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## JOHN LANCASTER SPALDING (1840-1916): A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL REFORM

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*The life and work of John Lancaster Spalding focused on the importance of Catholic ideals of life and education in the development of the human person and society in order to fit them to the high purpose of participating in God's reign on earth and preparation for humanity's ultimate end – eternal life with God. Following a brief biographical introduction, this article addresses the central themes of Bishop Spalding's social thought and proposes that his attempts to articulate a Catholic perspective on social justice issues of his time were among the earliest in the United States. The article concludes by focusing on the importance of the role of education in Spalding's social thought and proposes some implications for the teaching of peace and justice today.*

### INTRODUCTION

“We must help greater and greater numbers to understand and love the ideal of human perfection, and to believe in education for the transformation it is capable of working in man and in society” (Spalding, 1902a, p. 231).

While a systematic analysis of a Catholic perspective of social justice did not arise in the United States until the early years of the 20th century, the core ideas were born much earlier in the human experience of and in response to industrialization, immigration, and urbanization. John Lancaster Spalding's life spanned the years that witnessed these events. Over the course of his career, he was deeply entrenched in the struggle of the American Catholic Church to cope with the magnitude of suffering experienced by Catholics in the US. Carey (1987) aptly notes that the Americanists who had so ardently worked for a rapprochement between Catholicism and American democratic ideals laid the foundation for the recognition that there was a strong social element in the problems that beset the early immigrants:

Just as the so-called “Social Gospel” developed within the context of Protestant liberal theology, so also the Catholic “Search for Social Justice” originated

within the context of Americanism and modernism and developed more fully during the early part of the twentieth century. (p. 39)

## BIOGRAPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

John Lancaster Spalding's early years prepared him to rise to a position of national leadership in addressing social problems in the years between the Civil War and the early years of the 20th century (Carey, 1987). Born into a family of long standing in the Catholic colonies of Kentucky, Spalding was a seventh generation American Catholic – a status that would lend credibility to his Americanist ideals. He received home schooling from his mother, Mary Jane Lancaster Spalding, who was educated by the Sisters of Loretto at a time when few women received any formal schooling. Mary Jane Lancaster instilled in young John a deep and abiding respect for things of mind and spirit. The purpose of human life, she taught him, was “to know truth, to love goodness, to do right, that so, having made ourselves god-like, we may forever be with God” (Spalding, 1890, p. 151).

Spalding's father, Richard, was the brother of Martin Spalding who became Bishop of Louisville, Kentucky, and later of Baltimore, Maryland. Richard married Mary Jane Lancaster and raised a family on an idyllic plot of farmland in Springfield, Kentucky, which they named Evergreen Bend. John Lancaster Spalding was a thin and sickly child, but loved the beauty, serenity, and pastoral open spaces of the farm (Sweeney, 1965). His later disdain for the filthy conditions and dense population of the city was strongly influenced by these happy years in rural Kentucky. Spalding enrolled at Mount Saint Mary's College of the West in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he excelled in his studies and showed early promise in debate, rhetoric, and writing while pursuing classical studies. He also showed an early interest in social issues, successfully debating that intemperance caused more misery to humankind than war (Sweeney, 1965).

Bishop Martin Spalding arranged for young Spalding to attend the American College of the Immaculate Conception in Louvain, Belgium. Spalding corresponded frequently with his uncle and flourished in the discipline of the college. In the summer of 1862, he had occasion to attend a meeting of the Catholic Union at Aix-la-Chapelle (Sweeney, 1965). The Catholic Union was an assembly of lay social groups that had been forming since 1848 throughout the German states. These groups gathered to discuss issues of Catholic concern with Church and national leaders. “Side by side the cardinals, bishops, princes, and the learned professors there sat mechanics, carpenters, shoemakers” (Sweeney, 1965, p. 53). Spalding observed that the assembly gathered together there “in active thought and cooperation for

the furtherance of definite and religious social ends. The brotherhood of the race was there...and one felt the breathing of a divine Spirit” (Spalding, 1877, p. 246). This was European Social Catholicism in practice, and Spalding was getting an early dose of it. He saw in the Catholic congress at Aix-la-Chapelle an organizational model for the American Catholic Church, one allowing for the cooperation of all social groups. He wrote:

If we wish to be true to the great mission which God has given us, the time has come when American Catholics must take up the works which do not specially concern any one diocese more than another, but whose significance will be as wide as the nation’s life. (Spalding, 1877, pp. 247-248)

Thus, the stirrings of a vision of a national Church – one actively and publicly engaged in social issues – began in the mind of John Lancaster Spalding as a young man studying for the priesthood in the climate of European Social Catholicism.

In 1864, while Spalding was still studying in Europe, *The Syllabus of Errors* was issued by Pius IX as an attachment to the encyclical, *Quanta Cura*. At the time, Spalding considered it a necessary writ in light of the threats of modernity to the Church. He later changed his position and became a staunch defender of Catholic liberalism as he “sought for a rapprochement between American Catholicism and the spirit of the age” (Sweeney, 1965, p. 67).

