

of the American public certain industrial problems which could not be settled by capital and labor alone."³⁶ The problems were endemic in the steel industry—long hours and low wages. More than half of the workers at Bethlehem worked twelve-hour shifts and sixty-one percent of the workers received less than eighteen cents an hour. A considerable number of the workers, the committee discovered, received twelve and a half cents an hour, twelve hours a day, seven days a week.

The report of the committee stated, matter-of-factly, without pointing the finger of blame, "A 12 hour day and a 7 day week are alike a disgrace to civilization." It went on to state, "There should be laws requiring three shifts in all industries operating 24 hours a day, and there should be laws requiring one day rest in seven for all workmen in 7-day industries." The investigators recognized that the steel industry built its argument for twelve hour shifts on the necessity for continuous operation of the process. In response the report suggested that the churches should "inaugurate a movement to place in the hands of the courts, or some similar appropriate body, the authority to determine when industrial operations are necessarily continuous, and must necessarily be performed on Sunday."³⁷ Further the report recommended that work contracted by the federal government should conform to a six-day schedule wherever possible and three eight-hour shifts in continuous operations. The committee also asked that an investigation be carried out to determine what constitutes a "living wage" in the United States. It completed its report by suggesting that unions be accepted to represent workers in the workplace. A final recommendation of the report was to establish conferences or open forums between the Federal Council and the ministers of Bethlehem to help local ministers understand the working conditions in industry. That recommendation derived from the finding of the wide gulf existing between the clergy and the working people in Bethlehem. In response to the strikers' accusation that the clergy had supported management's

action, the committee's inquiries had discovered that the local ministers had appealed to the Bethlehem Steel management on numerous occasions, without any effect, on the issue of Sunday rest. The committee also refuted the strikers' accusation that the churches had received money out of involuntary deductions from the workers' pay envelopes. It did find, however, that Bethlehem Steel had paid money from deductions in the workers' pay to Roman Catholic priests for religious services but only with the voluntary consent of the workers. The committee recognized that aloofness had characterized the ministers' attitude toward the workingman's situation and declared: "We deem it the duty of ministers not simply to record a formal protest against industrial evils, which may serve to pacify a partially awakened conscience, but to arouse a righteous indignation on the part of the Church and of the general public which will make the continuance of such ills impossible."³⁸

It took another ten years and the investigation of the Steel Strike of 1919 by the Interchurch World Movement (IWM) to bring the twelve-hour day again into focus. A committee of the IWM was appointed to carry out an investigative study of the strike and the issues leading up to the strike. The IWM report again focused on labor practices within the steel industry which had not changed significantly since the 1910 Bethlehem study. The investigatory committee again found the practice of the twelve-hour day and the low wages paid in the industry unacceptable. The findings of the IWM committee raised the ire of Judge Gary, the head of U.S. Steel, whose influence in the corporate community ultimately affected the funding and the failure of the Interchurch World Movement. The twelve-hour day, however, was finally abolished by the steel industry soon after the issuing of this IWM report.³⁹

V

Stelzle came away from his experience in the 1910 Bethlehem steel strike study

more convinced of the need to bridge the gap between the churches and the workingman. Stelzle's social analysis skills had indicated the continual flight of downtown congregations from the neighborhoods into which the immigrant working class had been moving. Stelzle believed it was the churches' responsibility to continue ministering in these areas and to help serve the new inhabitants in their needs.

A major opportunity opened for Stelzle to demonstrate the viability of his vision when in 1910 the Second Presbyterian Church was considering the sale of its building on Manhattan's lower East Side to move and join with a congregation on the West Side. The Second Presbyterian Church, which was located on Second Avenue and 14th Street, galvanized Stelzle into action. It was the neighborhood in which Stelzle had his roots. In describing the area George Nash writes:

In 1910 this section of New York City was the most forbidding ground for Protestantism in the United States. The "new immigration"—predominantly Jewish and Roman Catholic—had virtually overwhelmed the city missions and churches, many of which had simply retreated to more congenial neighborhoods. "Monk" Eastman the gangster, rebellious Wobblies, and Leon Trotsky were active in the area. Even Dwight L. Moody, who had once conducted a month long revival at the Presbyterian Church on Fourteenth Street and Second Avenue, had been unable to surmount the indifference of the masses.⁴⁰

