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1906

Religion in a Democracy

Earl Clement Davis

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Keligion in a democracy. To run along in a sort of floud contentwent in regard to many frering froblans is notwol, for me do and indeed must confine one allerties to clutes near ot hand, giving only occasional glancar to deverels that me to be made in the future. The momentourness of the problems involved in the perent condition of religions muret con he but faintly realized. When we some to speak of religion in a Dewacacy it selden accur to us that we are spoking of things which have were been tried, except in a very swoll way. Muder the fearme of other demands the feefle of this devocation nation have votyet turned their attention to the readjustment

of religious idear and former made necessary by the guring and ex foreling of the spirit involved in our Devocatie life. While it is not clear that any consideration was given to the ultimote influence upon rectain accepted forms for interfecting religious experiences, get the men who were the commanding fusing slikes in the establishment of our Serveratie notion, were oferly at alle with current theological notions. Of come the fundamental tenet of the government, that all were one rested egod wer a profosition offliced only to folitical fortleurs. But it contains an implicit-devial of every dogwa of the Catholocius, Colinism and Sutheranism, and at the some. Time it is the grandest endorsement of the teachings of ferms, that has yet regimen us.

But is it wot absured to imagine that the religious life in a Sew-revolie come muity should be any different this the religions life of any other commity! But in asking that question, one falls to distinguish between the shirt; and the form of infereting the shirt of the vog in which a won feels himself to be related to the wiseen world. The spiritual impeter which unted in the development of the Cotholic Church is of course essentially the some, as the spiritore infetur which gave the Chientel to the an the religion of Islam, or game rise to the great methodic were: went of the eighteenth century. But the form of interfetating this ofinition force, in to simply the mirror of the current folitical conditions. The Cotholic Church is nothing was

or len in its form, and its worth, than the firelist of all leaven foliticol and State ideals, afflice to the forthern of organizing the religion life of the feefle. Violentantium in simply a reacquitment of, or a reinterfection tion of the spirit-religion in terms of the new folitical iclear that mere developing, during the year centeries after the Reformation. The folitial fineigles involved in a devocatic form of kenement found their first interfectation in the world of seligion, in the folity of the Broguego time the has. deveniention of this country who follow the sor collect Rongrego timoline. But even, here. the spiril-engelolized before Serveracy had developed into form. Twony, in fact wort

of there churcher hear the mark of the her England Somotherway Sherracy rother the story of the Servous ey of the United Stoles. In it hof few that we have yet before is the task of re-interfreting the spiriture former of life in terms of a church system which still entocky the frueifler of notional life. Us me look over the religious son? ditions of the country to day, me fund a feculiar, even an a groterque conglower ohin of various forms of thuck Government, which reperent as many folitical ideals, as Employ nations, and the Deworota U.S. have adofted. The Coth-lie Church belongs to the old Revon World. and Widowood Emofe. The efisciful Church belongs to England. Other bochies refresent the armounded

Congregationalism represents the new-langland theoreway, and thus it goes on. Each one of there group referents a bygone age, or a foreign ustin. Each ene is a transflanted sustitution, and in spiritand in form is freign to the atworffue of the notion, The church, and in fort the theology of a Dewocracy is yet to be given us. The gener of such an vistilution, and the beginnings of such a theology have shooty been made, but the work of extending, and defening the friveifler involved has not yet extended very midely du fact this is the religions follow before us to day. The in: cuasing acutener of the friction Letwer the decaying france

both as terfolity and theology, between the decaying institutions, and the Severatie in terpetation of the religious life is offerent. The striking ellustration of the way in which this fretim offers, and indicates the fundamental frit at issue is formed in the current trial for herery of Dr. Dropsey of Porchester New Joh. The foint at issue is one of folity, vot of truth. It is simply the question of whether or vot the subject is to eving the rights of free speech. In Crafsey as frist of the Efireofol Church, has declared his obligieure to certain established beliefs, and frinciples. But as a worth of feet he close vot believe thre frinciples, and har hear very bold and fre