Before returning home to Kentucky from Europe, Spalding was given a prophetic mission by Father De Nève of the American College of the Immaculate Conception at Louvain. Father De Nève proposed that the young priest consecrate his first years to African Americans who had suffered from enslavement and oppression in America. Upon returning to Louisville, it was evident to Spalding that the growing population of newly emancipated slaves was in need of pastoral assistance. Insisting on the need of African-Americans for a parish of their own, Spalding believed that, with persistence, the funds might be found so that this increasing Catholic population might be kept within the fold. In 1870, St. Augustine’s parish and school was dedicated, and Spalding, its young pastor, lived happily and simply for a time among the parish members. The parish remains vibrant today.

Spalding gained attention for his writing ability as a result of the publication of his biography of Archbishop Martin Spalding of Baltimore who died in 1872. In the following years, Spalding also gained notoriety as a superlative orator. His sermons and lectures in the New York area attracted many listeners. In 1876, he edited two Catholic readers for elementary school students (Sweeney, 1965). That same year, after careful consideration of the somewhat liberal views of the young priest, Pius IX named John

Lancaster Spalding the first bishop of Peoria, Illinois.

Among the key issues that captured Spalding's energy and attention during the 1880s and 1890s were: (a) the development of the Baltimore Catechism in 1885; (b) the founding of The Catholic University of America in 1888; (c) the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893; and (d) Americanism. Each of these, in one way or another, was influential to the development of Spalding's social thinking and reflective of Catholic social thought of the time.

## **THE BALTIMORE CATECHISM**

The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884 gave major impetus to the role Spalding came to play in Catholic education in the United States. The issue of a national catechism that would give unity to the presentation of the faith was of great concern to many bishops, and Spalding was appointed to the Council committee to address the matter. The move to develop a national catechism was quickly approved and within 1 year of the close of the Council, the first Baltimore Catechism (Catholic Church, 1885) was published.

## **THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA**

The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore also afforded the bishop of Peoria an opportunity to promote the cause dearest to his heart – the development of a national Catholic university. Years before, Spalding and his uncle, Martin, had discussed the possibility of establishing in this country a national university along the lines of the American College in Louvain. The bishop of Peoria is widely credited for his zealous efforts in establishing The Catholic University of America. James Cardinal Gibbons would later say:

All great works have their inception in the brain of some great thinker. God gave such a brain, such a man, in Bishop Spalding. With his wonderful intuitionary power, he took in all the meaning of the present and the future Church in America. If The Catholic University is today an accomplished fact, we are indebted for its existence in our generation, in no small measure, to the persuasive eloquence and convincing arguments of the Bishop of Peoria. (1916, p. 195)

## **THE CATHOLIC EXHIBIT AT THE WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION**

In 1892, Spalding was asked to oversee the Catholic educational exhibit at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which was ultimately successful in making public the practical and philosophical contributions of the nation's Catholic school system and its zealous pursuit of Christian education. In an article written for the *Catholic World* about the upcoming

Catholic exhibit, Spalding stated that there could be no compromise: “The Catholic Church is irrevocably committed to the doctrine that education is essentially religious, that purely secular schools give instruction, but do not properly educate” (Spalding, 1892, p. 4). The article suggested a religious education congress of Catholic schoolteachers to stimulate learning and discussion in the science of pedagogy.

## THE AMERICANIZATION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

In addition to his strong educational concerns, the bishop of Peoria wrote about and actively participated in national social issues. Along with the other perhaps more well known Americanist bishops – Ireland, Keane, and Gibbons – Spalding believed the immigrant Church should seek assimilation into American culture as quickly as possible not only for its own good, but because the nation would benefit from its association with Catholicism as well. Spalding noted a close affinity between the ideals of Catholicism and American democracy. While extolling the virtues of liberty and progress, he was not naïve in these perceptions. De Hovre paraphrased Spalding’s thought in the classic work, *Catholicism in Education*:

Certain American ways need modification or redirection. There is need for reform in the American’s absorption in the pursuit of success, wealth and material progress; in his restlessness; in his exaggerated self-confidence; in his individualism; in his narrowness; in his neglect of the higher life of the spirit; in his lack of sound religious and moral convictions. (1934, pp. 168-169)

Spalding taught that the remedy for these ills could be found in the ideals of Catholic life and Catholic education. But Catholics in America must not retreat into a parochial mentality, closing themselves off in ethnic parishes and neighborhoods. The Church must remain engaged to the fullest possible extent in American culture and society.

