

A Speech by
 The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, 15th Senior Minister,
 The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ,
 444 East Broad St., Columbus, Ohio 43215
 phone: 614-228-1741, ext. 13; tahrens@first-church.org
 delivered October 1, 2011 at Greenlawn Cemetery, Columbus
 dedicated to all the men and women who built Greenlawn Cemetery,
 all who have sustained it through the years and all who have been laid to rest here,
 including The Rev. Dr. Washington Gladden and his family
 and always to the glory of God!

+++++

***“Washington Gladden:
 Prophet of Truth and Justice”***

+++++

Before beginning today, I must acknowledge the sources from which I have drawn historical and to some extent, theological insights. First and foremost, THE book on Washington Gladden was penned in 1966 by Jacob H. Dorn. It is entitled Washington Gladden: Prophet of the Social Gospel. Jake is a professor of history at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio.

Richard D. Knudten’s book The Systematic Thought of Washington Gladden has also been helpful in preparing for today. There is a Washington Gladden Society - based in Farmington Hills, Michigan - no less. I have drawn somewhat from their December 1986 edition of The Journal of the Washington Gladden Society. Also, Gladden’s own words in Recollections have influenced my speech today.

I am not a Gladden historian.

I’m the Sr. Minister, and as such, the pastor and teacher of The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio. As the 15th Senior Minister of First Church, I have also become the seventh in a line of successors to Dr. Gladden. As I venture into history, I will do my best to honor Dr. Gladden, his good name, his legacy, and his spirit. But, if I miss locations, dates, or other details that any one of you holds dear, I ask your forgiveness in advance!

Day #1, Senior Minister of First Congregational...

On November 19, 1999, I was called by the membership of The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, and Columbus, Ohio to be the 15th Senior Minister. In this honor, I was to join a long line of great leaders who had occupied the pulpit and the pastorate of First Church. Having spent my summer vacation reading Washington Gladden: Prophet of the Social Gospel by Jacob Dorn, I was deeply aware (*so I thought*) of the life and ministry of the seventh minister in this long line. However, I was not prepared for all that was to come.

That afternoon, I called home to tell my parents the good news. My mother’s first response was, “*Congratulations, Tim! Have I ever told you that I would like ‘O Master Let me Walk with Thee’ at my funeral? It’s written by Washington Gladden!*”

Three Stories as Gladden’s “Successor”

In almost 12 years, there has rarely been a day that has passed when my long ago predecessor, Dr. Gladden is not mentioned by someone, somewhere, for some reason. This man who died 93 years ago is clearly alive in the hearts and minds of many people. Ah, the stories I could tell! But, I will share three.

Story #1: Karen Schwartzwalder was director of the YWCA when she shared this story. In the 1960's, Karen was a social work student at The Ohio State University. She was meeting in the home of an elderly couple. She asked them about their church affiliation. They belonged to a Methodist Church near the University. *"But,"* the husband offered, *"we used to attend First Congregational Church before their pastor, Washington Gladden, started preaching communism and socialism!"* His wife jumped in, *"I told you that wasn't true. Dr. Gladden was the kindest, gentlest pastor we have ever known. He was not a communist. He was a real Christian."* Karen described a heated argument that went on for some time. Finally, she asked, *"How long ago was this?"* They both answered, *"About 50 years ago."* Karen said to me, *"Any pastor who can generate that much passion in folks in their mid-80's from 50 years before is worth knowing more about!"*

Story #2: Rev. Virginia Ress told me this one. Ginny is a United Church of Christ pastor whose father grew up in First Church. Her father was the youngest of four boys whose mother had to clean houses while people worshiped on Sunday mornings. His father had died shortly after his birth. So, his mom would drop the boys off at church and go clean. Ginny's dad was too young for the boys' choir and would often sit alone in the front row of church. When he did, he remembered *"the old man in the robe with the white beard sitting with me teaching me the hymns and haling me with the prayers."* It turns out that "old man" was Doctor Gladden who would come down and sit in the front row during worship to teach Ginny's father the faith of all our fathers.

Story #3: In the spring of 2001, I spent one week in the archives of the Ohio Historical Society to read documents relating to our church's 150-year-old history. I got to know the man in the copy room who was careful and thoughtful when he made photocopies of documents relating to our church history. One day, he stopped me, looked me in the eye and said, "Do you know who you are?" I answered, "Yes, I am Timothy Carl Ahrens." *"No!"* he responded, looking me straight in the eyes, *"YOU ARE THE SUCCESSOR OF DR. WASHINGTON GLADDEN, the greatest preacher Columbus and America has ever known. Never forget your lineage!"* My immediate internal response was - this guy is a bit creepy. But, as I pondered his presence and the intensity of his words, I thought to myself, "he is right." It was then that I decided I would find out more about Dr. Gladden.