Stelzle made a bid to the Second Presbyterian Church leadership to use the facilities for a three-night-a-week program to reach the people in the neighborhood. The officers of the church hesitated, then finally agreed but asked that Stelzle pay the church five thousand dollars a year and provide the money to carry out his program. Stelzle was stunned by their response. He was already involved in four other major tasks and was taking this on as an additional work. Nevertheless, he presented his plan and the financial request of the Second Presbyterian Church to the Church Extension Committee of New York Presbytery. The Church Extension Committee voted to purchase the build-

ing outright with part of a two-million-dollar bequest which had come from John L. Kennedy to the Board of Home Missions. The committee also gave Stelzle two years to carry out an experimental program. He was to be responsible for the program without interference from any committee.

Stelzle's response was jubilant. "This was the happiest moment in my career as a minister," Stelzle reflects.

I was about to realize a dream which I had had since my machinist days—of organizing and conducting a church such as I felt would appeal to the average workingman. It was to be a real workingman's church in every particular. Avowedly it was to be run by workingmen, the men who actually lived in the community. So I called it the "Labor Temple," a name which as a religious institution became famous the world over even before I had completed my two years' experimentation.⁴¹

The work of Labor Temple began at a ceremony on April 10, 1910 attended by Frank Morrison, secretary of the American Federation of Labor. An open forum called the Temple Brotherhood was an immediate success. It attracted the immigrant population, among them socialists, who sometimes composed seventy-five percent of the audience. Stelzle recalls:

Meetings were held every night of the week, and practically every address was followed by an open forum discussion. For a month I listened to the severest arraignment of the Church I had ever heard—and I had been listening to criticisms of the Church for many years in practically every industrial center in this country.... It was interesting that the Labor Temple audience exhausted itself making criticisms of the Church, and the speakers never repeated their accusations. After every person had once delivered himself of the speech against the Church which rankled somewhere in his system, he never repeated it.⁴²

Within three months of its opening as Labor Temple the church press was extolling the remarkable work going on at the newly converted Presbyterian church building. Visitors were amazed at the crowds attending the various meetings which Stelzle and George Dugan, whom Stelzle had brought from Toledo, Ohio, to assist in the program, had organized seven days and nights a week.

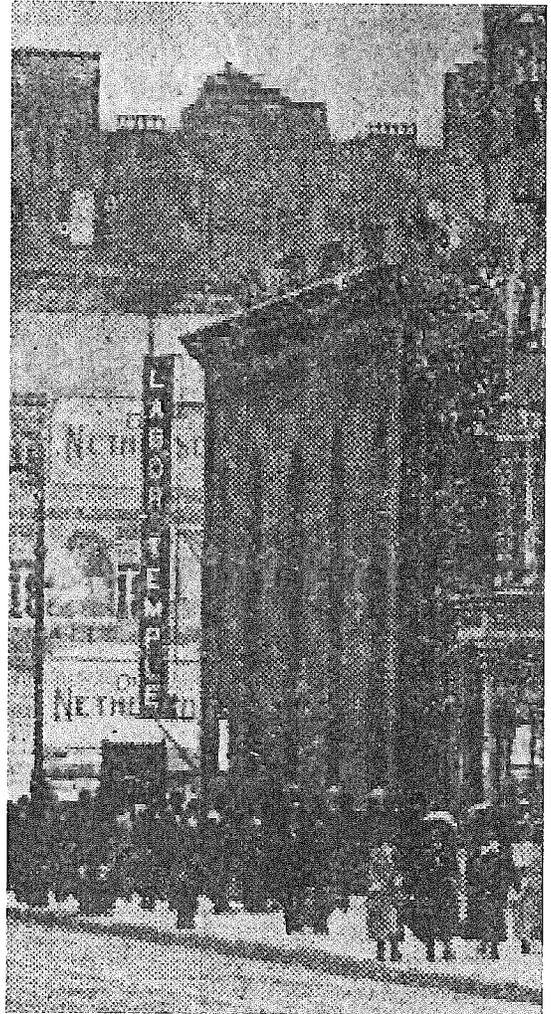
Among the earliest church visitors to the Labor Temple, George Anderson of *The Congregationalist and Christian World* wrote on June 4, 1910:

After the meetings the superintendent and the pastor are surrounded by working men, young and old, some seeking advice and others proffering it on the affairs of the Temple. One and all receive the same kindly attention, but these are the pillars of the Labor Temple. They are made to feel that the responsibility for the success or failure rests upon them alone. In the near future will be formed a Brotherhood of the men which will largely direct its affairs.⁴³