Abell describes the relationship between Americanism and social thought:

Zealots for Americanization...were often ready, in conjunction with non-Catholic moralists, to wage war on crime, immorality and social injustice. It was the ardent friends of Americanization who during the 1880’s and 1890’s advanced and defended a comprehensive program of economic and social reform which steered a middle course between the extremes of individualism and socialism. (1968, p. xix)

Spalding, too, rejected the extremes of individualism and socialism, while acknowledging that both Christian thought and American democracy

embraced each at some level. Responsibilities of the Christian include both personal development and social transformation toward the absolute fullness of equality, freedom, and sanctity for all. He explained:

After the things of absolute and everlasting import, after God and the soul's immortal destiny, that which most vitally and profoundly concerns awakened minds is the social problem, which touches us as closely as God's being and our own eternal welfare; for only those who know him and love their own souls strive in all earnestness to found on earth a heavenly kingdom wherein each one shall have opportunity to work and grow, wherein truth, justice, and love shall prevail. (Spalding, 1905, p. 170)

Spalding's life story, and indeed his whole philosophical view of the world, is a study in balance and moderation. In his thinking, Catholics needed to keep one foot in the Catholic Church and the other in the society. He believed right education was to be found in the shared influences of the home, Church, state, and school. "If one were to epitomize his [social] thought in one phrase it would be called a system of balanced rights" (Schroll, 1944, p. xiii).

Before his death in 1916, Bishop Spalding intellectually and publicly contended with economic, industrial, urban, and immigration issues (Schroll, 1944). While he did not put forth a unified social philosophy in any one area of his writings or his many lectures, it is possible to discover a good deal about Spalding's social thought from his collected volumes and from secondary sources that have consolidated his ideas. Intertwining his dual concern for social justice and for Catholic education, Spalding put forth reforms that, more often than not, saw Catholic teachings and Catholic education at the heart of solutions to the social problems of his time. At times overly abstract and naïvely optimistic, Spalding nevertheless displayed a profoundly prophetic sense in his treatment of the social questions of his time.

## **THE SOCIAL THOUGHT OF JOHN LANCASTER SPALDING**

In order to fully understand the implications of Spalding's educational philosophy for the transformation of the individual and society, it is important to examine some of the main themes of his social thought. While the historical conditioning of his thinking is evident, it is ironic to recall that methods of historical criticism had yet to be applied to the burgeoning body of Catholic social teachings. The shift in the Church's approach to social reform from applying charity as a remedy for the evils of industrialism to the understanding of the inherent sinfulness of societal and economic structures was a gradual process. Steinfels notes:

One of the most momentous shifts of the nineteenth century was from a formalist understanding of the human self, in which self-denial, temperance, and education were the solutions to economic distress, toward an anti-formalist understanding that stressed social explanations for individual crisis. (2004, p. 11)

John Lancaster Spalding's social thought developed on both sides of this paradigmatic shift. In one place, he emphasized the individual responsibility:

The cause of our evils is not so much social or political forms as human nature itself, which is impelled and swayed more constantly and more profoundly by self-interest than by any nobler passion. As the soul weaves its body, so individuals create society....The essential principles on which society, as constituted in Christendom, rests, are permanent. They are the expression of enduring and unalterable elements of man's nature. (1905, pp. 191-193)

And in another place, Spalding places the stress on societal structures:

The disease is organic; it works unseen; and remedies which but skin and film the ulcer have no efficacy....The complexity of the social organism, in which we are all caught as threads in the cloth, make it difficult, if not impossible, for us either to perceive or to utter simple truth. (1905, p. 199)

The bishop of Peoria understood the responsibilities of individual and social welfare as belonging to the family, the Church, the school, and the state. The following sections address Spalding's social thought in four key areas of social turmoil during the late 19th and early 20th centuries: economics, industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. While Spalding saw some of the methods and practices of education as part of social problems, he most often offered Catholic education and application of Church teachings as the necessary catalysts of the needed reforms.

## **ECONOMICS**

In Catholic social teaching on the economy, the name of Monsignor John A. Ryan is held in high regard. More often than not, the name of the bishop of Peoria is left unmentioned in any discussion of its development. It is therefore interesting to note that Ryan attributes much of his inspiration on promoting the causes of economic justice in the United States to Spalding. In his autobiography, *Social Doctrine in Action*, Ryan alludes to this debt:

Bishop Spalding was undoubtedly the greatest literary artist in the entire history of the American Hierarchy. Most of his productions dealt with education, but he wrote a great deal that fell under the general head of literary criticism and not an inconsiderable amount on social questions.



For many years he exercised a greater influence upon my general philosophy of life, my ideals, my sense of comparative values than any other contemporary writer. (1941, pp. 28-29)

Furthermore, Ryan adds after quoting part of a Spalding lecture:

These passages will provide some indication of my intellectual indebtedness to the Bishop of Peoria on account of his social outlook and teaching. I like to think that his intellectual sympathy with the economically weak and his understanding of the efforts made on their behalf...were the natural outcomes of his ideals and his general philosophy of life and society. (1941, p. 33)

Though the phrase, “a living wage,” is often attributed to Ryan, Spalding also used it in an earlier essay, “Social Questions”:

A decent physical existence for those who labor for employers should be considered a first charge on business; and their wages should be sufficient to make it possible for them to found a family under conditions compatible with right human life, and favorable, therefore, to mental, moral and religious improvement....The living wage is a postulate of justice, but man does not live by bread alone. (1905, p. 207)

With Leo XIII, Spalding and Ryan addressed the decidedly social and ethical nature of the subject of wages.

