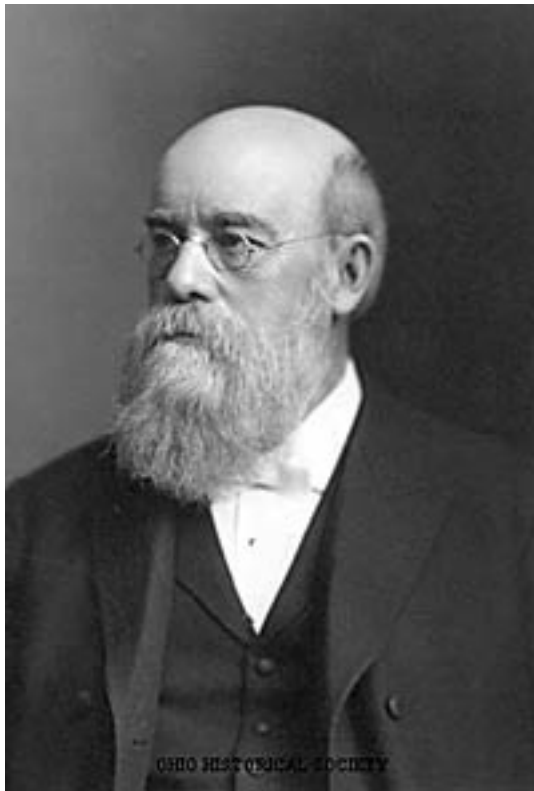


Walter Rauschenbush, Washington Gladden, and Jacob Riis
Prophetic Witnesses, 1918, 1918, 1914

Observed 2 July



All three of these men helped to change the consciousness of American Society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. All were deeply moved by the plight of the poor in our cities and felt deeply the shared responsibility of all people to address their needs and make society more compassionate and equitable. All three were active in New York City, a place that drew many activists striving to build a better society.

Both Gladden and Rauschenbush were early leaders in the Social Gospel movement whose Christianity emphasized our responsibility as Christians to work to bring about the Kingdom Christ announced. Rauschenbusch sought to help people understand that Christ died "to substitute love for selfishness as the basis of human society." The Social Gospel activists sought to live out the values of the Kingdom in whatever their circumstances. This way of being Christian focused not on talking about God and Christ in order to convert people, but on living as Christ lived in loving service to others, thus changing the world and drawing others into the Christian life in that way.

Riis is renowned not as a religious leader, but as a journalist and photographer who used his remarkable skills to make people aware of the great suffering and injustices rampant in society.

All three men worked directly with the poor and disadvantaged, using their own lives to make life better for those who were suffering. Among the three they left an extraordinary number of works that can help us understand urban life in their lifetimes, and even more find inspiration in their loving dedication to the people for whom Christ died.

Lessons Isaiah 46:8-11; Psalm 72:12-17; James 2:14-18; Matthew 7:7-12

Collect Loving God, you call us to do justice and love kindness: we thank you for the witness of Walter Rauschenbusch, Washington Gladden, and Jacob Riis, reformers of society; and we pray that, following their examples of faithfulness to the Gospel, we may be ever mindful of the suffering of those who are poor and work diligently for the reform of our communities; through Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.