What can one say about Washington Gladden?

So, who was this man who could cause a happily married couple to fight over religion fifty years after leaving a church; who could gently teach a child the faith of our fathers, and could call forth the best intentions of a young pastor seeking to be faithful to a heritage long ago established?

Consider this:

This man was a pastor for 58 years, although he never completed a theological degree. By the end of his life, he had received 35 honorary doctorates. In addition, without a theological degree, he had lectured at Harvard, twice, Yale, and Oxford Universities, once. He actually turned down another lecture series at Harvard because he felt he needed to be home pastoring to his congregation more. Who knows many times that happened through his 58 years of ministry?

Washington Gladden was a great writer. He was always a writer, who could be found each day of his life for hours at a time with a quill pen in his hand. In the Ohio Historical Society alone, there are 66 books and pamphlets, at least 91 articles for papers and periodicals; and more than 2,500 sermons (By my calculations there should be close to 3,000 for his time in Columbus alone), plus additional speeches, reports, and personal papers “penned” by Washington Gladden. The Ohio Historical Society recognizes in its exhibition two great Ohio writers - James Thurber and Washington Gladden!

He was a hymn writer and poet. He not only authored hymns - most famously “*O Master Let Me Walk With Thee,*” but he was quite a musician. In fact, the only thing we know at which he failed badly was being the choir director of First Church. Oh well! He was a poet who opened many chapters of his books with poetry from great Americans. He clearly understood the cadence of life!

As a preacher he delivered two sermons each Sunday - morning and evening. In the morning Gladden preached on living the Christian life. In the evening he preached on social problems of the day. Each word was manuscripted and carefully read. It is said he rarely raised his voice, his hands or his eyes from the text. But, his words were always strong and clear. Each Monday morning The Ohio State Journal printed his Sunday night sermon on page 1.

Added point: From the sermons I have read, his content was amazingly engaging and challenging, and at times humorous. It would have been worth spending 45 minutes listening to his sermons.

His was a difficult life. He lost his father at six years old. He was raised by other family members. He faced considerable challenges throughout his lifetime - including an emotional breakdown at the outbreak of war in 1861 which left him somewhat reclusive for two years. His only brother was killed in battle at Cold Harbor during the war. He had four children, one of whom died at 24, leaving his only grandchild to be raised by he and his wife (he, 54 at that time). But, his sons struggled mightily with alcohol and other personal problems and each died young. Nevertheless, out of the ashes of war and hardship, he rose - like the Phoenix - so much so that he by life’s end, he was hailed as “Columbus’ First Citizen.”

The period into which Gladden was born and lived

Solomon Washington Gladden was a wise man of his age and a man whose wisdom spanned all ages. His life spanned 82 years - February 11, 1836 - July 2, 1918 - from the stagecoach to the advent of airplanes; from candlelight to electrical light, from the 60th birthday of our nation to its 142nd - so much change in one lifetime.

Born in the era of Jacksonian Democracy - known as the “age of the common man,” Washington Gladden witnessed the alienation of a large part of American society through and social and economic dislocation in the last half of the 19th century. In the early years of his life, the doors of opportunity seemed open to all people. By the end, they seemed closed to the average person. In the early part of his life he experienced the rise of the anti-slavery movement and the crushing burden of the Civil War. He witnessed the settling of the west and America’s entry into World Politics and War. From his earliest childhood where he grew up in rural America to his life in the metropolis, which spanned more than 60 years, Dr. Gladden saw the problems posed by the rise of the city and its mass immigration assuming modern dimensions and causing modern problems.

In his first 14 years, America had grown to 23,191,876. By 1900 there were 76,303,387 Americans - 50 million born on our soil, but an amazing 26 million born to foreign parents - over

10 million born in other lands. By 1910 the population had reached 90,000,000 - 14 million more with the most growth coming from immigrants in the early years of the 20th century.

Family Background

Gladden came out of old but undistinguished New England stock. His paternal ancestors descended from John Gladding, who came to Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1640. His great-grandfather, Azariah Gladding, served as a body guard for General Washington in the America Revolution. Gladden was named Solomon Washington because of a family tradition and he used Washington rather than his Christian name, we don't know why. It was grandfather Thomas Gladding who changed the surname to Gladden. Both of Gladden's grandfathers were shoemakers who found it necessary to supplement their meager income by working on other people's farms - Thomas in Southampton, Mass. And Grandfather Daniels, his mother's dad, on his own little farm in Owego, New York - where Washington actually grew up following his father's premature death.

