their success

depended more on deeds than on creed. They wanted to hear that they could achieve salvation through hard work, and not through the outpouring of emotion or meaningless intellectual formulations, and as a result, he explained to them that "our religion lays insistence upon the life rather than the belief; it attaches the greatest importance to righteousness rather than to creed. . . . The burden of the Holy Scriptures is not Believe! Its battle cry is Do! Do!!"[7]

Third, his enunciation of the mission ideal allowed him to function as the conscience of Jewish businessmen. Consistently, he warned his followers that they could not afford to focus too energetically on individual accomplishments or material aspirations because they would lose sight of their mission, or their newly created raison d'etre. In one speech, he reaffirmed his central theme: "Israel's duty is to build an ideal city, not through armies or commerce, but through the principles of humanity and justice. Yea . . . learning this lesson . . . is better than . . . struggling for gold and possessions wet with the tears of our fellowmen." This role was one that Newfield cherished, and he often outspokenly ridiculed those Jews who never looked beyond "the music of the market place."[8]

Fourth, the mission concept offered a theological underpinning that allowed the rabbi to reconcile Jewish faith in a God-centered universe with Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, which was popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Because they did not believe in a God-centered universe, the Unitarians, the Free Religious Association, and Felix Adler's Ethical Culture Society held little attraction for Morris Newfield. These ethical systems, he thought, not only forced individuals to drift between selfish feelings and the always-changing "quicksand of public opinion" around them, but also minimized the particular accommodation that Reform theologians had made for American Jews.[9]

But Newfield did not reject out of hand the theory of evolution. Instead, he accepted it as a process, but not as a force or creator, or a substitute for God. He taught his congregation that an Infinite Power accounted for the process of evolution, and that evolution was the work of that Power's procedure. Similarly, Newfield accepted scientific criticism of the Bible when it did not run counter to his belief that the Bible was divinely inspired and the source of divine revelation. An unthinking perusal of the ancient documents, he warned, was as detrimental to

the cause of truth as was irreverential scoffing at them. He further reasoned, "Biblical criticism is not the product of scepticism, but the result of painstaking study of men devoted to religion." The Birmingham rabbi believed that his congregants were going to think critically because they were aware of scientific progress in their day, and if Judaism was to be meaningful, their faith had to be integrated with biblical criticism and study of the natural laws of civilization.[10]

But Newfield refused to compromise his faith by questioning the existence of God. As a result, he argued that the "Kingdom of God" represented the highest level of the evolutionary process, and he claimed in 1900:

> The race is not to the swift, nor victory to the strong. Not to Pharaoh, the powerful king, but to Moses, the spiritual leader; not to Goliath, the physical giant, but to David, the idealistic youth. . . . in short, not the men of muscles have led their fellows . . . but the men of soul, the prophets of humanity. . . . with Israel's birth was born the conception "mind is more than matter."

In the synthesis that he proposed between Reform Jewish principles and evolutionary theory, Moses and Isaiah were exemplary teachers who taught men to strive for an ethical society.[11]

Morris Newfield, then, preached the tenets of the social gospel because he felt that he had to offer his congregants a rationale for remaining Jews in an environment that threatened their identities as Jews. By rejecting many of the traditional laws, he developed a set of religious practices that did not interfere with his congregants' quest for economic success. By accentuating the mission ideal, he asked them to remember that in their pursuit of worldly gain, they could not overlook their commitments to Judaism or to society.

Interfaith Relations and the Mission Ideal

Morris Newfield's social gospel theology was also very appealing to his congregants because it offered them a rationale for living peacefully with Birmingham Christians. This factor cannot be overemphasized, because the relative cultural strength of white Christians was overwhelming in this Southern city. In 1918 only 3,500 of Birmingham's 198,000 citizens were Jews—1.5 percent of the population—while

more than 85 percent, or 170,000, were Protestants. Of the white population of approximately 113,000, Jews represented 3 percent.[12]

During the period of Newfield's rabbinate, from 1895 to 1940, most of Birmingham's churches and denominational newspapers had a rural flavor characterized by Protestant traditionalism and wholehearted acceptance of a supernatural religion, including beliefs in the infallibility of the Bible, the virgin birth of Jesus, the supernatural atonement, the physical resurrection of Jesus, and the authenticity of the Gospel miracles. For the most part the city's Protestants were evangelical Christians, and Newfield understood that many of them feared those who sought to reconcile Christianity with scientific advances or the social milieu.[13]

But Rabbi Newfield confidently expected that he could help evangelical Protestants develop more broadly-based attitudes toward Jews. The mission ideal not only allowed him to modernize Judaism for businessmen in his congregation, but also rationalized Jewish separatism in an area that feared alien customs. He often told his congregation, "A faithless Jew is a faithless man; such men create prejudice and ill-will. . . . Gentiles even today believe that Jew and Talmud go together and that every Jew knows the Talmud by heart." Newfield sensed that Jewish religious commitment was not threatening to fundamentalist Christians, since they regarded Judaism as the mother of Christianity and therefore expected Jews to have faith in God, but he felt that Christians feared the differentness of Jews and thus would have misconstrued an attempt to emphasize Jewish racial characteristics.[14]

