Social Darwinism and Social Gospel Movement

During the epoch of late 19th century through early 20th century, two notable social philosophy theories sequentially emerged in European and United States society and get themselves prevailed in specific groups somehow. However, despite the closeness of creation time between those two theories, they're essentially different from each other.

Originated from Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, natural selection was a group of sociologists including Herbert Spencer, who first defined the term progress to be the transition from homogeneous to heterogeneous (Spencer). The theory was pretty popular at the time since it implies that future will always be better through natural selection and thus promote such optimism.

While on the other hand, from Protestant United States, grew out of the disgust to the poor situation of social justice, inequality, poverty, high crime rate and environment issues, Social Gospel Movement applied Christian ethics to social problems listed above and called for a more theological life and faith in the Lord to live a more moral life.

At that time, Social Darwinism was applied as a symbol of the triumph of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Republican and the failure of Roman Catholic represented especially by the recession of Southern Europe and Latin America. It was used as a evidence that the United States was blessed by the Lord and was obligated of expansion and mission or even destine of converting the whole world to such glorious status (Johnson). This ideal became a potential reason and justification that United States gradually discarded its isolationism and turned into a nation that actively played a role like a judge that intervenes or mediates the conflicts all around the world. The decision to liberate Cuba from Spain was one of the cases that show such ideal.

On the opposite, Social Gospel Movement is like a self-reflection. It is pretty obvious in the cases presented in *Christianality and The Social Crisis* by Rauschenbusch that the social conflicts had already become pretty sharp. In fact, Rauschenbusch's tone is pretty similar to those communists talking about interclass oppression and inequity. Labors in lower class earn little and occupy nothing they produced because the land and machine are provided by the business owners. Millions of the poor cannot recieve proper treatment when in sick and were treated like burden and transferred between hospitals. Leaders of Social Gospel Movement clearly pointed out these problems and calls for revive of religion and education and promote the progress of the society and realize personal happiness and achievement through hardworking in order to finally bring a better world by themselves. And they're successful indeed in some way including ameliorated working conditions and the abolishment of child labor. Generally speaking, Social Gospel Movement is a liberal progressive movement started to adjust United States protestantism to the society of that age.

The attitudes brought up by those two theories towards the relation between different classes is entirely opposite to each other. Social Darwinists are generally opponent of social welfare and insane asylums and typically abnegate any obligation of the wealthier. To them it is more than a natural phenomenon but also a desired status that the strong should see their wealth and power increase while the weak should see their wealth and power decrease. The Social Darwinists claim that competition within a society can help it to make further progress by letting the weaker ones drop out of the stage. Thus, it is unnecessary to them at all to maintain social equality since it will " allowing inferior humans to survive and reproduce at levels faster than the more 'superior' humans "(Galton). The theory was furtherly extended, adjusted, extremalized and eventually reached its peak during 1930s to 1940s under the regime of Adolf Hitler, which led to the massacre of millions of Jewish people. And the theory of Social Darwinism finally came to its recession rapidly as the fall of Nazi.

On the other hand, Social Gospel movement is much more progressive. The leaders and participants were uneased by the situation of the United States society either because of the lack of social justice or culture shock brought in by massive immigration. It is consist of people who really cares about social equality and pretty much devoted to change the status quo. It is per se a progressive social movement though its conversative component and close relation to religion. It is an attempt to make religion play a more active and positive, compared with Roman Catholic in the Europe, role in the transition of society. People who serve the Lord started to take more resposibility when confronting Matthew effect. This movement also bravely embraced the rationalism brought by the development of science and actually changed millions of people's life by strengthening their faith, as well as promoting various efforts and charities.

**Reference:**

Johnson, Paul. *A History of the American People*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1998. Print.

Rauschenbusch, Walter. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. New York: Harper & Row, 1964. Print.

Spencer, Herbert. *Education, Intellectual, Moral and Physical and Progress: Its Law and Cause*. New York: Humboldt, 1880. Print.