Solomon Gladden married Amanda Daniels in 1833. On February 11, 1836, their first son, **Solomon Washington Gladden** was born in Pottsgrove, PA where Solomon was serving as a school teacher in a one room schoolhouse. It was in Lewisburg, across the Susquehanna River from Pottsgrove, that Gladden's father became headmaster of the village school in 1840. One year later, he died (age 33) leaving Amanda with two children - Washington and George.

Although she tried valiantly to continue work at the school and raise her boys, Amanda returned to Owego in late 1842. There Washington grew up on the farm of her parents and her brother, Ebenezer Daniels. Washington worked for his uncle until he was 21 years old - hauling lumber to market, working at a printing shop in town, leading teams of horses through fields with plows, working each day from sun up to sun down, he learned to love the earth and hard work.

Throughout his childhood and youth he was active in church. Schooled in the judgmental religion of "hell, fire, and damnation," Gladden never felt comfortable with this style of religion - believing from his earliest childhood that the love of God in Jesus Christ could not be reconciled with the judgment of people "unto death."

The formation of a pastor and theologian

In 1853, at the age of 17, he joined a Congregational Church which had formed when a group of members split off from the Presbyterian church over slavery (which is how First Congregational Church, Columbus formed in 1852). It was in this church that he resolved to become a minister. The pastor, Jeremiah Burchard influenced him greatly and convinced him to study at Owego Academy and later at Williams College where he graduated with an English major in 1859. Upon graduation he returned to teach at Owego Academy and formed a close and lifelong friendship with Moses Coit Tyler. Tyler later became a famous historian of literature. At the time he served as Gladden's pastor. Under Tyler's guidance, Gladden studied theology, preached his first sermon and licensed to preach in the church. After studying theology at Williams under Mark Hopkins and refining that study with Rev. Tyler, Gladden headed for his first congregation in 1860 - The First Congregational Methodist Church of Brooklyn, NY (soon to be renamed State Street Congregational Church).

How the Congregational Church ordained pastors in the 1800's

It's important to note: In the Congregational Churches in the 1800's, Congregations ordained pastors after they had been examined by an association of churches. Gladden was

licensed for ministry by the Susquehanna Association of the Congregational Churches in Pennsylvania. He writes in *Recollections* (1909), that the scribe of the association was “an illiterate blunderer.” When Dr. Beecher, the moderator of the Association, saw that the scribe had written that Washington had been commended to the churches of “Chr” and on the next line “-ist,” he said, “*What is this? Is Christ divided? Give me a pen and let me write a certificate that will not disgrace this body!*” (P. 86). On November 15, 1860, Gladden was ordained by the New York City Association under the leadership of Dr. Richard S. Storrs - an imminent Congregational divine of the 19th Century.

First Pastorate, Brooklyn, NY, 1860

Dr. Gladden writes of his first full-time charge in Brooklyn:

Brooklyn, in 1860, was a comfortable city of about 275,000 people; it had not quite outgrown its bucolic traditions, and the Dutch flavor in the municipal life was quite perceptible. It was the City of Churches, and there was no lack of them; Mr. Beecher was, of course, the star of the first magnitude in the ecclesiastical firmament, but Dr. Storrs and Dr. Cuyler and Dr. Bartlett and others were also shining lights. In the midst of such a galaxy, the rushlight is not likely to miss the fact of his own insignificance. (Recollections, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1909, pp. 89-90).

Marriage, Family and early ministry

On December 5, 1860, Gladden married Jennie O. Cahoon in Brooklyn. They had met and fallen in love while he was teaching at Owego and she was a student there (like his father had done with his mother - different times!). Jennie was originally a Congregationalist from Columbus, Ohio - where she had been a member of the First Congregational Church (since 1857) - the place to which he would return in 1882 to complete his life in service to Christ and His church! Small world - especially in 1860! (I should also note that not long before they were married - Wash had another love interest - Hattie A. Hamilton, who letters sow, was heartbroken after their break-up. In one letter she wrote, “You have clearly fallen for the Buckeye.”).

Jennie and Washington were married for 49 years - the last four years of her life (died May 8, 1909), she was quite sick with arteriosclerosis- which eventually brought on a state of bed-ridden dementia.