Spalding believed that economic domination was a natural, yet undesirable, outcome of the competition inherent in capitalism. While “labor creates capital and capital gives labor a field to work in” (Spalding, 1902b, p. 60), together they led the human person to see wealth as the primary virtue, thus leading to an understanding of poverty as the lowest state of life. But poverty in Spalding’s eyes was not the worst thing for humans. Ignorance and vice are the lowest states for human beings. Only religion and moral education could form the whole individual and thereby transform society. He wrote:

Political economy, like government, rests on a basis of morality. Moral character alone can give a man self-respect, courage, hope, cheerfulness, and power of endurance. Hence the laborers, and all who identify themselves with their cause, should have a care first of all that they be true men – provident, self-restrained, kindly, sober, frugal, and helpful; and that this may be possible, also religious. (1902b, p. 170)

In Spalding’s view, the greed that led to overproduction, the layoffs that led the worker to a state of idleness and despair and leading to the pursuit of vicious habits to dull the pain of the loss of self-respect was worse than

poverty itself. The poor and the rich would always exist. Their rights and duties to each other must be lived out. Spalding saw that many in poverty were able to be happy, healthy, and dignified in their work. He held that some class distinction was necessary for human progress, though he spoke in terms of a gradation of economic success.

Spalding warned both individuals and society that placement of the greatest value on money and the acquisition of material goods would lead to a reversal of Christian ideals and the subsequent ruin of the nation. "The influence of Christianity has been and is the chief power which has brought the world to recognize the rights of the enslaved, the poor, the weak, of all who are heavy laden and over-burdened" (Spalding, 1902b, pp. 170-171). When virtue, truth, goodness, and beauty are forgotten or made secondary to the goal of amassing wealth, the individual and society grow narrow and crass, pushing poets and philosophers and saints to a position of marginalization and ridicule. Spalding prophesied that the love of money would lead the rich "to die great capitalists, but stunted men" (1904b, p. 24).

On the national level, greed and the love of money led to American imperialism. Spalding believed that a noble people should critically self-reflect on their own motives and intentions, especially in international affairs. He addressed an anti-imperial group that gathered in Chicago in 1899 to discuss concerns over the U.S. acquisition of the Philippine Islands following the Spanish-American War:

We have never looked upon ourselves as predestined to subdue the earth, to compel other nations, with sword and shell, to accept our rule; we have always believed in human rights, in freedom and opportunity, in education and religion, and we have invited all men to come to enjoy these blessings in this half of the world which God has given us; but we have never dreamed that they were articles to be exported and thrust down unwilling throats at the point of a bayonet. (1900, p. 215)

Spalding believed wholeheartedly that, in truth, all wars of conquest were rooted in a nation's desire for the wealth and the power that inevitably accompanied them. God had blessed the United States with wealth and power enough. America's task was to live out the holy experiment of the New World while maintaining the religious principles upon which it was founded. By this, it would become a beacon in the world.

Ironically, Spalding saw that

one of the principal sources from which arises this overemphasis on money as such...lies in the instruction given in the classrooms, where the child is treated as though he were a mere mind and is led to believe that life is a thing of barter and that wisdom consists in making the most of it. (Schroll, 1944, p. 80)

Educators, perhaps unwittingly, propose that money affords a person an education which informs the mind and subsequently facilitates the pursuit of moneymaking endeavors. Not only were persons and society involved in the breathless pursuit of money, but also education, which could be a part of the solution, was uncritically promoting materialism and consumerism. Spalding was disheartened when education was seen merely as a means to the end of moneymaking. He queried:

What more striking instance could there be of the crude kind of thinking in vogue amongst us, than that a university professor should deem it not absurd to place a great money-gatherer on the same footing with a great poet? (1902b, p. 134)

The solution was to be found in the transformation of the hearts and minds of people. Catholic education was particularly suited to this task. The desire for the accumulation of wealth for its own sake was the result of a lack of religious education which addresses the person as a whole. A religious education acknowledges the fact that humans cannot live on material goods alone, since human persons are as spiritual and affective existentially as they are physically. Society is impoverished by a consumerist attitude because it neglects the notion of a common good to which all people have the rights of access and participation. Spalding points to education as both part of the problem and as catalyst for reform. While education often promoted wealth as the pinnacle of human success, Spalding also understood “the ends to which as a people we are called to devote ourselves are religion, education, justice and charity” (1902b, p. 94). There is both an educative function of society and a social aspect of education (De Hovre, 1934).