to say so. Two the question at issue in not whether the statements of & aufrey are true, or fole, but whether as a sevent of the Efiscofol church, he har a right to freach ideas vot in conformity to the Standards of the church. It is not a question of theology so whe as it is a question of fabily. It is not so much a guestion of bruth, as it is a question of outhorty. a question as to whether a vot the legitimote rights of the inclinidual me to be restrained by a foreign justilulin. The some fourt of dispute is at the bottom of the fresent continues, about the feren of ferres. It is not so much a guestin of the relative worth of Jerus teachings, as it is the question of accepting any over dietum as a binding

authority. In other works we are ? changing one enferis. Lustead of accepting a thing as time, because it is alleged to have hear for = claimed by feres, me accept whote ever me way of his sayings because they correced themselves to us or heing in harvey with one general conceptions of truth. The sufrewacy of Jesus well rise or foll according to whether the investigations over heing conducted hear evidence of his confounity to truth. at this twine the problem of reachusting one religious forms, and one interfree tolins of religions exferènce is be: giving to few upon us for solution. It would be futile for me to ottenft to forsevoit the ortune of this

great religious vonement, fut one is blind who court see some ? thing of the tendencies, and fulfo one of the wort striking, forithe the fundomental characteristic of the permenting werewest, is seen in the fresent day hobit of wind, evidenced by whit is spoken of as search after truth. For very infortant idea are in: volved here, one is the inflicit faith in the existance of truth. and the seemed is the implicit faith in the ability of won To discover truth. In our folities institutions this faith tokes the form of confi: devee in the forsibility of a just, and equitoble system of self bonemwent, of a gomenment of the people. by the feefle, and

for the feofle, and second in the shility of were though warred exferiments of failure and success to dirementhis ideal system, and adoft themselves to it. This implies the devial of the Divine Right Go Parle. and its attendent offerous. The high officer is the secret of all. and his fituer to whe restorat ofen any suferer throl sudme: went, but upon the personal integ: sity, and ability for whing. His election to office, rest, not ufor any inherital sufernotivoling or the carting of lots, and such things. but upon the obility of the waging of the forthe to select one from array them to set tempraily

as their executive in notional offairs, This finecifle how yet to be widely officed to proflew of the religious world. Suter feeted in terms of theology it means faith in God, and faith in won, Of course any organize ohim which himit its faith in won by any ateficial standard, such as a fruitivel, or an authoritative book, or an authoritative need, is simply a dead weight ofm the progress of the feefle of our nation towards the development of our notion of self controlling self deciding ferfle. Buy insti : Tutin that maintains such a system and exponer it is breaking down the behaver of Devociacy. Any wishitetion

But if you have not authority of 14 frient, or church or book, to maintain the structurch, whiten, and to keeffer: fle in the staight and name forth, both are Therity have you? The authority of the religion of Denveracy, in the authority of further of finite of finion relying ofon the streaments of expert in: nerlyoter. On illustration of the natural development of poblic ofinin much a system and the exceedingly formerful influ: ence of the fublic ofinion developed. is found in the medical froferin. The medical wais authrity wo longe rests who any sufernatival former as it-one diel, but ofen his hard work, and his coursen sense shilly to heat succenfully the cases that some under his treatment. If his frescrifting and his treatments ferra

themselver by ower, his word 1's along farticular hires forces for great with, a farticular illustration in fruit is the rafiel development of the curative volve of freshau. acting whom the expect testimony of teating wany diseases has become courum, and fublic ofinion has become so stirryly insistant of this method that tacky or delinguent flyriciens have to aclose the ver wethers, or they are left behind. The authority of religion in Deworray must sest upon a similar basis, a wether, a doctione, to must fine itself by its general fortobility of truth, and its workshifty when tested, Evan Then it went ohnop set under text, and to ready to be onethern when a sufirin

and was wahole wether too! come to light. The great meatures of the christin churches to dry con to traced to this one fauet. Being bound hand and wind by accient ideas about which a certain glawon has been certis the churches have not been free to sast aside the enferredad doctrines and idear, and adjust itself to new truth, a votoble example of this is the attitude maintained by the church as a whole towards the discoveries of worlen Science. Being fledged to the finality of sertain doctries, the church ferred itself in the very underintle fortie of heing completed tratardine