As a consequence, Newfield worked hard to explain to evangelical Christians that Jews were different because they were committed to their unique mission; and "so that we may be better able to fulfill our mission, God has endowed us with wonderful faculties and abilities, which has made us proverbial. He has given us greater vitality to survive the storms of hatred and persecution, wealth and wisdom to emulate in the solution of the greatest problems of mankind." We can see, then, that Newfield also used the mission ideal as a threat to his congregants. By reinforcing the impression that evangelical Christians expected religious loyalty, regardless of creed, he used the fear of Christian intolerance as a means of keeping his congregation in line.[15]

Although much of the evidence indicates that Newfield's theological response to Birmingham's evangelical Christians was a defensive one,

some of his work suggests that he hoped to serve as a "prophet" among the Gentiles. At times, acting much like the social-gospeler that he believed Isaiah, Moses, and Jesus to have been, he castigated Christians for their anti-Semitic tendencies. In a speech entitled "Dream of Temple," he exclaimed, "Anti-Semitism is the confession of bankruptcy of society; it is the admission of failure by the boasted philosophy of materialism on the one hand, and on the other, of the impotency of a religion which abandons the world for the sake of the next." Many times, he used this speech when asked to address Christian audiences in Birmingham.[16]

Morris Newfield's attitudes toward Christians, and his subsequent theological statements about them, suggest, then, that he recognized the extent of their cultural influence in Birmingham. Hoping to ensure the survival of Birmingham's Jews, he fashioned a theology that was appealing to Jewish businessmen and diplomatically attempted to convince Christians that Jews were different but acceptable. His sermons about the mission idea indicate how he rationalized Jewish similarities to, and differences from, Christians in order to make peace with them. But Newfield's more forceful stance toward evangelical Christians cannot be overlooked. It indicates that he was not afraid to express his Jewish identity.

Interfaith Relations and the Social Gospel

Morris Newfield's theology was also influenced by his relationships with Christians who were more flexible thinkers. In this case, there were both indirect and direct influences operating. On one hand, while still in college, he heard Washington Gladden speak, and in the course of his ministry in Birmingham, he read the ideas of other liberal Christian theorists, such as Richard T. Ely, Josiah Strong, and Walter Rauschenbusch. On the other hand, Newfield also developed friendships with liberal Christian ministers in Birmingham, such as Henry M. Edmonds of the Independent Presbyterian Church and Middleton S. Barnwell of the Episcopalian Church of the Advent.[17]

These more progressive Christians, often called "social gospel theologians" by historians, shared Newfield's belief that organized religion had become too concerned with enforcing piety and traditional dogmas. They hoped to shift the emphasis in religious thinking

from individual piety and dogmatic ritual assumptions to the creation of an ethically-based "Kingdom of God" on earth. Their goals were to create a religious atmosphere in America through a set of theological precepts that would transcend the vales of growing materialism and the inflexible practices of orthodox sects. Also, these liberal Christians shared Newfield's confident expectation that their theologies could reduce the enmity between capitalists and labor, reconcile the laws of science with faith in God and the Bible, and promote interfaith cooperation.[18]

Various Christian groups had always been interested in pursuing the goal of an ethical society. Unitarianism, which developed in the eighteenth century, was fundamentally ethical, stressing the dignity and divine possibilities of man. It also emphasized the importance of the present life and of man's responsibilities to others.

In the late nineteenth century, Christian "social-gospelers" looked to the teachings of Jesus as a means of reconciling the Christian faith with the values of the newly emerging urban, industrial, and immigrant-filled society. In 1897, Dr. Washington Gladden stated that Jesus had valued the harmony of society, the solidarity of the human family, and the necessity of the strong protecting the weak. In 1912, Walter Rauschenbusch suggested that Jesus spoke of the social order as an organism in which each individual act, however small, affected the whole. By definition, ethics were social: an individual lived in a complex of social relationships, and was therefore responsible to more than just himself.[19]

Because they saw the creation of an ethical "Kingdom of God" on earth as the mission of Christianity, various progressive Christian ministers repudiated conventional Protestant goals of individual perfection and other-worldly concerns. In 1884, Richard T. Ely, a leading economist with theological interests, suggested that the other-worldly concerns of Christians were an "unfortunate error that would explain many historical aberrations such as persecution and formalism." He also maintained that the church should abandon the "narrow, negative, individualistic attitude" that had restricted the Christian message to saving souls. Rev. Edward Everett Hale directed men, in the same year, to look beyond a "medieval" church that stressed the salvation of individuals.[20]

Like Newfield, liberal Christians rejected selfish, acquisitive values.