The only authentic way to teach the superiority of spiritual values over material possessions was through a religious education that stressed the eternal ends of the human race and the human person. “The ends to which as a people we are called to devote ourselves are religion, education, justice and charity” (Spalding, 1902b, p. 94). Spalding wrote:

The individual is at once an end and a means. He exists first for God and himself, and then for his fellowmen; and he becomes valuable to the society by which he is so largely formed and fashioned, in the degree in which he makes his own life complete and perfect. (1905, p. 94)

If the failure of individuals and nations to thrive is due to weakness in morality, the schools must then become centers of moral strength. “But if the teacher would communicate [virtues] to the pupil, he must be possessed of them himself” (De Hovre, 1934, p. 186). The teacher, in Spalding’s philosophy, should embody the values that he or she seeks to inculcate on the stu-

dents. These values are moral, spiritual, and religious as well as intellectual and behavioral and are both individual and social in nature. Therefore, if the teacher seeks to expose the problems of materialism and consumerism to students, they must “inspire them with reverence for what is worthy and with faith in what is good; and this, which is almost the whole duty of the teacher, we neglect” (Spalding, 1900, pp. 136-137). While family, state, Church, and school all seek to educate the whole person, Spalding exalted the role and influence of the personality and lifestyle of the teacher as central to the task at hand. If economic domination and its effects were to be remedied, education of hearts and minds would have to play a defining role.

## INDUSTRIALIZATION

Spalding held as the ideal, the rural life – such as he had experienced growing up in Kentucky. The evils of industrialism began when people were forced to leave the land and seek employment in overcrowded urban centers. Never naïve in his understanding of the necessary progress brought about by industrial capitalism, he nevertheless shared the views of Leo XIII put forth in the 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*: the social questions posed by industrial development are also religious questions and therefore the concern of the Church. American Catholics, mostly immigrants from Catholic Europe, looked to the Church for assistance not only in spiritual matters, but also for support in all arenas of life. Spalding was well aware of the conditions under which American Catholics were being employed and in many cases exploited.

Spalding was a keen observer of the facts and he saw that the factory system degraded human beings to the level of machines. He deemed industrial workers “a new species, a race of human machines whose destiny is to be a part of the iron mechanism which transforms the world” (1880, p. 85). In a historical survey of the rise of industrialism in the U.S., Spalding artfully assessed the situation:

In every part of the land factories lifted their tall smokestacks to the sky; and within, innumerable brains and arms wrought to human uses whatever in nature may be made serviceable to man. The oceans bore our products and our wares to all the markets of the world.

But from the midst of this marvelous success and achievement a cry of discontent and distress was raised by the toiling masses....While great fortunes enriched the few, the laborers, who were the chief producers of wealth, were left in poverty, were condemned to toil without hope of improving the condition of themselves or their families, to live in unwholesome surroundings and amid danger until, prematurely old or crippled, they should be cast aside like things outworn, no longer able to be of service, with bodies distorted, with

minds darkened, and with souls starved. (1905, p. 174)

Materialism, coupled with the growth of capital, was placing the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, while the multitudes toiled in the sweatshops of the land. That these multitudes were largely Catholic immigrants in this country made the issue even more important to Spalding. While agreeing that “a nation’s greatness depends largely on its ability to produce material goods...the exaggerated estimate we place on such values is a primary source of most of the societal miseries from which we suffer” (Spalding, 1905, p. 210). The Church, while struggling to organize itself nationally, had a duty to hear the cries of its people and assist them in organizing for labor rights.

Spalding and others such as Bishops Gibbons, Ireland, and Keane, followed the thinking of Leo XIII concerning the inability of socialism to remedy the evils of industrialism and unbridled liberal capitalism. Over time, Spalding changed his negative views on organized labor and became a staunch supporter of organized labor. Appointed in 1902 by President Theodore Roosevelt to the Anthracite Coal Strike Commission, Spalding recognized the mutual interdependence of and the need for cooperation between capital and labor. As an ecclesial representative, he was able to bring to light the spiritual nature of human work. Money alone could never be the entire measure of the relationship of the work one person does for another. Spalding’s successes in the work of the Commission were extolled for years by many, including President Roosevelt, who were close to the situation.

The remedies proposed by Spalding for individual and social problems that arose as a result of the emergence of industrialism were numerous. The state has a duty to intercede where injustices in labor issues cannot be resolved. The worker has a right to a living wage and the employer has the right to expect certain duties from the worker. The solutions to complex labor problems must include, among other economical, legislative, and political considerations, deeper insights into human nature and a wedding of Christian values to economic principles. “The excesses which have been provoked by capital and labor have been made possible by a general decline in our moral and religious life” (Spalding, 1905, p. 235). Therefore, the Church should never cease proclaiming the supremacy of religious values over monetary gains and “insisting that religion is the source of the principles of a just solution of the evils arising in connection with modern industry” (Schroll, 1944, p. 110).