as faithy survieous it doctives once forlained as thiring thath, or to enter into a long feriod of worthlere, and negative ofoligation. Held in thairs by these unnecessary ties the church or a whole store to fut itself on the defensive, and in the fore of actorizing science enter with a long feriod of ofolis getis. The result have as often before has been weathering to the church, and its work, and wow it is trying to Juget, and conceol the wintrhe brought ufu it by the heavy load of doctrines frorlained as firol, and ultimote truth. If the church is to regain its fast diminishing control, it must thew off there chains

which limit it peeden to seek after and accept new truth. The world of science has vo fixed creed, we authoritative statement of any kind, get there are certain functionwetal truth that are quite gruevoly acceptular fival, for example the leve of granitation, and similar ones. Questions that one in anyway ofen to doobt are held in a tentotice, until their fortile truth is demonstrated by their workability. Wors the the door is always for you for ver trutt and the constint expectation of new scientific truth is a further stumber to construct investigation, on the world of religion we went remember that me are finite beings ottenfling Tor interfect

our relations with the infinite It is semewhat percening to form assume that we know any: thing fivel, and the claims to a complete and fivol revelotion suchas the chain main lained in regard to the Bible, inwestight Khochs every effort ofter new truth, and trainforms the work of the church into deferious after: gitte. In the developing church of devocacy, there con and will be wo claims to absolutiones in all the doctrines developed to interflet religious experiences. The mindows and down will always be feved for the light of new truth, and the bars of iron will be rewried.

But one thing was at least way be voted, the chief of Sewrany will be mint be inchesine. It cornet femil- thet one sheef sheek he lost. The organizations of every form still have their excuse for heing, not because they serve as a flace of refuge for saints, and a shelter for hypocities but become they serve all, The church like the said exists to west a social and inclinichal need. It has wo special flear to be found except in so far ar it con justify it claims. by service just as a hosfitel justifys it claims. The churchen then

of the religion of dervociony, con long claims to vo boun a serfect or special frinileges for the church as such, but it way ask and will receive how and suffect torect of upon its efficient and important service, and above all the in so for as it ferfour ili work, and becomes in wistitution of worth in the Breligions life, it-will servine the howege fail to it as a symbol of the highest pelotions of human life, time as we fy to our flog an four as the symbol and emblen of a notion of predum. The instructors attitude towards the church in the religion of Deurocracy. munt of vecerity be changed from whot has been, and still continues to be the one of the great carrier of the fole atworshore

within the church, and the frhe attitude without. For centuries the Church has her regarded as a sort of a goteway to heaven, and the fefte have been tright to wok you it as the natural channel though which they way ever who the solvation of their own souls, one of the work derfirable, and yet me of the gravalent ideas ever hell. But this wor longer bolels in a Sewocracy. The church becomes an wistitution of spiritural service, and the inclinichal identifies himself with it not for the perfit which it will be to him, but for the good that he con do to the world though the agency of fellowship in the church, and though the recipo:

influence of the feelinship of the noble life ofon him in keeping undefiled his ferrovol integrity and keeping unsfolded his Divine retire. It is the fellowsky of woblene oblige." Here we the general him along mutich, and the aims towards which the wonement of religious ideals, and religions life in this country are forguering. The religion of human is yet to become wishly accepted. but its spirit in about, and its forms are establishing themselves with homenslys rofichty.

Religion in a Democracy

Earl Clement Davis

1906

To run along in a sort of flaccid contentment in regard to many pressing problems is natural, for we do and indeed must confine our attentions to {???} near at hand, giving only occasional glances to demands that must be made in the future. The momentousness of the problems involved in the present condition of religious unrest can be but faintly realized. When we come to speak of religion in a democracy it seldom occurs to us that we are speaking of things which have never been tried, except in a very small way. Under the pressure of other demands the people of this democratic nation have not yet turned their attention to the readjustment of religious ideas and forms made necessary by the {???} and {???} of the spirit involved in our Democratic Life. While it is not clear that any consideration was given to the ultimate influence upon certain accepted forms for interpreting religious experiences, yet the men who were the commanding personalities in the establishment of our Democratic nation were openly at odds with current theological notions. Of course the fundamental tenet of government, that all men are created equal, was a proposition applied only to political problems. But it contains an implicit denial of every dogma of Catholicism, Calvinism and Lutheranism, and at the same time it is the grandest endorsement of the teachings of Jesus that has yet been given us.