Newfield did so because he feared that resentment of Jewish prosperity might lead to anti-Semitism. The Christians had a different reason. Some believed that the churches, by catering to the needs of wealthy citizens and ignoring the needs of working people, were failing to promote social harmony. In 1897, Gladden wrote, "We are driving toward chaos. . . . What can be done to bring these scattered, diverse, alienated, antipathetic groups of human beings into a real unity?" He hoped that captains of industry, farmers, miners, and laborers would realize that they were members of one body, "where an injury to one concerned every other." Later, Rauschenbusch, too, rejected the "new selfishness" of business life in America, suggesting that churches were "forgetting the weighty matters, such as social justice and Christian fraternity."[21]

Liberal Christians such as Ely and Theodore Munger also hoped to attract new members to Christianity by reconciling faith in a God-centered universe with the new intellectual propositions of the nineteenth century. These Christian social-gospelers shared with the Birmingham rabbi the uncritical assumption that the "Kingdom of God" on earth was the highest operation of natural laws. Their theologies linked moral and religious improvement to the nineteenth-century belief in progress. In 1892, Lyman Abbott spoke of a "growing spiritual life in man, beginning in the early dawn of human history, when man first came to moral consciousness, and to be consummated no one can tell when or how." Rauschenbusch agreed: "Evolution has prepared us for understanding the idea of a Reign of God toward which all creation is moving."[22]

Finally, Christian social-gospelers agreed with Newfield, for the most part, that the Hebrew prophets, and not Jesus, were the first to offer the ideal of a "Kingdom of God." This contradicted the thoughts of more traditional Christians, who believed not only that Judaism was a harsh, formalistic religion, but also that Jesus' goal was a kingdom in Heaven. Rauschenbusch suggested that "a comprehension of the essential purpose and spirit of the prophets is necessary for a comprehension of the purpose and spirit of Jesus, and of genuine Christianity. . . . the thought of the prophets was the spiritual food that he assimilated in his process of growth." Gladden, too, acknowledged the debt that Christianity owed to Judaism and the prophets of the Old Testament.[23]

Newfield's working relationships with liberal Christians in Bir-

mingham, initially stimulated by his knowledge that his congregants expected him to develop Christian friendships, are very significant in documenting the influence of Christian social-gospelers on his thinking. In 1898, three years after he had heard Gladden, he invited a Chicago Unitarian minister, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, to speak at his temple on "The Parliament of Religions and What Next?" In his speech, Jones lectured both Jews and liberal Christians on the importance of mutual understanding between religious groups.

Of more significance, however, were Newfield's friendships with Edmonds and Barnwell, who not only helped him to understand evangelical Christians but also treated him like a brother in a fraternity of socially-advanced clergymen. The three ministers were all charismatic figures with large personal followings, but they were able to work together because each was strong enough to see the ethnic and religious worth of the others.

Edmonds, pastor of the South Highlands Presbyterian Church from 1913 to 1915, and after 1915 of the Independent Presbyterian Church, was considered a maverick by the Presbytery of North Alabama because he refused merely to preach the gospel, instead accentuating the social teachings of Jesus and the "Kingdom of God" ideal.

The dispute between Edmonds and the Presbytery of North Alabama came to a head in 1915. Disagreeing with the idea that salvation could only be attained by acknowledging that God would save mankind through Jesus, Edmonds reasoned from his study of the Old Testament that salvation was the result of good works, and that Jesus was not a savior but rather the perfect example on whom Christians should model themselves in striving to fulfill their ethical duties in society and unto God.[24]

In October 1915, Edmonds separated from the Presbytery and formed the Independent Presbyterian Church. When Edmonds was attacked by the Presbytery, Newfield rushed to the aid of his friend. He offered Edmonds the use of his temple, at no cost, for as long as Edmonds needed to use it. Edmonds's followers worshipped at Temple Emanu-El, and this was the beginning of a close association between Newfield's temple and Edmonds's church.[25]

Newfield and Middleton S. Barnwell, rector of the Episcopalian Church of the Advent, were also close friends and shared many of the same beliefs. Barnwell served in Birmingham from 1913 to 1924 and

participated with Newfield in many social endeavors. But a letter he wrote to Newfield in 1922 indicates the problems that social gospel ministers were facing in this religiously conservative city:

> My dear Dr. Newfield:
> . . . I am far from a permanency in this field [at his church]. Whether I stay in Alabama or not depends entirely on the outcome of the Council. . . . If Bishop Beckwith succeeds in imposing his will upon the diocese again . . . I shall leave Alabama. I am not willing to spend the rest of my life breaking my head against a stone wall. . . . I think the two men in the city for whom I feel the deepest affection and the greatest respect are Mr. Rober Jemison [a real estate broker and a member of his parish] and yourself. . . . You are the very first person in Birmingham to whom I have spoken my mind.

Barnwell and Newfield both knew that the former was indeed "breaking his head against a stone wall." The Episcopalian diocese was not favorably disposed to many of Barnwell's outside activities, choosing rather to take an apolitical position on many public issues. As a consequence, Barnwell left Birmingham two years later.[26]

The Social Gospel in Practice

As Morris Newfield grew older and more established in Birmingham, he became involved in social welfare activities because he hoped to translate his social gospel theology into practical efforts. After 1909, he participated in relief efforts in Birmingham, and also in activities to aid children on the local, state, and national levels. As a consequence, his career can be used as a "case study" of the social welfare efforts that occurred in Birmingham and in Alabama in the first four decades of the twentieth century.