Once again, teachers have an important influence in education’s ability to act as a catalyst for individual and social change. In “The Meaning of Education,” Spalding concluded:

Not politics, not finance, not machinery, not commerce, but education in the large and deep sense of the word, is the first and highest concern of a free people; and the truest patriots are not party leaders, nor captains of industry, not inventors, but teachers – the men and women who live and labor to make themselves and all who are brought under their influence wiser, holier, and happier. This is the noblest work. (1905, p. 140)

Laws and legislation were but poor substitutes for the kind of transformation education could give the population. Neither could a common school education, lacking the religious component, ameliorate the situation. Only a Christian education that inspired “Christian character, ideals, and values could save the day” (Curti, 1935, p. 372).

In essence, as historian Curti noted, Spalding’s social thought, often focusing on abstractions, lacked attention to the realities of the actual earthly struggles of the poor and the root causes of poverty ingrained in heredity and environment. These points of focus developed over time with the rise of the sciences of psychology and sociology and their integration into Catholic social teachings.

## **URBANIZATION**

Spalding thought rural living far superior to urban living in the burgeoning cities of the United States. Family life thrived in the rural areas and the brand of Catholicism seemed to him more vital in essence when practiced in open spaces. “The farmer is the strongest and the healthiest member of the social body; he is the most religious and the most moral” (Spalding, 1880, p. 75). Spalding realized the benefits of city life and the development of culture that took place in metropolitan areas, but for the poor, relegated to the slum sections of towns, the city meant both physical and spiritual death.

Spalding lived in New York City from 1872 until 1877 before he was named bishop of Peoria. He knew well the effects of city life on the poor, immigrant laborers who lived in overcrowded, often unsanitary conditions. There was much that concerned him about these conditions, and he addressed many of them in sermons, lectures, essays, and even poetry. He bemoaned the lowered birthrate in the city and was especially saddened by the conditions in which inner-city children were raised. He wrote:

The children rush from the narrow quarters and stifling air into the street, and the gutters are their playgrounds. The sounds that greet their ears are the yells of the hawkers of wares and the blasphemous and obscene oaths of the rabble. Through all the changing year they see only the dirty street and the dingy houses....For these poor waifs no flowers bloom....They are born in prison and will wear the chain of servitude. No possible school system can make good the lack of sunshine. (1880, pp. 94-95)

Spalding's essays decry the depravity that was characteristic of city life. He describes the sad state of those who have forgotten God in their daily struggle for survival. Their homes were broken and divorce or abandonment was common. Children were forced into work and their innocence was lost early by acquaintance with immoral situations. Saloons, especially where coupled with gambling and prostitution, wreaked havoc on the community. Society was to blame in the bishop's eyes because what humans become is influenced by their heredity and environment. Not only did saloons attract men who had no other source of comfort in their dismal lives, they also provided an arena in which corrupt politicians could practice. This Spalding deemed the greatest crime of all. In the US, the bishop believed society had robbed its people of their belief in God and left them without hope, even in their so-called elected officials. Spalding also addressed intemperance, sins of the flesh, dishonesty in the press, and discrimination in the criminal justice system.

Education alone could not bring about the social reform of urban conditions. Spalding saw them as particularly resistant to educational means:

In cities education is most difficult. City populations are decadent and would die out if they were not reinforced from the country. There the home is...less potent and less sacred. Parental authority is undermined....In abandoning the care of their children's education, they give up all thought of their own. (1897, pp. 219-220)

The classroom teacher remained at a disadvantage as well. Attendance was irregular and the classroom overcrowded. Without parental support, the children were idle and disinterested. The noble teacher strived to do whatever could be done to lead the children to Christian values and attitudes about life.

For the remedy of the problem of urbanization, more legislation, plans, or projects offered little help in the bishop's opinion. There was a need for a different view of life, a truer balance between materialism and the needs of the spirit. Certainly charitable causes helped, but even the Church seemed to Spalding to be a culprit in promoting superficial and narrow perspectives. Faith, hope, and belief in God could help the poor, urban dweller understand and bear his plight with gratitude for the deeper things in life without complaint concerning the lack of material possessions.

At this time in history, the idea of Christian resignation was not an uncommon suggestion for the poor. Sounding quite out of date to contemporary listeners, the bishop thought "man is actually poor only when he allows the vices and perversities of his fellow men to embitter him and lessen his good will toward them" (Schroll, 1944, p. 170). "Do we imagine that it is not possible to lead a high life in a lowly room?" (Spalding, 1900, p. 13).

Poverty teaches the need for industry, discipline, and obedience (De Hovre, 1934). By personal virtue and holiness of life alone can the evils of urban life be overcome and, nationally, only the spirit of Christ's justice and love prevailing will aid the cause (Schroll, 1944).