They had four children - Alice, Frederick, George, and Helen. Alice never married and served for 26 years as Headmistress of Columbus School for Girls. Frederick and George never really found a place in this world outside the shadow of their father’s larger than life figure. Helen married George Twiss died at 24 years old and left the Gladdens their only grandchildren - Alice Gladden Twiss (called “Baby”). She was raised after her mother’s death by her maternal grandparents at First Church and in Columbus. She married Stanton Kelton at First Church and lived here through the end of her life. I will say that little is known of the Gladden family. Washington, writing his autobiographical book *Recollections* (nine years before his death and published in the year of Jennie’s death) never mentions his wife or children - at all - in the book. For whatever reason, Washington Gladden was an intensely private man when it came to his family life.

Because of the pressures of early marriage, overwork, and anxiety over a lack of financial security, in the spring of 1861, Washington Gladden had a nervous breakdown. He resigned his Brooklyn pastorate in June of that year.

Morrisania and Horace Bushnell

What could have become a low point of his life and the end of his ministry became a serene transition to future usefulness. He took over a quiet suburban church in the village of Morrisania - now a part of the Bronx. During the five years in Morrisania, Gladden took the opportunity to rest, reflect, and study theology at Union Seminary in Manhattan. More significantly, he became a student of the writings of Horace Bushnell who liberal theology deeply influenced Gladden's own thought and development theologically. He became a friend as well as student of Bushnell's.

Bushnell believed we should study the language of the Bible and of our faith with great care, but not a literalistic. So, the Biblical literalists were suspect in Bushnell's view. He also saw Christ as an "expression" of God but denied the supposition that he was divine and human and he felt the Trinity was a construct of human imagination, but not a Biblical mandate. Bushnell became even closer to Gladden when he came for a week to Gladden's next church in North Adams, Massachusetts to preach his installation sermon. As Gladden later wrote, "*he was better in real life than he was in his writing.*"

The liberal theology of Bushnell led Gladden to formulate his own theology which later became known as the Social Gospel.

Three Churches, Religious Editing and Civil War Chaplain

Throughout the 1860's and on into the 70's, Gladden was pastoring various churches, authoring books, and - for a brief time - serving on the battlefield as a chaplain for the Union.

Before coming to First Congregational Church in Columbus, Washington Gladden served five years in Morrisania, NY (1861-1866); five years in North Adams, Mass. (1866-1871); and seven years at North Congregational Church, Springfield, Mass (1875-1882). From 1871-1875, he left pastoral ministry to become Religious editor of *The New York Independent*. Although he was paid to write during this time, Gladden was editing, authoring, and commenting in newspapers, journals, and magazines all the time.

He had gone to serve as a chaplain in 1863. Following the Union disaster at Cold Harbor, Gladden received word from his half-brother, that his brother George had fallen in battle. Gladden went to the battlefield and there as well as beyond Cold Harbor served in the Christian Chaplaincy Core. While serving, he discovered that George, a lieutenant in the 8th NY Heavy Artillery, was killed while mounting the Confederate breastworks and, because of the Masonic pin he wore, was pulled into the breastworks to die with some sense of dignity (Dorn's biography, pp. 37-38). Gladden returned to Morrisania only after he contracted malaria while working as a chaplain. Weakened, he returned to New York where he struggled for two months before he could continue his pastoral duties.

The seeds of Gladden's union organizing and work with the common man were planted and nurtured while in North Adams and Springfield. In North Adams he advocated for the working man openly and often - organizing in mill and church for the assistance for workers and their families. In addition, his Springfield organizing workers in the textile mills and factories made him very unpopular with city fathers and the mill owners. When he left Springfield, he was ready after some tough years of fighting for worker rights and economic justice for all.

Gladden the Poet

Gladden wrote some beautiful poems during the civil war and immediately thereafter. I will share with you three of the poems. The first was written the day the war ended - April 9,

1865. The second was written the day Mr. Lincoln died. The third was written for the Williams College Class of 1859 when they returned for a memorial service for all the dead from their class and college in the summer of 1865.

Three poems: The first written the day the Civil War Ended; the second the day President Lincoln was assassinated; the third when then men of Williams College returned to campus following the Civil War.

