

II. Biographical Note

Sidney Emanuel Goldstein was born in Marshall, Texas on March 7, 1879, the oldest of six children of Jacob and Golda Mesritz Goldstein. Jacob Goldstein was an immigrant from Odessa and a supporter of liberal causes. Golda Mesritz Goldstein was born in Louisiana (her father was from Holland, her mother from Ireland) and wrote prose and poetry. When Sidney was a young child, the family moved to Chicago, where he attended public school. Later he worked his way through high school as a cutter in the garment industry, the same trade at which his father worked.

While in high school, Sidney Goldstein attended services at Chicago's Temple Sinai, where Rabbi Emil Hirsch inspired him with his ringing sermons against social injustice and inequality. In that period, Goldstein also heard lectures by Jane Addams, Frank Gunsauls of the Armour Institute, and Rev. Newell Dwight Hillis of Central Church. After graduation from high school, Goldstein took courses with John Dewey and others at the University of Chicago.

Goldstein prepared for the Reform rabbinate at Hebrew Union College (HUC), and at the same time attended the University of Cincinnati. Apart from a few individual professors, he found the atmosphere at HUC "uninspiring" in its conservatism and isolation from the social and religious problems of the day. (In 1904 Goldstein scandalized the faculty at HUC by publicly supporting Eugene Victor Debs' Socialist bid for the Presidency.) He supplemented his studies with work at the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, then headed by Boris Bogen. Goldstein received a B.A. from the University of Cincinnati in 1904 and ordination as rabbi from HUC in 1905.

After graduating from HUC, Goldstein opted not to pursue a conventional career as a congregational rabbi, and deciding instead to devote himself to community service. From 1905 to 1907 he was assistant superintendent at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York, where his duties included visiting with patients and their families. Impressed by the lack of concern at most hospitals for the social needs of patients, he published an article on "The Social Function of the Hospital" in Charities and Commons. The article caught the eye of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, then still in Portland, Oregon.

In 1907 Wise invited Goldstein to join him at the Free Synagogue, which Wise had recently founded after his return to New York. Goldstein found a natural home at the Free Synagogue, where social service and action formed an integral part of the congregational mission. Goldstein founded and directed the synagogue's Social Service Department, working to cultivate the social consciousness of the congregants and to keep the synagogue fully involved in the life of the surrounding community.

(In 1907, before the Free Synagogue could afford to offer him a

full-time salary. Goldstein also served briefly as rabbi of a Reform temple in Brooklyn. There he led a split in the congregation in opposition to the temple's president who was involved in corrupt political activities.)

Under Goldstein's leadership, the Social Service Department undertook a variety of innovative programs. For many years, the department maintained a close relationship with Bellevue Hospital, where a staff of professional social workers and volunteers looked after the needs of poor Jewish patients. The work with hospital patients later expanded to include Bronx-Lebanon Hospital as well. Other projects of the Social Service Department included support of ex-tuberculosis patients, an orphan adoption program (begun by Louise Wise), assistance to psychiatric out-patients, an infant hygiene clinic, child care and youth groups, an infantile paralysis program, workshops for the unemployed, and work with refugees from Germany. From 1917, the Free Synagogue was the only congregation affiliated with the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies.

Goldstein linked his social welfare work to a broader vision of political action and change. Over the years, he was involved in a wide variety of movements and causes ranging from militant pacifism to support for the labor movement, civil rights and liberties, birth control and public morality.

On a number of occasions, Goldstein came to the aid of organized labor. In 1922, Goldstein represented Wise on a mission to investigate the living conditions of miners at the New River coal field in West Virginia. Together with Father R.A. McGowan of the National Catholic Welfare Council and Winthrop D. Lane, former editor of The Survey, Goldstein spent a week in the coal fields, and later issued a report on the abysmal conditions they found there. Thereafter, Goldstein worked closely with the United Mine Workers of America and the West Virginia Miners' Relief Committee. On other occasions, he supported the work of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the unionization of textile workers in North Carolina.

Together with Wise, Rev. John Haynes Holmes and Norman Thomas, Goldstein helped to organize the City Affairs Committee (CAC) in 1930 to push for honest local government. As chair of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) Commission on Social Justice in the midst of the Great Depression, he promoted the establishment of social action committees in Reform congregations, and espoused a far-reaching agenda of political and economic reform.

During the 1930s, Goldstein worked actively with the CAC and a number of other organizations to ameliorate the problem of unemployment. He was also a founder and leader of the Joint Committee on Unemployment, a coalition of labor, religious, educational and farmer groups. The Joint Committee lobbied and

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agitated for a program which included immediate relief for the jobless, public works, unemployment insurance, limitation of the work force (by eliminating child labor, enacting old-age pensions, and encouraging mothers to stay at home), a shorter work week, a guaranteed minimum income, and the enforcement of a maximum income.

Goldstein had special interest in problems relating to family life. He advocated the liberalization of birth-control laws, and was a long-time admirer of Margaret Sanger. An active marriage and family counselor, Goldstein wrote two books on the subject: The Meaning of Marriage and Foundations of the Family (Bloch, 1942) and Marriage and Family Counseling (McGraw-Hill, 1945). He was founder and chair of the CCAR's Committee on Marriage, the Family and the Home, and a member of the New York State Conference on Marriage and the Family, the Jewish Institute on the Family, and the National Council on Family relations.

Goldstein attempted to balance his concern for strict moral standards in entertainment and culture with his support for civil liberties. An active member of the American Civil Liberties Union and its National Council on Freedom from Censorship, he also joined Protestant and Catholic clergy in several campaigns to drive New York burlesque houses out of business. Arguing that pornography was a "source of infection" in moral life, Goldstein considered these efforts to be exercises in "sanitation" and not censorship.

Civil rights also engaged Goldstein's attention. At various times he was a member of the National Council for a Permanent Fair Employment Practices Committee, the Citizens' Committee to Save Colored Locomotive Firemen's Jobs, and the A. Philip Randolph Educational Fund. In 1941, New York Governor Herbert Lehman appointed Goldstein to the Committee on Discrimination in Employment.

A life-long pacifist, Goldstein refused a commission as a military chaplain during World War I. From 1930 to 1940, he served as chair of the Executive Committee of the War Resisters' League. (While Goldstein opposed the American war effort during World War I, Stephen Wise and the Free Synagogue supported it. Goldstein also remained an opponent of Zionism, even while Wise became the most prominent leader of the American branch of the movement.)

Goldstein participated in the founding of the Jewish Institute for Religion (JIR) in 1922 and helped to devise its curriculum. As professor of Social Service he taught courses in pastoral and counseling services, community organization, and the role of the synagogue in the social order. JIR granted Goldstein an honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1945.

In 1944-1945, Goldstein performed a second brief stint as a congregational rabbi (apart from the Free Synagogue) by filling in

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at Brooklyn's Temple Ahavath Sholem while its rabbi was in military service.

Goldstein was married to Susan Sugarman (d.1937) and had two daughters, Dr. Beatrice S. Kohnheim, a professor of Physiology and Hygiene at Hunter College, and Eleanore G. Nichthausen. He retired from the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in 1953, and died on March 19, 1955.

The Synagogue and Social Welfare, in which Goldstein summed up his philosophy of religious social service and gave an account of his life's work, appeared in 1955, shortly after his death.