## IMMIGRATION

No subject captured the imagination of the bishop of Peoria more than immigration. Apart from the tremendous zeal he exhibited in promoting the idea of The Catholic University of America, no other cause occupied more of his time. Noted especially for his support of the Irish in this country, Spalding also supported the cause of Italian, German, and Chinese immigrants to the United States. His love of this country prided itself on America's hospitality to all who would come to seek a better life.

There is no part of the civilized world in which there are at present fairer opportunities for Catholics to do a great and lasting work for the Church, for her children, and for the age than here in the United States. (Spalding, 1880, p. 136)

Spalding's greatest social undertaking was his role as president of the Irish Catholic Colonization Association (Schroll, 1944). Though of English descent, Spalding had great sympathy for the Irish whom he saw coming to New York in streams during the year of his residence there. Their meager existence led him to believe that the Irish would best be served by establishing land grants where they might farm the land and have the opportunity to raise their families away from the sordid conditions of overcrowded urban conditions. For this end, he worked extensively to garner funds and to persuade Catholics who were financially secure to assist in the cause.

Though the Colonization Association was not considered a success in the end, the effort was most important to Spalding. A few colonies were formed in Arkansas, Minnesota, and Nebraska. Many Eastern Bishops were unconvinced of the credibility of moving the Irish out of urban centers. Spalding's book, *The Religious Mission of the Irish People*, written in 1880, underscores his belief that the Irish were destined to be tied to the destiny of American Catholicism. In the preface of the book, Spalding wrote:

The general truth which I have sought to develop is that the Irish Catholics are the most important element in the Church of this country, and that their present surroundings and occupations are, for the most part, a hindrance to the fulfillment of the mission which God has given to them. It follows that all honest attempts to bring about a redistribution of our Catholic population are commendable. (Spalding, 1880, pp. 13-14)

In addition to helping immigrants find suitable living arrangements



which would serve, in Spalding's opinion, to strengthen family life and strengthen religious commitment, education would prepare them for life in the New World. The Church was thriving in America and had grown in numbers and strength as a result of its continuing efforts in organization and education. This education must include religious education:

We do not accept, and never can accept, for our own children a system of education which ignores what we hold to be the fountain-head of all true knowledge and of all right conduct – the inculcation of the love and fear of God through the teaching of definite religious doctrines and practices. (Spalding, 1880, p. 139)

Spalding lived and served as bishop of Peoria during a period of great change and turmoil in the American Catholic Church. The questions of rapid growth and the need for greater organization within the Church occupied much of the Catholic hierarchy's attention. Spalding was drawn to the social question on all its levels – materialism, industrialism, urbanization, and immigration. These were complex social issues, and the whole of Spalding's thought is not to be adequately covered in a paper of this limited scope. He was aware of many of these complexities and forged a body of writing that allows today's readers to grasp the nature of early Catholic attempts to apply natural law tradition and early psychological and sociological theory to the social questions of the day.

## **TOWARD SOCIAL REFORM: A SUMMARY**

In summarizing Spalding's ideas on these four major social crises of his era, it becomes evident that he placed a heavy emphasis on the necessity of transforming individual character and behavior through the inculcation of religious values learned in the Christian home, taught in the Catholic Church and schools, and supported by a government ideally free from any religious bias and certainly of political corruption.

As has been noted, this was not an uncommon view since it was believed that the basic cause of societal problems was due to the nature of human beings. Since the human person is formed by heredity and environment, society itself bears some responsibility for its ills. "If things are to be made right, we ourselves must be changed" (Spalding, 1902b, p. 200). "Spalding knew that as the individual is, so the collectivity will be" (Schroll, 1944, p. 278).

What is needed to transform society is a renewal of the hearts and minds of its people. This renewal was necessary because society had fallen away from the Christian principles upon which it was founded. This falling away was a result of the neglect of the spiritual aspect of life due to the frantic effort to gain material wealth and physical comfort. Spalding proposed that

moral and religious education could help to alleviate the suffering of the times. While religious education was of great import, increased recognition of the importance of the role of the laity and women in all aspects of societal development was also high on the bishop's list of remedies.

Longing to save his beloved America from the perils of immigration, urbanization, industrialism, and materialism, Spalding held up the religious and moral teachings of the Catholic Church as the one sure hope and education as the one true means of reform. He believed, "As men become more enlightened they become more merciful, and universal education will create universal good will" (Spalding, 1882, p. 248).

### **SOME IMPLICATIONS OF SPALDING'S THOUGHT FOR SOCIAL EDUCATORS OF TODAY**

Reading the present into history can be a dangerous enterprise, but it is difficult not to observe a relationship between the educational and social challenges faced during Spalding's times and today. Social unrest and debates about the U.S. educational system are as much a part of today's world as they were in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Today in the US, the educational system is under close scrutiny, and ironically, while the successes of the Catholic school system are being lauded, many parish schools are closing. Issues of social justice, then and now, call for careful attention to the many voices and perspectives involved. Education for world peace and global justice has never been of greater importance.