Stelzle continued his intense programming at Labor Temple for his experimental two years. The sanctuary and the rooms were in continuous use. Stelzle notified the public that Friday evening, the Jewish Sabbath, was a "religious night" and on Sunday nights an "evangelical" message would be delivered. Stelzle organized what became known as the Labor Temple Fellowship. The fellowship provided an opportunity for those who wanted to associate more directly with the Labor Temple. Members were asked to make the pledge, "I Accept the Purpose of Jesus and I Will Help Bring in the Kingdom of God." The breadth of the pledge made it possible for the most radical of those attending the Labor Temple and the most conservative Christian to stand on the same ground. On Easter Sunday in 1911 one hundred and forty nine persons, of whom one-third were Jews, joined the Labor Temple Fellowship.⁴⁴

On Sundays from two-thirty to ten o'clock in the evening the schedule included a children's hour, Bible class, organ recital, reading of a literary masterpiece, concert or lecture, and sermon. Prior to the eight o'clock service Stelzle would have a half hour of singing with illustrated hymns and solos complete with a hundred-voice choir. An inspirational song preceded the sermon.

I was on my feet before the choir had finished the song, and with a studied gesture—differing according to the occasion and the audience—I prevented a pell-mell movement toward the big front door. We rarely lost more than a dozen of our audience....The Sunday night meeting was like a normal church service...but they were done decidedly differently....The audiences never



Labor Temple: a view from Fourteenth Street at Second Avenue on a Sunday afternoon, 1910, featuring the large sign which was lit at night. (Halftone image from *The Congregationalist and Christian World*, 4 June, 1910.)

behaved the same except that they always applauded the prayers; that was their way of saying "Amen."...There was no forum discussion on Sunday night, although we had our biggest audiences at that time.⁴⁵

Sunday activities at Labor Temple drew 2,500 people. Annually some 150,000 attended the full schedule of programs.

The highlight of the Labor Temple programs was the open forum. Stelzle's wide contacts and reputation gave him access to a wide range of speakers. He invited socialists, radicals of all stripes, labor leaders, social gospellers. During evenings when the forum was scheduled the sanctuary was filled to capacity. On many evenings there

was standing room only. The fire department gave Stelzle notice that he was pushing the limits of safety regulations with his capacity crowds. Before he took over the Labor Temple Stelzle had inspected the basement underpinnings of the sanctuary floor. So confident was he of his ability to fill the auditorium that he had the wooden posts replaced with iron underpinnings.

Susan Curtis in her critique of Stelzle as a social gospeller asserts that much of the success of Labor Temple came from his insights into the consumer culture of the day. Stelzle was an early pioneer in church advertising and used "the language, methods and message of mass culture to attract workers to the church."⁴⁶ He understood the techniques of mass culture and used them to attract and hold those who crowded into the Labor Temple. Stelzle outdid the commercial competition of the music halls and the movie theaters for the attention of the working class because he had studied and understood their appeal. His underlying concern was while reaching the working class through wholesome engagement and entertainment he could narrow the gap between the working class and the church.

The work at Labor Temple reached far beyond New York City. He won awards in both London and Paris for bridging the gap between the church and labor. People from around the world came to learn of the work of the Labor Temple in the midst of the immigrant neighborhood of 400,000 which Stelzle called his parish. While the work of Labor Temple was drawing plaudits from outside the country, Stelzle was coming under increasing attack from his conservative critics inside the country.

VI

Stelzle had come upon the scene at a most favorable time in the life of the Presbyterian Church. There was need for a new kind of evangelism to reach the new population arriving on the American scene. In a conservative Presbyterian Church there were not many people available for this job. The

progressive-minded people in the church recognized in Stelzle a person who understood this new population because he was one of them. Stelzle was aggressive in his program and had immediate success in reaching both the working class and the new immigrants. He pushed ahead with his programs until he came up against the basic conservatism of the Presbyterian Church. Ultimately, his own aggressiveness and his success, and the aroused anger and the concerted efforts of conservatives in the church forced his resignation.