But is it not absurd to imagine that the religious life in a Democratic community should be any different than the religious life of any other community? But in asking that question, one fails to distinguish between the spirit and the form of interpreting the spirit of the way in which a man feels himself to be related to the unseen world. The spiritual impetus which resulted in the development of the Catholic Church is of course essentially the same as the spiritual impetus which gave the Orientals the religion of Islam, or gave rise to the great Methodist movement of the eighteenth century. But the form of interpreting this

spiritual force is simply the mirror of the current political conditions. The Catholic Church is nothing more or less in its form, and it's worth, than the product of old Roman political and state ideals, applied to the problem of organizing the religious life of the people. Protestantism is simply the readjustment of, or a reinterpretation of, the {???} religion in terms of the political ideas that were developing during the centuries after the Reformation. The political principles involved in a democratic form of government found their first interpretation in the world of religion in the {???} of the various denominations of this country who follow the socalled congregationalism. But even here the spirit crystalized before democracy had developed into form. Many, in fact most of the churches bear the mark of the New England Theocracy rather than the stamp of the Democracy of the United States. So it happens that we have yet before us the task of reinterpreting the spiritual forms of life in terms of a church system which shall embody the principles of national life.

As we look over the religious conditions of the country today, we find a peculiar, even a grotesque conglomeration of various forms of church government, which represent as many political ideals as European nations and the Democratic U.S. have adopted. The Catholic Church belongs to the old Roman world and medieval Europe. The Episcopal Church belongs to England. Other bodies represent the commonwealth Congregationalism present in New England Theocracy, and thus it goes on. Each one of these groups represents a bygone age, or a foreign nation. Each one is a transplanted institution, and in sprit and in form is foreign to the atmosphere of the Nation. The church, and in fact the theology of a Democracy is yet to be given us. The germs of such an institution, and the beginnings of such a theology have already been made, but the work of extending, and defining the principles involved has not yet extended very widely.

In fact this is the religious problem before us today. The increasing acuteness of the friction between the decaying forms both as to {???} and theology, between the decaying institutions, and the Democratic interpretation of the religious life is apparent. The striking illustration

of the way in which this friction appears, and indicates the fundamental point at issue is found in the current trial for heresy of Dr. Crapsey of Rochester New York. The point at issue is one of {???}, not of truth. It is simply the question of whether or not the subject is to enjoy the rights of free speech. Dr. Crapsey as priest of the Episcopal Church, has declared his allegiance to certain established beliefs, and principles. But as a matter of fact he does not believe these principles, and has been very bold and free to say so. Now the question at issue is not whether the statements of Dr. Crapsey are true or false, but whether as a servant of the Episcopal Church, he has a right to preach ideas not in conformity to the standards of the church. It is not a question of theology so much as it is a question of {???}. It is not so much a question of truth as it is a question of authority, a question as to whether or not the legitimate rights of the individual are to be restrained by a foreign institution.

The same point of dispute is at the bottom of the present controversy about the person of Jesus. It is not so much a question of the relative worth of Jesus' teachings, as it is the question of accepting anyone's dictum as a binding authority. In other words, we are changing our emphasis. Instead of accepting a thing as true, because it is alleged to have been proclaimed by Jesus, we accept whatever we may of his sayings because they commend themselves to us as being in harmony with our general conceptions of truth. The supremacy of Jesus will rise or fall according to whether the investigations now being conducted hear evidence of his conformity to truth.

At this time, the problem of readjusting our religious forms, and our interpretations of religious experience is beginning to press upon us for solution. It would be futile for me to attempt to forecast the outcome of this great religious movement. Yet one is blind who cannot see something of the tendencies, and perhaps one of the most striking, possibly the fundamental characteristic of the {???} movement, is seen in the present day habit of mind, evidenced by what is spoken of as search after truth.