Social workers and historians who have written about social welfare efforts in Birmingham in this period have emphasized their private scope and elitist nature. The Red Cross Family Service Agency, for example, which acted as the primary relief-giving body in Birmingham from 1925 to 1932, was largely funded by private donations channeled through the Community Chest because there was no local Department of Public Welfare at this time.[27]

A political scientist, Ed La Monte, has argued that the city fathers,

wanting to develop business in Birmingham and fearing that corporations would not come to their city if businesses had to pay heavy taxes to support needy people, maintained that welfare was not a major responsibility of local government, and that the private sector should render the necessary services. Because an obvious shortcoming in previous studies is a failure to discuss the thoughts and actions of those leaders who sat on the boards, staffed the private agencies, or assisted in child-care activities or in the professionalization of social work in this region, we can gain an understanding of some of these efforts by studying the interests and motivations of one of the key leaders, Morris Newfield.[28]

The rabbi chose a secondary career as a social worker for a number of reasons. First, because he understood that fundamentalist Christians feared Jewish business success, he may have believed that first-generation Jews like himself could attain more prestige in Birmingham through humanitarian efforts than through aggressive business careers. Second, he may have wanted to emulate other rabbis in the American Jewish community. Although he came to Birmingham in 1895, he did not become involved in social welfare efforts until 1909, the same year that the Central Conference of American Rabbis formally adopted an anti-child-labor plank. Third, he may have been influenced as well by Christian ministers around him. In 1908, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ took a definite stand against child labor, and Newfield, like the CCAR, may have waited until ministers agitated for social change. Fourth, Newfield had read about the work of Edgar Gardner Murphy of Montgomery, who founded the Alabama Child Labor Committee in 1900 and the National Child Labor Committee in 1904. Although there is no record of any correspondence between the two men, Newfield's later participation on the Alabama Child Labor Committee indicates that he was very conscious of Murphy's efforts. Fifth, Newfield's father-in-law, Samuel Ullman, who had been a champion of better schools in Birmingham, and of education for blacks, probably showed the rabbi that idealistic Jews, who persisted on a day-to-day basis in the face of traditional attitudes about self-help and the supremacy of property rights, could accomplish social change. Sixth, as a member of an exclusive and conservative club in Birmingham, the Quid Pro Quo Club, which consisted of ten of the city's leading business, religious, and social leaders, Newfield

developed close contacts with other social reformers. This provided an environment for discussions of stewardship and of improvements in, but not substantial change of, the social order in Birmingham.[29]

As a result of Newfield's personal motivations, we have a picture of an ambitious man who wanted further prestige and influence in Birmingham, and perhaps as a Reform rabbi in America. But Newfield was also a socially-concerned individual who believed that Jews and Christians alike would listen to his ideas about improving society because he was a minister. Comforted by cues given by Murphy and other Christian ministers, he felt that Jews could take a far more active role in pursuing social justice than simply preaching from comfortable pulpits.

In 1907, although Newfield was a close friend of John Herbert Philips, the superintendent of the Board of Education, and the son-in-law of Samuel Ullman, he passed up a chance to join the Board of Education because he feared that his service would establish a sectarian influence in an area that he wanted to keep separate. But two years later, because he understood that private agencies bore most of the brunt of relief support, Newfield agreed to help businessmen and other ministers in establishing the Associated Charities, whose purpose was to act as a clearinghouse for private charitable efforts.[30]

In the second decade of the twentieth century, Rabbi Newfield also became involved in two other privately funded agencies, the Anti-Tuberculosis Society and the Jefferson County Red Cross. In 1910, he helped found the Jefferson County Anti-TB Society, whose purpose was to study and prevent tuberculosis. By 1916, the Society had opened the first TB camp in Alabama and a fresh-air school for both black and white children, an unusual occurrence in segregated Birmingham. Newfield also helped form the Alabama Anti-TB League in 1914. From 1919 to 1921, he served as its president, working closely with the state health officer, Dr. Samuel Welch, to develop a local health unit in every county.[31]

The rabbi also began working for the Jefferson County Red Cross in 1917. Formed in 1909, and chartered by the national body in 1916, Birmingham's Red Cross chapter prospered thanks to the work of businessmen and religious leaders like Morris Newfield. From 1917 to 1934, he acted as chairman of the Home Service Committee, whose responsibility was to assist veterans. In late 1919, his case load was more

than two thousand a month. By 1921, he was playing a leading role in the chapter's work: he helped over ten thousand men secure treatment from the publicly assisted Veterans' Bureau; he investigated the free milk system in Birmingham, and subsequently helped the city's nurses develop a well-managed program; and he was responsible for hiring Fanny M. Blynd, a professionally trained social worker, to manage the Civilian Relief Committee, the primary privately funded relief-giving body in Birmingham.[32]

In 1923, when the city refused to meet the responsibility of providing relief for the indigent, businessmen and social workers developed a Community Chest. Newfield led the movement to establish an effective relief organization under the auspices of the Community Chest because he was convinced that the relief efforts of the city and the Red Cross were overlapping, and therefore wasteful. In 1925, he helped establish a Family Relief Department as an integral part of the Red Cross. A year later, he worked closely with Roberta Morgan, who had been appointed secretary of the Red Cross, and within two years, Newfield was elected chairman of the Advisory Case Committee. Here, his responsibility was to aid trained and untrained caseworkers in solving the most difficult relief case problems, and to obtain more financial support in the community. In this capacity, Newfield served as a liaison between the Community Chest and the Red Cross Family Service in order to inform businessmen of the caseworkers' needs.[33]

We might say that Rabbi Newfield was successful in his Red Cross work for two reasons: first, although he was not a professionally trained worker, his willingness to operate judiciously won the respect of professional social workers; second, because he was a respected clergyman in Birmingham, he secured a good deal of money from businessmen.