In his autobiography Stelzle summarizes the factors in the Presbyterian Church which were working against the church's engagement with social concerns. He put as first the possible consolidation of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., with three other Presbyterian bodies, all of which were more conservative in their view of social issues. "Indeed, the Southern Presbyterian Church [Presbyterian Church, U.S.] went so far as to say that the Church had nothing whatever to do with social and political questions."⁴⁷ The second factor which undermined his work was the increasing antagonism of those in the fundamentalist and extreme conservative camp, who had become more intense in their criticism as the church became directly involved in social problems. The result of this criticism was manifested in the efforts launched against the growth of the special departments and the "experts" employed in the Board of Home Missions to engage the emerging social problems. This attack, Stelzle believed, came especially from a coterie of conservatives in the Pittsburgh area. Opponents ultimately forced the Board of Home Missions to withdraw support from new programs and to cut the budget of programs with which he was engaged. They had also called for a reorganization of the work of the Board of Home Missions. "There was a feeling among some of the officials of the Board," Stelzle analyzes, "that 'the tail was wagging the dog,' meaning that the various Departments which I was heading up—namely, Social Service, Country Life, Immigration and Survey, were dominating the

entire work of the Board. The truer situation was that they had attracted so much public attention that they were being mentioned more frequently in newspapers and conferences than any other phases of the Board's work."⁴⁸

The effort to reorganize the Board of Home Missions, Stelzle believed, was strategically planned to do away with the Bureau of Social Concern of which he was the superintendent. Instead of promoting social concern as a special program, the reorganization would "socialize" all the departments of the Board of Home Missions. The attempt to "socialize," Stelzle suggests, "was an exceedingly vague term and meant substantially that the Presbyterian Church, through the only Board which could express its convictions, was determined to have practically nothing further to do with outstanding industrial problems, but rather to limit its activity to 'social welfare work' in the local church. In other words, the comprehensive program in the field of industry became thoroughly emasculated and finally dropped altogether."⁴⁹

Behind the criticism of the program of social service, Stelzle believed, was a concerted attack against himself as a representative of the Social Gospel movement. This effort, he thought, had begun when the 1910 General Assembly adopted "The Social Creed of the Churches." The passage of the social creed had angered former moderator Dr. Mark A. Matthews of Seattle, who deeply opposed the Social Gospel. Unknown to Stelzle, Matthews had brought charges against Stelzle as a socialist and had him tried before the Executive Commission of the General Assembly. When it was leaked in the press that he was being secretly attacked, Stelzle demanded to appear before the newly elected Executive Commission. He testified before the commission that "the Presbyterian Church had no right to take any action concerning sociological convictions or teachings of its members." Stelzle had on numerous occasions declared that he was not a socialist and was, in fact, a conservative in theology. After an investigation con-

ducted by the Committee on Bills and Particulars, the committee agreed with Stelzle's statement and exonerated him. They declared that their investigation had shown that Stelzle was not a socialist.⁵⁰

VII

By 1913, Stelzle had reached the end of his rope. His work at Labor Temple, which he considered the height of his ministry in reaching immigrants and working people, had been attacked. The conservatives charged that in all his Social Gospel efforts he had not brought one new member into the Presbyterian Church. In 1913 the Church Extension Committee of the Presbytery of New York took over the Labor Temple property and, recognizing its importance, decided to continue its program under new leadership.

Many years after he had left the Labor Temple, Charles Stelzle still felt a close attachment to the work he had begun. On December 26, 1936, he responded to a letter written to him by Dr. Ted Savage, stated clerk and executive of the Church Extension Committee of the Presbytery of New York, who had asked him for advice on the then current program of the Labor Temple. In a four-page analysis of the Labor Temple, Stelzle continued to stand by its original purpose as a forum to hear and discuss issues which would "keep the participants ... from having a narrow outlook upon the great problems that face our country today."

In his letter to Savage, Stelzle expresses his dissatisfaction that a church had been organized at Labor Temple, suggesting that it would create an elite group who might feel superior to the average person attending the program. He recommends that those "converted" at Labor Temple "should be encouraged to unite with some [other] Church." He felt the organization of a church at Labor Temple deflected it from its supreme mission. "Frankly," Stelzle writes, "when I organized Labor Temple and had a vision of the kind of building I should like.... I dreamed of an auditorium which seated about 1500

people, which should become a great discussional center—inspirational in character, deeply religious in spirit, dealing with the major personal problems of people in the community, but so broad in its appeal that it would attract mainly those who were out of sympathy with the Church and its teaching."⁵¹