APRIL THE NINTH, 1865

*Bells, bells peel from your towers
Maddest and merriest noises!
Organs and trumpets, burden the hours
With your victorious voices!
Break, O Land, into blossoms and songs!
Gather, ye people, in jubilant throngs,
Praising His name to whom glory belongs;
Liberty lives and rejoices!*

*Glory to God! Glory to God!
He hath with victory crowned us;
Sore was his chastening, yet hath his rod
Broken the shackles that bound us;
Lift up thy head, O land of the free!
Humbled and smitten, no more shalt thou be;
Nations shall join in the glad jubilee
Ringing in melody round us.*

*Spirit of Earth, now hovering near,
Stoop thy bright wings as thou fliest,
Then to the peoples in bondage and fear
Speed thee, nor rest while thou criest:
"Tidings! Ye millions and manacles led;
Liberty cometh with jubilant tread!
Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny's Dead!
Glory to God in the highest!"*

APRIL THE FOURTEENTH, 1965

*Toll!
Slowly toll, funeral bell!
Let your solemn pulses tell
That the white robes of the angel
Chanting peace are soiled with blood;
That Humanity's evangel
Was a curse misunderstood;
Toll! The staff of strength is broken
That the people leaned upon;
Toll! The grief that hath no token,*

*For our kingliest man is gone.
Toll! Toll!*

*Weep!
Let the heavens drop tears of woe!
Darkness shroud the land below!
Weep! Ye millions hath he guided;
 Weep! All ye who scorned him here;
Let the land so long divided
 Meet in sorrow round his bier!
Weep! Ye hosts whose chains are falling;
 Palsied lies the arm that broke them;
Words of life ye heard him calling,
 Silent are the lips that spoke them!
Weep! Weep!*

*Rest!
He is resting in his grave
Where the prairie grasses wave;
Rest! Our fathers' God ordaineth
 That this martyr's blood shall be,
Evermore while earth remaineth
 Precious seed of Liberty!
Rest! Our God will watch the sowing;
 Wait! The harvest ripens fast;
All the golden fruitage growing
 Will be gathered in the last,
And reapers soon be going
 To their rest.*

PARTING SONG

for the class of 1859, Williams College

*THROUGH the merry months of spring
 and the smiling Summer time,
Through the snows of dreary winter
 and the autumn's golden prime,
Through the happiest days of life here
 together we have passed,
And we've seen the sunset glories gild
 the saddest and the last
And, Brothers, here tonight,
 beneath this quiet summer sky,
We have gathered for our parting,
 and we say our last good-bye.*

*While the vintage of the past sparkling wine
of the pleasure pours,
And memory gathers home
all her richest harvest stores,
While the songs we here have sung float
with cadence soft and low
Through the starry vaulted heavens
of the storied long ago,
Let us spread the festive board,
and the foaming beaker drain,
To the golden-fruited seasons
that may never come again.*

*Now the truce to toil is past,
and the hour of battle comes,
And we hear the clash of sabers
and the roll of signal drums,
Where the flags of Truth and Right
o'er the hosts of labor wave,
And the veteran columns
open to the willing and the brave;
So we grasp the flashing sword
as we loose the parting hand,
And the smoke of battle settles
o'er our separated band.*

*And, Brothers, as the years roll
their joys and sorrows past,
And the smile of battle clears
away at victory's bugle blast,
Through our triumph and our toil
we will guard the sacred bond
That has joined us here on earth;
and in the better lands beyond,
When the silver cords are loosed
and the final partings come,
May we find it joined forever
in an everlasting home!*

Gladden the Hymn Writer
“The Disciple” a.k.a “Walking With God”
a.k.a. “The Great Companion”
a.k.a., “O Master Let Me Walk With Thee” - 1879

Although he wrote many hymns, in 1879, Washington Gladden penned the poem for which he became most famous. The poem, “The Disciple” was written as part of a trilogy of poems. In time, it became a hymn - “The Great Companion.” Ultimately, the hymn became known as “O Master Let Me Walk with Thee.”

The four verses of the hymn are familiar to all who love to sing the hymns of the church. My favorites are verse one and four:

First verse:

*O Master let me walk with Thee
In lonely paths of service free
Tell me Thy secret, help me bear
The strain of toil, the fret of care.*

Final verse:

*In hope that sends a shining ray
Far down the future’s broadening way,
In Peace that only Thou canst give,
With Thee, O Master, let me live.*

However, two verses were dropped from the hymn on the grounds that they were not suitable for the worship of the church. If they had been included these verses would have reflected more completely Gladden’s view that there is ugly inconsistency in organized religious life and practice. While the poem, “Walking With God” challenged the reader to live the faith while being honest about the challenges of the faith. In memory of Dr. Gladden and in hope of reviving the Forgotten Stanza of American Hymnody - please allow me to share the second stanza of the poem which would have been the third and fourth stanza of the hymn:

*O Master let me walk with Thee
Before the taunting Pharisee:
Help me to bear the sting of spite,
the hate of men who hide thy light.*

*The sore distrust of souls sincere
Who cannot read Thy judgments clear,
The dullness of the multitude
Who dimly guess that Thou art good.*

Now then, do you believe the church can (or should) handle these verses? Perhaps they would help us to become more real to the world around us who see us quote scripture about the Lord of Life and too often act like his opponent in the desert, Satan himself.