During the depression, after the Red Cross had been relieved of its relief-giving responsibilities by the federal government, Newfield was free to undertake different jobs. From 1934 to 1936, he served as president of the Red Cross, raising funds for disaster relief and continuing to help ex-servicemen who were hurt when the Birmingham office of the Veterans' Administration closed.[34]

While Morris Newfield acted as a liaison between Birmingham's business and social work communities in relief activities, his role in child-care efforts was more complex because so many agencies were

privately funded. On the one hand, he continued his liaison role, helping to develop the Jefferson County and Alabama Children's Aid Societies, both privately funded agencies involved in finding homes for children. On the other hand, because the state of Alabama had made and honored a commitment to helping dependent and delinquent children, Newfield helped develop two types of publicly funded programs. He assisted trained social workers in improving child-labor laws in Alabama, and he helped establish ameliorative institutions, such as the Juvenile Court of Birmingham in 1911, and the State Department of Child Welfare in 1919, to carry out the dictates of the new child-labor laws.

The year 1911 was an important one in the development of child-welfare efforts in Birmingham. Not only were the Seventh Annual Proceedings of the National Child Labor Committee held in Birmingham, with leaders such as Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, Felix Adler, and Theodore Roosevelt among the speakers, but the city's first Juvenile Court was established by the State Legislature. Newfield sat on its Advisory Board of Directors.[35] The support of social workers like Newfield was significant in securing private funding for the work of the Juvenile Court when it became clear that the city and county subsidies were not enough.

In 1913, Newfield helped establish the Children's Aid Society, and four years later, the Alabama Children's Aid Society, whose objects were to support local child-welfare work in every county in Alabama. The rabbi and his friends, Henry M. Edmonds and Judge Samuel D. Murphy of the Birmingham Juvenile Court, to name a few, traveled the state to raise money for juvenile programs.[36]

In 1913 Newfield also revived the Alabama Sociological Congress to provide a forum for discussions of such issues as where to develop child-care services and how to secure further child-care legislation. Serving as president of the Congress until 1924, he successfully lobbied in Montgomery for passage of the more restrictive Child Labor Law of 1915, which regulated the labor of children under eighteen, and for the Child Welfare Department Act of 1919, which created a Department of Child Welfare. This new state agency had the functions of supervising county child-welfare boards, enforcing the Child Labor Law of 1915, and training and licensing probation officers and county welfare superintendents. It also helped pass the first Comprehensive School Attendance Law in 1919.[37]

Throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, Morris Newfield also helped social workers in Alabama define standards for their profession. At the first meeting of the Alabama Conference of Social Work in 1921, Newfield, as president, brought in leading trained social-work experts, such as Frank J. Bruno, a professor of sociology at Washington University in St. Louis, Julia Lathrop, and Judge Ben Lindsay of Denver, the nation's leading juvenile court judge.[38]

In addition to successfully marshaling support for the projects of trained social workers in his capacity as a well-regarded minister, Morris Newfield, as an experienced "nontrained" social worker, helped develop both social reform legislation and the profession of social work in Alabama. Moreover, as president of the Alabama Sociological Congress and the Alabama Conference of Social Work, he worked for social reform and served as an agent of transition in the development of the social work profession. In 1910, in Alabama, many of the child-care and relief efforts were organized and managed by ministers such as Newfield, Edgar Gardner Murphy, and Henry M. Edmonds. By 1930, the torch had been passed to professionally trained workers.

Attitudes toward labor unions and blacks were, however, social issues over which Newfield struggled in the period between World War I and World War II, for two reasons. First, Jews were in a difficult position, as non-Christians, in this severely evangelical Christian region. Second, after World War I, the bottom had fallen out of the cotton market, making for an economic pinch, and in addition many Birminghamians were disillusioned by the social changes taking place in their city. As a consequence, the Ku Klux Klan flourished, making life difficult for Jews and other minorities. During the period from 1920 to 1930, many Jews were forced to become circumspect in their activities, and Jewish lawyers and educators found that they could not practice their trades. Against this atmosphere of intolerance, Rabbi Newfield created an interfaith colloquium, with Edmonds and a Catholic priest, Eugene L. Sands, to further trust between religious faiths. They barnstormed the state, lecturing mostly on college campuses, but "they'd take invitations to any place." In 1928, the three clergymen founded the Birmingham chapter of the National Conference of Christians and Jews to develop a common ground between members of different faiths.[39]

But Newfield's hopes of developing a spirit of brotherhood among

religious groups were hurt by the labor and social unrest that occurred in the 1920's. In response to the Klan, Newfield emphasized the similarities among religious groups, confident that he had the support of a responsible majority against a truculent and intolerant minority of disaffected whites. However, because opponents of labor unions and equal rights for blacks were often conservative and well-regarded leaders of Birmingham, it was more difficult for Newfield to act publicly without endangering his own prestige and that of the city's Jews.