James Armstrong, in his assessment of Stelzle's rise and fall within the Presbyterian Church, concludes: "He was not, after all, an evangelist, at least in the eyes of his denomination.... This illustrates perfectly the basically conservative Presbyterian Church that let him operate for a period, but then, in 1913 when the progressive era was beginning to come to a close, clamped down on him. They said, 'Look Stelzle, you're not an evangelist. You haven't brought one of these people at Labor Temple into the church!' So Stelzle made his exit."⁵²

So it was that on June 29, 1913, Charles Stelzle resigned from the Board of Home Missions. On hearing of Stelzle's resignation, the conservative publication *The Presbyterian* confidently predicted that Stelzle would soon become a socialist. It went on to suggest that the Presbyterian Church could now abolish the Bureau of Social Service, which Stelzle had headed, and return to the "Word of God."⁵³ Others, who took a different perspective, saw Stelzle's work at the Labor Temple as "one of the noblest efforts ever made by the churches to minister to the workingman."⁵⁴ Despite his conservative critics, Charles Stelzle, in his ten years of leadership, had opened a new era of mission for the Presbyterian Church in the twentieth century. In fact, the church which had forced his resignation in 1913 invited him back in 1917 to work with the Social Service Commission newly created by the General Assembly. Stelzle was one of the nine commissioners elected to its Executive Committee. One historian comments on Stelzle's reinstatement: "Like the faithful remnant of Israel who survived the exile in Babylon, social-gospel advocates were permitted to return to a visible place in the power center of Presbyterianism."⁵⁵

Charles Stelzle's major influence was over, but the work he had begun was to be carried into the ninth decade. Charles Stelzle had done his part in educating the Presbyterian Church in its mission to his people—the working people. It was for others to see that mission continued.⁵⁶

NOTES

1. See *Annual Report of the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (New York, 1903), 6 (hereafter cited as "BHM Report" with date). The Social Gospel movement was the main-line Protestant churches' response to social changes in the late nineteenth century. Walter Rauschenbusch's book *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907) exemplifies the theological content of the movement. For analysis of the Social Gospel movement see also C. H. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865–1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940); R. C. White, Jr., and C. H. Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1976); and Donald Gorrell, *The Age of Social Responsibility: The Social Gospel in the Progressive Era, 1900–1920* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1988).

2. BHM Report 1894, 37–38.

3. *Ibid.*, 38.

4. See Robert T. Handy, "Charles L. Thompson, Cooperator," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 33 (1955): 207–28.

5. Material in the next section is largely drawn from Charles Stelzle's autobiography, *A Son of the Bowery: The Life Story of an East Side American* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1926). While Stelzle left the work of the Presbyterian Church in 1913, he continued his social justice concerns on the Commission on Social Service staff of the Federal Council of Churches from 1916 to 1920. After his exit from the Presbyterian Church he began his own church advertising business which he continued throughout his remaining career. See chapter on Stelzle in Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). Curtis sees in Stelzle not only an "Apostle to Labor" but also a pioneer in church advertising. Stelzle also served in the 1930s as executive director of the pro-New Deal Good Neighbor League. His most productive years, however, were the ten years he was employed by the Board of Home Missions. During this period he produced over twelve books.

6. Stelzle, *A Son of the Bowery*, 30.

7. *Ibid.*, 35.

8. *Ibid.*, 45.

9. *Ibid.*, 55.

10. *Ibid.*, 60.

11. *Ibid.*, 65. Stelzle had preached five years as a layman, and studied intensely to pass the ordination examination. Not many in the presbytery were sympathetic with his radical methods of work. Stelzle says: "It was a real pleasure to have the presiding officer at my ordination service tell the audience that no candidate, including those who were graduates of regular theo-