The First Congregational Church of Columbus, Ohio (1882-1918)

When Gladden arrived to serve First Congregational Church on December 24, 1882, he came to a church that was strong, independent, and socially conscious. As mentioned earlier, “Third Presbyterian Church” was an abolitionist congregation which had started with 42 members in 1852 after breaking away from Second Presbyterian (now Central Presbyterian Church). Their first little building was on the NW corner of Lynn Alley and Third Street (now an entrance to the parking garage for the Renaissance Hotel). In 1856, they built a small church near the Northeast corner of the Capital Square (it was knocked down in the 1950's and is mostly

a parking lot today). They had also changed their name to The First Congregational Church of Columbus (a name that stood until 1961 when we took on “United Church of Christ” in our name as well).

By the time Gladden came, the church had more than 1,000 members on the rolls - a mega-church by late 19th Century standards. By far, it was the largest church he had served and one of the strongest Congregational churches west of the Allegheny Mountains at that time. All but one pastor of the first six pastors in the first 30 years of the church’s history had been abolitionist, socially conscious and theologically progressive. The one who fit none of those descriptors was asked to leave after two years (poor George . . .).

New Beginnings - Christmas Eve, 1882

Like the Christ child, Dr. Gladden arrived on Christmas Eve! His rebirth in the city of Columbus was to have a lasting impact. He was 46 years, 10 ½ months old when he became the seventh Pastor of First Church.

It was from the pulpit of First Congregational Church that Solomon Washington Gladden found his clearest voice as a prophet of the social gospel. Like the question posed by the Pharisees to Jesus, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” - late 19th and early 20th Century European and American theologians must have asked - “Can anything good come out of Columbus Ohio?”

When Gladden arrived that Christmas Eve, Columbus was further from the center of the Universe than Nazareth was in Jesus’ time! In Gladden’s words from *Recollections* (1909):

Columbus in 1882, was a city of fifty-two or fifty-three thousand people. Commercially and industrially, it has always been rather conservative; it has not much resorted to booms; its growth has been steady and solid; its enterprise has not been flighty. I have seen the city more than triple in population, but it has all been done soberly . . . Nothing was wanting to the welcome with which my new neighbors greeted me; they soon made me feel much at home. Yet the environment was, I confess, depressing. The hills to which I had been wont to lift my eyes and from which had often come my help, were nowhere in sight; the flatness and monotony of the landscape were a perpetual weariness. I put all of this out of my thought as much as I could, but, at first, it was hard to bear . . .

*In those days Columbus, on the physical side, was rather crude; few of its streets were paved, its lighting was primitive, its domestic architecture was not, as a rule, a delight to the eyes . . . Yet the streets were wide and well-shaded and there were large possibilities of beauty . . . (*Recollections*, pp.284-285).*

Dr. Gladden also pointed out in his introductory thoughts in *Recollections* that Columbus was the political, educational, and philanthropic capital of the state. Here was not only the state government (which was producing U.S. Presidents during that era!), but also, in his words, “*the state institutions for the blind, the deaf, the insane, the feeble-minded, as well as the state penitentiary.*” Here was the state university (The Ohio State University) “*then in its feeble infancy, with twenty or twenty-five instructors and three hundred and fifty students.*”

This is how Gladden saw Columbus in 1882.

An OSU aside...

In 1893, former U.S. President Rutherford B. Hayes presented Dr. Gladden as a candidate for President of The Ohio State University. Gladden was not accepted by the Board of Directors because he was “too pro-Catholic.” He was opposed to the work of Protestant hate groups who targeted Catholics in Columbus and across the country. He was a close friend of Bishop Watterson and stood with him when Bill Sunday and others sought to belittle Roman Catholics. After the Board of Directors voted Gladden out, they also voted that “*no one from Franklin County could serve as OSU President.*”

What was the Social Gospel?