The social sciences have made great strides in the last century. A study of Catholic social teachings reveals a developing view of the human person and his or her responsibility in an increasingly diverse world community. The Catholic Church and its leaders project a growing presence in global events as popes travel extensively and consult with world leaders. Regardless of such progress, Spalding's social thought still has relevance to the contemporary situation.

- **The very fact that we are citizens of the United States has something to do with the way we view and think about social issues.**

The American spirit captivated Spalding's heart. His great patriotism colored his social thought to the point that the two were close to inseparable. His deep love of both his Church and country permeate his writing.

He recognized and praised the virtues of the American people, namely their love of peace, justice and liberty, their religious good will, toleration and fusion of peoples, their initiative, progress, and air of well-being and comfort, and above all, their faith in the national destiny. (Schroll, 1944, p. 285)

Spalding saw these virtues as closely related to Catholic Christian ideals. This spirit is alive today in U.S. Catholicism.

The American's loyalty to his country is first of all loyalty to truth, to justice to humanity. He feels that its institutions can be enduring only when they are founded on religion and morality. He is less inspired by the fortune of the Republic, its material advantages and possibilities, than by its spiritual significance and destiny. (Spalding, 1900, pp. 197-198)

- **The imagination is important in forming social opinion and envisioning solutions to social problems.**

Spalding never ceased to uphold the image of humanity's perfectibility as the ideal and goal of education. While this life is enhanced by striving for a higher, nobler existence, humanity's ultimate end, eternal life with God, is the most important reason to rise above the mundane to imagine the fullest possibilities of a world in which all partake of the common good and love of God and neighbor. In educating for peace and justice, the imagination is a powerful tool. "The heart is reached and character is created through the imagination rather than through the reason" (Spalding, 1880, p. 210).

In educating, as in walking, we have an end in view. In educating this end is an idea, the idea of human perfection; and to develop and make this plain this ideal is more important than any of the thousand questions with which our pedagogical theorists are occupied. (Spalding, 1901, p. 89)

- **In educating for peace and justice, we must not lose sight of the fundamental task of Catholic education.**

The education of the whole person – body, mind, and spirit – requires an education that is religious. Spalding never ceased to believe that the ultimate task of education is the fulfillment of the divine image in which each human person is created. Education without religion is lifeless and mechanical. God is the supreme teacher and Jesus Christ is the model educator. If peace and justice are to be taught and

if in our democratic world all the institutions that educate are impelled by the force of public opinion to train to social service, to emphasize the truth that no one can be wise or good or great or happy for himself, but only in loving, helpful association with his fellows, where shall we find an example so high or an incentive so strong as in the life of Him who came not to be ministered to, but to serve; who made the love of others the test and proof of spiritual kinship with Himself? (Spalding, 1904a, p. 356)

• **Self-assessment and self-criticism are essential in avoiding the commodification of education.**

Spalding sensed early in this country's history the dangers of materialism and consumerism to the discipline of education. Robbing it of its intrinsic worth, education viewed as solely a means for moneymaking loses its nobler qualities. In today's market-driven world, schools have been relegated to commercial accommodation of the needs of the job market in a global economy. For Spalding,

the aim and end of education is to bring out and strengthen man's faculties, physical, intellectual, and moral; to call into healthful play his manifold capacities; and to promote also with due subordination their harmonious exercise; and thus to fit him to fulfill his high and heaven-given mission, and to attain his true destiny. (1901, p. 128)

• **Education is a key component in social change and therefore we must fully attend to the study of ways in which individuals and society are transformed toward the common good.**

While the bishop of Peoria fully recognized the individual and social aspects of education, methods of theological reflection and social analysis were not addressed in educational circles during the years of his episcopal influence. As noted earlier, the examination and analysis of systemic structures as well as the understanding of how social change comes about are more modern concerns. However, the bishop of Peoria knew that the supernatural builds on the natural and that abstractions without practical considerations seldom led to actual change. Today these connections must be made. How exactly is the human imagination formed and transformed? In what ways does individual change lead to social change? What conditions seem to foster social action following observation and understanding of the situation? Spalding was ahead of his time in many ways, but the advanced thinking in theological reflection and social analysis of today would hold great fascination for him. He foresaw cooperation between the clergy and the laity as key to future advancements in society:

One of the most potent aids at the disposal of the Church in her program of social action is the leadership of good and capable men....[Christ's minister] is to co-operate with his fellow men, whether or not they are of the same creed as he in promoting public welfare....Moreover, Spalding urged the active co-operation of laymen in religious work along lines so much encouraged today. (Schroll, 1944, pp. 284-285)

While very much a product of his times, Spalding anticipated the need for collaboration among all people of all religions for the realization of the Reign of God where peace and justice will prevail. There is much to be mined from the early social thought of the bishop of Peoria, but the role of education as a catalyst for social change is of central importance.

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