- logical seminaries, had passed his examination more creditably."
12. *Ibid.*, 67.
 13. BHM Report 1903, 6.
 14. Charles Stelzle and Charles Thompson, "The Presbyterian Church and Social Reforms," in W. D. P. Bliss, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (New York, 1908), 942.
 15. In 1900 Stelzle sent out two hundred letters to labor leaders across the country asking them four questions with regard to the gulf between the workingman and the church. His replies showed a belief in Jesus Christ, but suspicion that the church works in the interest of the capitalist with the preacher submitting "to the wealthy men who run everything." Charles Stelzle, "The Workingman and the Church: A Composite Letter," *The Outlook* 68 (1901): 717-21.
 16. Stelzle, *A Son of the Bowery*, 69.
 17. *Ibid.*
 18. *Ibid.*, 90.
 19. *Ibid.*, 89ff.
 20. *Ibid.*, 88.
 21. BHM Report 1906, 6.
 22. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America ... 1907*, 91.
 23. Cited in William T. Ellis, "A Union Preacher," *The Outlook* 95 (13 Aug. 1910), 838.
 24. Stelzle, *A Son of the Bowery*, 147.
 25. BHM Report 1908, 10.
 26. BHM Report 1909, 25-26; *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America ... 1909*, 60-61.
 27. William Payne Shriver (1872-1957), as secretary of City, Immigrant and Industrial Work, Board of National Missions (1910-41), initiated a program of immigrant fellowships which sent ministers overseas to learn the religion and culture of the immigrants and return to cities in the U.S. in which they had located. Shriver authored *Immigrant Forces* (New York: Missionary Education Movement, 1913), *What Next For Home Missions?* (New York: Council of Women for Home Missions, 1928), and *Mission at the Grass Roots* (New York: Friendship Press, 1949). See biographical files, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.
 28. Charles Stelzle, *Boys of the Street: How to Win Them* (New York: F. H. Revell, 1904).
 29. See Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*, 303ff.
 30. *Ibid.*, 154.
 31. *Ibid.*, 306.
 32. *Ibid.*, 311.
 33. Stelzle, *A Son of the Bowery*, 165.
 34. *Ibid.*, 160.
 35. Charles Stelzle et al., *Report of Special Committee Appointed by the Commission on Social Service, F.C.C.C. in America Concerning the Industrial Situation in South Bethlehem, Pa.* (pamphlet, n.d.), cited in George H. Nash, III, "Charles Stelzle: Social Gospel Pioneer," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 50 (1972): 214. See also George Nash, III, "Charles Stelzle: Apostle to Labor," *Labor History* II:2 (Spring 1970).
 36. Stelzle, *A Son of the Bowery*, 161.
 37. Nash, "Charles Stelzle," 215.
 38. Cited *ibid.*, 214.
 39. Commission of Inquiry, Interchurch World Movement, *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1921).
 40. Nash, "Charles Stelzle," 216.
 41. Stelzle, *A Son of the Bowery*, 120; see also James Armstrong, "The Labor Temple 1910-1957: A Social Gospel in Action in the Presbyterian Church" (doctoral diss., U. of Wisconsin; Madison, 1974).
 42. Stelzle, *A Son of the Bowery*, 123.
 43. George J. Anderson, "The Church of the Heavy-Laden," *The Congregationalist and Christian World*, 4 June 1910, 772ff.
 44. Letter of Charles Stelzle to Theodore Savage, 28 Dec. 1936, assessing the original Labor Temple program. RG 301.7-12-14, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.
 45. Stelzle, *A Son of the Bowery*, 125.
 46. Curtis, *A Consuming Faith*, 258ff.
 47. Stelzle, *A Son of the Bowery*, 167.
 48. *Ibid.*, 168.
 49. *Ibid.*, 169.
 50. *Ibid.*, 96ff.
 51. Stelzle to Savage, 28 Dec. 1936.
 52. Jim Armstrong, "Twentieth Century Beginnings of the Presbyterian Church's Involvement with the Working Class," *The Church and the Wage Earner* (Chicago: ICUIS, 1974), 7ff.
 53. Cited in Nash, "Charles Stelzle," 223ff.
 54. Statement by Robert M. Miller cited *ibid.*, 218.
 55. Cited in Gorrell, *The Age of Social Responsibility*, 265.
 56. Stelzle's efforts at the Labor Temple were continued into the 1940s when it became the site of the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations (1945-1975) The P.I.I.R., under the leadership of Dean Marshal L. Scott, became a training program for seminarians and clergy on urban-industrial change in the United States. Over its thirty-year history it reached 3,000 clergy and fulfilled Stelzle's dream of opening the Presbyterian Church to the issues of working people in an industrial society. For the continuing story of industrial mission see also Richard Poethig, "Toward Worldwide Industrial Mission: The Presbyterian Story, 1945-1975" *American Presbyterians: Journal of Presbyterian History* 73 (Spring 1995): 35-47.