Before World War I, Newfield did not support efforts to organize labor and criticized workers who complained about their wealthy employers: "It is true there is much poverty. . . . Some of it, no doubt, is due to the greed of employers. But is not most of it due to that fertile source of all poverty, idleness, intemperance, improvidence?" In this sermon, Newfield either showed his ignorance of the problems that industrial laborers faced or was acting as an apologist for business interests.[40]

In time, however, he began to change his mind, perhaps because of the greed displayed by the coal operators during World War I. In 1917, the wartime shortage of coal was used as a rationale for threatening Alabama miners with reprisals if they tried to join the United Mine Workers. In 1920, violence erupted; although it stopped when the miners agreed to binding arbitration, Governor Thomas E. Kilby ruled in favor of the operators on every point. Most of the twelve thousand striking miners lost their jobs. This incident convinced Newfield that businessmen had tried to take advantage of World War I for quick profits, and as a result, he began to understand that employers and employees represented separate interest groups. By 1919, he had changed his tune completely: "If capital has the right to be and is today under the necessity of combination, labor has the same right. . . . Money proclaiming with Cain's insolence 'As I may,' will always provoke men to responsive defenses."[41]

Newfield's uncertainty regarding labor organizations may be similar to the dilemma that he felt about defending blacks. The rabbi may have been torn between his belief that blacks deserved fair and equal treatment under the law and his awareness that Jews, as one of the less-dominant subcultures in Birmingham, could not afford to oppose traditional Southern attitudes of black inferiority.

The rabbi's support of labor organization in the coal fields in 1921

suggests that he favored equal treatment under the law for blacks, because approximately 75 percent of the twelve thousand striking miners were black. Similarly, when a black janitor of Temple Emanu-El was arrested for murder and some members of the congregation wanted to fire him because they feared the negative publicity, Newfield defended the man. The janitor was eventually acquitted and stayed on at the temple. Nevertheless, Newfield refused to offer public support for the Scottsboro Boys, nine black youths who were accused of raping two white girls on a train near Scottsboro, Alabama, in 1931. He joined the Independent Scottsboro Committee in 1936, but its lack of money and failure to speak out indicated that neither Newfield nor the other members had taken a strong public stand. Perhaps Newfield's stance can be explained by his position as a Jew in a community that feared and resented Jews as well as blacks; he may have felt that he could not offer much public opposition to the mores of Birmingham's dominant white Protestant subculture.[42]

Summary

As I have indicated throughout this article, Rabbi Morris Newfield developed a theology similar to that of the Protestant social gospel ministers and translated it into social action by becoming one of the leading social workers in Alabama in the years 1910 to 1940. Newfield's social gospel theology was shaped by three forces: his training in Reform Judaism with Isaac Mayer Wise at Hebrew Union College and his subsequent sensitivity to the needs of his congregants, who wanted to integrate their religion into their daily lives; his awareness of the ambivalent feelings that Birmingham Christians held toward Jews; and his knowledge of the theological developments occurring in the more progressive Christian churches. The first of these forces provided the basis for Newfield's feeling that Jews could be loyal Americans without giving up their existence as a distinct religious group, the second sharpened his awareness of the difficulties that Jews faced in Birmingham, while the third helped him realize that Jews had allies in their quest for peaceful coexistence with Birmingham's Christians.

I have thought it important not only to discuss what Newfield said or did, but to suggest reasons for his words and actions. As a Jew and a rabbi in an overwhelmingly evangelical Christian area, Newfield was

faced with a number of difficult tasks. He had to manufacture a religion that kept his congregants coming to temple and at the same time had to satisfy their demand that he develop close friendships and working relationships with both liberal and traditional Christians. Newfield's social gospel theology and his leadership role in interfaith associations and the social work community suggest that he handled his task exceedingly well.

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Notes

1. The most significant contribution in this area for many years was Charles Hopkins's *The Rise of the Social Gospel, 1865–1915* (New Haven, 1915). He treats the ideas of progressive Christian ministers such as Washington Gladden, George Herron, and Walter Rauschenbusch. The first edition of the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1933) discussed the concept of social gospel under the heading, "Social Christianity." Other recent contributions that deal with the Christian social gospel include: Aaron I. Abell, *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1943); Paul Carter, *The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1954); Robert D. Cross, ed., *The Church and the City, 1865–1910* (New York, 1967); Robert T. Handy, ed., *The Social Gospel in America* (New York, 1966); and Cushing Strout, *The New Heavens and New Earth: Political Religion in America* (New York, 1974).

More recently, historians have noticed Jewish contributions to the social gospel movement. Charles Hopkins and Ronald White, eds., *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia, 1976), includes chapters on Jews and Catholics. However, only the work of Stephen Wise is analyzed. Egal Feldman, in "The Social Gospel and the Jews," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (March 1969), claims that a religion of humanity did not come about because Christian ministers rejected Jewish participation in it. Benny Kraut's *From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture* (Cincinnati, 1979) is a lucid study of the theological differences between Reform rabbis and Adler's nontheistic approach. Finally, Leonard Mervis's "The Social Justice Movement and the American Reform Rabbi," *American Jewish Archives* (Winter 1955), notes the theological contributions of rabbis to the social gospel movement but also suggests that they did not translate their ideas into social reform activities until 1909, when the CCAR adopted a child-labor plank, a year after the Federal Council of Churches of Christ had adopted various social reforms.