The Social Gospel was a religious movement that grew out of the industrial revolution of the late 19th Century. It was a movement in which salvation was seen as the symbiotic relationship between the personal and the social. One could not separate one’s own personal salvation from the salvation of the world. The leading proponents of the movement were Horace Bushnell, Lyman Abbott, Graham Taylor, George Gordon, Dean George Hodges, Walter Raushenbusch, and Washington Gladden. Each man exemplified the convictions that faith and social reform were closely related aspects of Christianity. The social gospel was Christianity lived out every day in the service to others. It was a commitment to social justice for all!

Gladden was an unapologetic Evangelical Liberal - Biblically grounded and scripturally centered, but always believing in the need to adjust Christianity to modern times.

He spoke of *Moral Evolution* - meaning we needed to get away from being troubled by original sin and deal with the sins of our current times.

On *Atonement* he said, “*Christ bore our sins in fellowship with us, not in substitution for us.*”

The *Creeds* he said should not be tests of faith. Rather, we need to live our personal testimonies of faith which demonstrate our abilities to care for our fellow human beings.

He did not see *Jesus* as the founder of a religious system, but simply the revelation to humanity of the Living God, the Life of God, and the duties growing out of those relations.

Gladden placed great emphasis on Jesus’ ethical teachings as central and normative for Christian faith and experience. The Sermon on the Mount was at the center of his teachings as the way to live the Christian life.

Gladden also believed that *Christianity was not the only way to God*. Other religions could lead people to God as well. However, Gladden felt that Christ was the head of the body of humanity. As the head, he could guide all the rest of the body through a better way to God.

It is “Friendship” that Really Matters

Near the end of life, Washington Gladden wrote these words in his autobiography:

“...When I was a boy, the main reason urged for being a Christian was a selfish reason. It was insurance against loss; it was the personal gain, the personal happiness, the future blessedness of which it put you in possession, that were constantly kept before your mind. That motive has been steadily retreating into the background; the motive of unselfish service has been increasingly emphasized. Because the Christian life in the noblest life, because it is more blessed to give than to receive; and better to minister than be ministered unto, , because the good life is not found in separating yourself from your fellows, but by identifying yourself with them - therefore, let us be Christians....”

The most important thing for Gladden was “friendship.” In Recollections he concludes his beliefs about Christian faith:

I am fain to believe that the time is drawing near when the Christian Church will be able to discern and declare the simple truth that religion is nothing but Friendship, friendship with God and with all people. I have been thinking about it in these last days, and I cannot make anything else, so far as I can see it, this is all there is to it. Religion is Friendship - friendship first with the Great Companion, of whom Jesus told us, is always nearer to us than we are to ourselves, and whose inspiration and help us the greatest fact of human experience. To be in harmony with God's purposes, to be open to his suggestions, to be in conscious fellowship with Him - this is religion on its Godward side.

Then, turning manward, friendship sums it all up. To be friends with everybody, to fill every human relation with the spirit of friendship, is there anything more than this, that the wisest and best of Men (and women) can hope to do?

Important stories to remember about Gladden

When a coal miners' strike happened in the early part of the century, Gladden went to Joseph Jeffrey and talked to him in advance of preaching on the strike. He told Mr. Jeffrey that would side with the strikers. The strike ended the week after the sermon was preached. Years later, in 1929, the Jeffrey family gave the church \$250,000 to build 444 East Broad St. in memory of Dr. Gladden.

He served on City Council for one term, though he spent no money and ran no election campaign. He did a study of American cities one summer. His report concluded that Columbus was a second-rate city - mediocre at best and would remain so until they cleaned up their police department, enforced laws on slum landlords, cleaned up their sewage and had clean water and milk. When they cleaned up their brothels and drug-related problems - they would become a great city. *Enforce the laws we have and we will be great!*

He was a close friend of Booker T. Washington. Together they worked to overcome the racist assumptions which had come to Northern whites from southern elites. Gladden was among the first to say that Blacks must lead their own institutions and that they were equal in every way to white men. At the 12 year mark of his ministry, Dr. G. wrote Booker T. that he “was finished with the people of First Church.” He was fed-up, ready to leave. Booker T. wrote back, “*You better hold on to the job you have because no one else will hire you.*”

At the Ohio State Conference on Charities and Corrections in 1896, Gladden proposed that the churches should take over the care of “the outside poor” for two reasons: 1) it is the mission of the church according to Jesus; 2) It will save the soul of the church (self-interest).

