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*Following In His Steps: A Biography of Charles M. Sheldon* by Timothy Miller (Review)

Jacob Dorn  
*Wright State University - Main Campus*, jacob.dorn@wright.edu

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of parallel and related associations, one for employees and one for employers
in each industry. But this was not the only line taken by Neo-Thomist social
thought, nor was it the path the Catholic labor movement followed. The
author is certainly right to point out the retardant effect such Vatican views
had on the labor movement. This is to state a historiographical problem; to
resolve it satisfactorily is another matter.

Marquette University
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

P a u l  M i s n e r

Following In His Steps: A Biography of Charles M. Sheldon. By TIMOTHY
MILLER. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987. xvii +
281 pp. $24.95.

Charles M. Sheldon is usually remembered only for his “sermon story,” In
His Steps (1897), which popularized the idea that every aspect of Christians’
lives should be guided by reflection on the question “What would Jesus do?”
Though this work did catapult Sheldon to fame, and its central concept
permeated virtually everything he did and wrote, Timothy Miller success-
fully rescues him from the customary “pigeonhole.” A prolific if not profound
author, he wrote some fifty books (thirty originating as stories for his
congregation). As a pastor in Topeka, Kansas, he conscientiously served his
parishioners’ and community’s needs, experimenting with forms of worship,
pioneering in pastoral counseling, and building Central Congregational into
an “institutional church.” An activist-reformer, he worked to improve the lot
of Topeka’s blacks, advance prohibition (his “most passionate social cause”),
and promote world peace.

The Sheldon admiringly portrayed by Miller was a person of simple faith
and apparent consistency between profession and practice. A “pious liberal,”
he adopted early, without hint of the personal crisis experienced by many
evangelicals of his generation, an “untheological Christianity” comprised of
love for God and humanity. Yet he adhered till his death in 1946 to daily
prayer and Bible reading, abhorrence of alcohol and tobacco, and disdain for
the theater and much modern literature. He refused to authorize a theatrical
adaptation of In His Steps unless all the actors and actresses were devout
Christians.

Miller probes some aspects of Sheldon’s career more thoroughly than
others. Three excellent chapters cover projects Sheldon launched for Tope-
ka’s black community, the enormous success of In His Steps, and a widely
publicized experiment in publishing the Topeka Daily Capital as a Christian
paper for one week in 1900. Sheldon’s parish activities and prohibitionism
also receive ample attention. In contrast, little is revealed about his private
life, personal reflections, and individual relationships with parishioners,
other Topekans, or contemporary religious leaders. These imbalances reflect the uneven character of the sources.

More significantly, because Miller chose to write neither an intellectual biography nor an analysis of his subject’s role in the Social Gospel, Sheldon remains somewhat isolated from the larger religious environment. *In His Steps* and the Christian newspaper are well grounded in the genre of the Social Gospel novel and nineteenth-century religious journalism. Beyond the influence that the Andover Seminary controversy may have had on him as a student there in the mid-1880s, however, one learns little about how he arrived at his disinterest in biblical scholarship and theology. Similarly, beyond his popularization of his own reduction of the Social Gospel and applications of its ideals in Topeka, contributions he may have made to the Social Gospel as a movement are not developed.

Miller balances affection with fair-minded discussion of Sheldon’s critics, including one who found his Jesus “merely the personification of his own personal ideals” (p. 139). Excellent illustrations enrich this well-written book.

*Wright State University*  
Dayton, Ohio  

**Jacob H. Dorn**


The main substance of this volume consists of the letters written by Eberhard Arnold (1884–1935) before and during his 1930–31 visit to the Hutterite communities of North America. The letters also include those written to well-known Mennonite historians such as John Horsch, Robert Friedmann, and Harold S. Bender. Arnold’s desire was to unite his fledgling religious movement in Germany with the historic Hutterite communities that were experiencing renewed vitality on the western prairies.

The history of the Hutterian Brethren, as noted by Leonard Gross in his introduction, goes back more than four and one half centuries to Moravia, where a peaceful wing of Anabaptists established community of goods. Following a golden period in the late sixteenth century, they experienced severe persecution which drove their remnants to Hungary, Rumania, Russia, and finally to the western prairies of the United States by 1874. From there many of their number moved to the prairie provinces of Canada during and following World War I, because as German-speaking “communists” they experienced substantial wartime hostility in the Dakotas.

Meanwhile in Germany, by 1920 Eberhard and Emmy Arnold with their