2. See *Minute Books of Temple Emanu-El, 1895–1923* (located at Temple Emanu-El, Birmingham, Ala.)

3. See Kraut, *From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture,* and W. Gunther Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism: American and European Sources until 1948* (New York, 1965), 2:3–17.

4. Morris Newfield, "The History of the Jews," no date, and "Address on Shavuoth," 1896 (sermons delivered at Temple Emanu-El, Birmingham, Ala.; located in Morris Newfield Collection at American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio).

5. For a more detailed discussion of the reasons why Jews and Christians did not develop a

universal religion, see Feldman, "Social Gospel and the Jews." Feldman claims that Christian ministers rejected Jewish participation. Neither Kraut nor Nathan Glazer, in *American Judaism* (Chicago, 1972), speaks directly to this issue, but both suggest that Reform rabbis were unwilling to join with Christians in a religion of humanity.

6. Newfield, "Religion of Dogmatism," March 1914, p. 1; and "Yom Kippur Eve Address," 1898, pp. 4–5 (sermons delivered at Emanu-El, located at AJA).

7. Newfield, "Yom Kippur Eve," 1899, p. 10; and "The Religion of Creed versus That of Deed," Jan. 8, 1915, pp. 1–2 (sermons delivered at Emanu-El, located at AJA).

8. Newfield, "Yom Kippur Eve Address," 1895, p. 5; "Yom Kippur Address," 1898, p. 6; "Rosh Hashana Address," 1896, p. 8 (sermons delivered at Emanu-El, located at AJA).

9. Newfield, "Festival of Conclusion," October 1907, pp. 2–3 (sermon delivered at Emanu-El, located at AJA).

10. Newfield, "Doctrine of Evolution and Its Effect on Modern Religion," no date, p. 4; and "The Bible in the Light of Scientific Study," no date, pp. 1–2 (sermons delivered at Emanu-El, located at AJA).

11. Newfield, "Pesach," 1900, p. 6; and "True Aristocrats," February 1906, p. 4 (sermons delivered at Emanu-El, located at AJA).

12. Edwin Scott Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America,* 1976 ed., passim; Bureau of the Census, United States Department of Commerce and Labor, *Religious Bodies,* 1910; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge, 1971), pp. 449–450; and *American Jewish Yearbook,* 1919–20 ed.

13. See Woodward, *Origins of the New South;* Kenneth K. Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1964); and Rufus Spain, "Attitudes and Reactions of Southern Baptists to Certain Problems of Society, 1865–1900" (Ph.D. thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1961). See also Martha Bigelow, "History of Birmingham, 1870–1910" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1946), pp. 200–201, and *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1933 ed.), s.v. "Fundamentalism," by H. Richard Niebuhr.

14. See Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Palssom, *Jews in the South* (Baton Rouge, 1973), intro.; and Newfield, "Alexander the Great," no date, and "Confirmation," 1897, p. 1 (sermons delivered at Emanu-El, located at AJA).

15. Newfield, "Pesach," 1898, p. 15, and "Jews: Religion, Nation, and Race," no date, p. 2 (sermons delivered at Emanu-El, located at AJA).

16. Newfield, "Rosh Hashana Morning," Sept. 9, 1907, p. 2; "New Year's Morning," 1903, p. 3; "Dream of Temple," no date, p. 5 (sermons delivered at Emanu-El, located at AJA).

17. See Mittie Owen McDavid, *A History of the Church of the Advent* (Birmingham, 1943), pp. 43–67; Henry M. Edmonds, *A Parson's Notebook* (Birmingham, 1960); and Washington Gladden, "Baccalaureate Address," in *17th Annual Commencement Exercises of the University of Cincinnati,* June 5, 1895, pp. 1–13 (located in Special Collections at the University of Cincinnati).

18. See above note 1.

19. Hopkins, *Rise of the Social Gospel,* pp. 3–5, 228; Cross, *Church and City,* p. 44.

20. Hopkins, *Rise of the Social Gospel,* p. 106; Handy, *Social Gospel in America,* pt. 2.

21. Cross, *Church and City,* p. 42; Handy, *Social Gospel in America,* pt. 3; Hopkins, *Rise of the Social Gospel,* chap. 13.

22. Hopkins, *Rise of the Social Gospel,* pp. 127–130.

23. Ibid.

24. For a full discussion of this controversy, see Presbytery of North Alabama, "A Review and Exposition of the Case of Dr. H. M. Edmonds and the Presbytery of North Alabama," privately published, pp. 3–20 (located in the Tutweiler Collection, Birmingham Public Library); and Dr.

Henry M. Edmonds and the Officers of the Independent Presbyterian Church, "The Other Side of the Recent Case of Dr. Henry Edmonds and the North Alabama Presbytery," privately published, pp. 1–12 (also located in the Tutweiler Collection).

25. Ibid.; Edmonds, *Parson's Notebook,* pp. 194–196.

26. Middleton S. Barnwell to Morris Newfield, May 18, 1922, pp. 1–2; McDavid, *History of the Church of the Advent,* p. 65.