During WWI his was the single most clarion voice against the war - based largely on the economic impact on a struggling nation. Originally an active supporter of Theodore Roosevelt, who ran an Independent Campaign for President against William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson, Gladden became a Wilson supporter and yet he was a strong voice against American entering the war, he often sent Wilson his sermons accompanied by personal letters. On the occasion of his death, President Wilson wrote immediately to his daughter Alice, “His death has impoverished us all.”

At the end of his life

In the winter of 1918, he had a serious stroke. He died July 2, 1918. Months before his death, Pastor Irving Maurer asked Gladden about his ability to speak out on issues of social

justice. How could he have done it so long and so well? Gladden responded, *“It was always hard. It always took something out of me. But, it is harder to stand by and watch injustice perpetrated against God’s children.”*

On June 28th having completed his final writing project, an article for women whose men were either at war or who were widowed, he called for them to get equal pay for the work they were doing in the war effort. They should not settle for less. Having penned those words, Gladden laid down his pen for the last time.

He died in the early morning hours, July 1st, 1918.

At his bedside, his favorite poem was found.

Tonight I lay my burdens by, as one who rests beside the road,

And for his wearied back unbinds, the ‘whelming load.

I kneel beside the hidden pools of prayer,

still waters fraught with healing power,

In God’s green pasture, I abide this long-awaited hour.

I know that day must bid my face courageously my task again,

Serving with steady hand and heart, my fellow men,

To hold my sorrow in the dark, to fight my fear, to hide my pain,

And never for one hour to dream the toil in vain -

This be tomorrow, now tonight, Great pitying Father, I would be,

Forgiven, uplifted, loved, renewed, Alone with Thee.

In his own words, Gladden closes his autobiography with these words:

We turn our faces to the future with good hope in our hearts. There are great industrial problems before us, but we shall work them out: there are battles to fight, but we shall win them. With all those who believe in justice and the square deal, in kindness and good will, in a free field and a fair chance for every man, in their courses are fighting and their victory is sure

(Recollections, Houghton Mifflin Co., New York and Boston, 1909, p.431).

Washington Gladden is buried in Greenlawn Cemetery in Columbus. A simple stone marks his grave. Beside him are his wife Jennie, his daughters Alice and Helen, sons Frederick and George and his grand-daughter Alice. Dr. Gladden’s stone simply reads “Washington Gladden 1836-1918.”

His bones are there but his spirit and his legacy live on.

The Legacy of Solomon Washington Gladden

So what is the legacy of Solomon Washington Gladden?

First, Washington Gladden was a prophet and visionary! During his tenure, the Gladden Community House, the Godman Guild, and the YWCA were formed in Columbus to serve the poor. He oversaw the founding of five churches in Columbus - including Dublin Community Church. His legacy is the spirit which created such fine institutions to serve other people.

Second, his belief in Friendship with God and Humanity. We need to befriend God and our fellow human beings. Each of us should be a shining beacon of light for racial friendship, inter-generational friendship, ethnic friendship, and friendship across economic lines. Friendship is at the heart of religion and life!

Third, he left a legacy of faithful service. He helped us live into the optimistic belief that God is calling us all to serve others in the full knowledge that we live in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-racial world. He was far ahead of his time in this belief.

Fourth, his was a visionary justice. He believed, as Amos, that “*justice should roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream.*” We need to create systems which change the powers of injustice and unrighteousness. Our times, like his, needs justice for all!

Conclusion

I close with Dr. Gladden’s words. In 1912, at the age of 76, Gladden wrote one of his final poems, “Ultima Veritas” which means, “Ultimate truth.”

ULTIMA VERITAS

*In the bitter waves of wo,
Beaten and tossed about,
By the sullen winds that blow,
From the desolate shores of doubt,*

*When the anchors that faith had cast,
Are dragging in the gale,
I am steadily holding fast
To the things that cannot fail;*

*I know that right is right;
That it is not good to lie;
That love is better than spite
And a neighbor than a spy;*

*I know that passion needs
The leash of a sober mind;
I know that generous deeds
Some sure reward will find;*

*That rulers must obey;
That the givers shall increase;
That Duty lights the way
For the beautiful feet of Peace;*

*In the darkest night of the year,
When the stars have all gone out,
That courage is better than fear,
That faith is truer than doubt;*

*And fierce though the fiends may fight,
And long though the angels hide,
I know that truth and Right
Have the Universe on their side;*

*And that somewhere, beyond the stars,
Is a Love that is better than fate;
When the night unlocks her bars
I shall see Him and I will wait.*

Thanks be to God for the life and legacy of Washington Gladden!