27. To cite only a few works, see Woodward, *Origins of the New South;* George Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South* (Baton Rouge, 1967); F. Sheldon Hackney, *Populism and Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton, 1969); Bessie Brooks, *A Half Century of Family Welfare in Jefferson County* (Birmingham, 1936); and Anita Van DeVoort, "Public Welfare Administration in Jefferson County" (M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1935).

28. Edward S. La Monte, "Politics and Welfare in Birmingham, Alabama, 1900–1975" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1978), pp. 5–6, 177–180. See also Elizabeth Wisner, *Social Welfare in the South* (Baton Rouge, 1938).

29. See Mervis, "Social Justice Movement," pp. 172, 176; Daniel Levine, "Edgar Gardner Murphy: Conservative Reformer," *Alabama Review,* Spring 1962, pp. 50–55; Hugh C. Bailey, *Edgar Gardner Murphy, Gentle Progressive* (Coral Gables, Fla., 1968).

30. Morris Newfield to Leah Newfield, Sept. 26, 1907, and March 21, 23, 24, 1909; Brooks, *Family Welfare in Jefferson County,* p. 4; La Monte, "Politics and Welfare in Birmingham," pp. 112–120; Van DeVoort, "Public Welfare Administration in Jefferson County," pp. 36–38.

31. La Monte, "Politics and Welfare in Birmingham," pp. 108–109; Minutes of the Jefferson County Tuberculosis Society, May 31, 1910 (located at Jefferson County Lung Association, Birmingham); Alabama Lung Association, "History of the Alabama Association" (no date, located at Lung Association); and Alabama Lung Association, "Lung Health News, 1914–1974" (privately published, 1974, located at Lung Association).

32. Minutes of Jefferson County Red Cross, July–August 1921, October 14, 1921, April 18, 1922 (located at Jefferson County Red Cross, Birmingham, Ala.); Brooks, *Family Welfare in Birmingham,* p. 27; Van DeVoort, "Public Welfare Administration in Jefferson County," p. 47.

33. Minutes of the Jefferson County Red Cross, June 15, 1926, February 21, 1928, May 21, 1928, and July 10, 1928.

34. Jefferson County Red Cross, "History of the Jefferson County Red Cross," no date, pp. 1–4 (located at Birmingham Red Cross).

35. *Birmingham News,* March 9, 1911, p. 1, March 11, 1911, p. 1, and March 13, 1911, pp. 1, 14 (microfilm at Birmingham Public Library); Ethel M. Gorman, "History of the Juvenile Court and Domestic Relations Court," no date, pp. 1–5 (located at Family Court, Birmingham, Ala.).

36. "Milestones of the Children's Aid Society" (unpub. manuscript, located at Children's Aid Society, Birmingham); "Proceedings of the Alabama Sociological Congress," 1913–1915 (located in writer's files); "Alabama's Charity for Alabama's Own," *Birmingham News,* 1919; also, "Scrapbooks of the Alabama Children's Aid Society," Jan. 14, 1919 (located at Children's Aid Society, Birmingham, Ala.).

37. Morris Newfield, "Child Labor," 1904 (sermon delivered at Emanu-El, located in writer's files); *Birmingham News,* March 9, 1911, p. 1, March 11, 1911, p. 1, and March 13, 1911, pp. 1, 14.

38. See "Proceedings of the Alabama Sociological Congress, 1913–1915"; and Reports of the Alabama Conference of Social Work (located at the Alabama State Historical Archives, Montgomery, Ala., and at the Office of the Alabama Conference of Social Work, Montgomery, Ala.).

39. See Tindall, *Emergence of the New South,* pp. 111–112; Wayne Flynt, "Organized Labor, Reform, and Alabama Politics, 1920," *Alabama Review* 23 (July 1970): 163–181; Philip Taft,

"Labor Organization in the Coal Fields" (unfinished manuscript, located at Birmingham Public Library Archives); Malcolm C. McMillan, *Yesterday's Birmingham* (Miami, 1975), pp. 38, 147; also, James A. Head, Sr., personal interview, September 1979; Newfield, "The Claims of Religion," *Birmingham Age-Herald,* March 28, 1920, p. 4; Henry M. Edmonds, "Good Morning," excerpt from *Birmingham Post-Herald,* May 13, 1960, (located in the Edmonds Collection at Birmingham Public Library Archives); Edmonds, *Parson's Notebook;* "Religious Forum: Talk of Newfield, Edmonds, and Sands" (located in author's files).

40. Newfield, "Exaltation of the Spirit," Jan. 2, 1914, p. 2 (sermon delivered at Emanu-El, located at AJA).

41. Flynt, "Organized Labor, Reform, and Alabama Politics"; Taft, "Labor Organization in the Coal Fields"; Newfield, "Industrial Relations," February 1919, p. 2 (sermon delivered at Emanu-El, located at AJA).

42. Mayer Newfield, personal interview, September 1979; Henry M. Edmonds, "Beau Geste," *Birmingham Post-Herald,* n.d. (located in Edmonds Collection, Birmingham Public Library); Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge, 1969), pp. 264–269, 273; *Birmingham News,* June 10, 1936, pp. 1, 14; Dinnerstein and Palsson, *Jews in the South,* pp. 9–11; John Shelton Reed, "Ethnicity in the South: Some Observations on the Acculturation of Southern Jews," *Ethnicity* 6 (1979): 97–106.