Two very important ideas are involved here, one is the implicit faith in the existence of truth, and the second is

the implicit faith in the ability of man to discover truth. In our political institutions this faith has the form of confidence in the possibility of a just and equitable system of self-government, of a government of the people, by the people and for the people. And second in the ability of men through varied experiments of failure and success to discover this ideal system and adapt themselves to it. This implies the denial of the Divine Right to Rule, and its attendant apparatus. The high officer is the servant of all, and his fitness to rule rests not upon any supernatural endowment, but upon the personal integrity and ability for ruling. His election to office rests not upon any inherited supernaturalism or the casting of lots and such things, but upon the ability of the majority of the people to select one from among them to act temporarily as their executive in national affairs. This principle has yet to be widely applied to problems of the religious world. Interpreted in terms of theology, it means faith in God, and faith in man. Of course any organization which limits its faith in man by any artificial standard, such as a priesthood, or an authoritative book, or an authoritative creed, is simply a dead weight upon the progress of the people of our nation towards the development of a nation of self-controlling self-deciding people. Any institution that maintains such a system and enforces it is breaking down the bulwarks of Democracy. Any institution that maintains such a system and does not enforce it is of course playing double and deserves no recognition. The religion of Democracy knows no such institution. Every man is his own priest, and the ministers and other religious servants are not clothed with any special authority except the authority of noble life, and zealous effort along the line of their work. The Religion of faith in God and fain in man and faith in man's ability to know God, demands first of all the clearing away of these survivals of ancient days and former systems of government.

But if you have not authority of priest, or church, or book to maintain the standards and to keep people on the straight and narrow path, what authority have you? The authority of the religion of Democracy, is the authority of public opinion relying upon the statements of expert investigators. An illustration of the natural development of public opinion under such a system and the exceedingly

forceful influence of the public opinion developed is found in the medical profession. The medical man's authority no longer rests upon any supernatural power as it once did, but upon his hard work and his common sense ability to treat successfully the cases that come under his treatment. If his prescriptions and his treatments favor themselves by cures, his word along particular lines {???} for great worth. A particular illustration in point is the rapid development of the curative value of fresh air. Acting upon the expert testimony of eminent physicians, this method of treating many diseases has become common, and public opinion has become so strongly insistent of this method that tardy or delinquent physicians have to accept the new methods or they are left behind. The authority of religion in Democracy must rest upon a similar basis. A method, a doctrine must prove itself by its general probability of truth, and its workability when tested. Even then it must always rest under test, and be ready to be overthrown when a superior and more workable method has come to light. The great weakness of the Christian churches today can be traced to this one fault. Being bound hand and mind by ancient ideas about which a certain {???} has been cast, the churches have not been free to cast aside the superseded doctrines and ideas, and adjust itself to new truth. A valuable example of this is the attitude maintained by the church as a whole towards the discoveries of modern science. Being pledged to the finality of certain doctrines, the church found itself in the very undesirable position of being compelled to abandon as partly erroneous its doctrines once proclaimed as divine truth or to enter into a long period of worthless, and negative apologetics. Held in chains by these unnecessary ties, the church as a whole chose to put itself on the defensive, and in the face of advancing science, enter into a long period of apologetics. The result here as often before has been weakening to the church, and its work and now it is trying to forget and conceal the mistake brought upon it by the heavy load of doctrines proclaimed as final, and ultimate truth. If the church is to regain its fast diminishing control, it must throw off these chains which limit its freedom to seek after and accept new truth. The world of science has no fixed creed, no authoritative statement of any kind, yet there are certain fundamental truths that are quite generally accepted as final. For example, the law of

gravitation, and similar laws. Questions that are in anyway open to doubt are held in a tentative, until their probable truth is demonstrated by their workability. More than that the door is always open for new truth and the constant expectation of new scientific truth is a perpetual stimulus to constant investigation. In the world of religion we must remember that we are finite beings attempting to interpret our relations with the infinite. It is somewhat presuming to assume that we know anything final, and the claims to complete and final revelation such as the claim maintained in regard to the Bible, immediately chokes every effort after new truth, and transforms the work of the church into defensive apologetics. In the developing church of Democracy there can and will be no claims to absoluteness in all the doctrines developed to interpret religious experiences. The windows and doors will always be opened for the light of new truth, and the bias of iron will be removed. But one thing more at least may be noted, the religion of Democracy must be inclusive. It cannot permit that one self shall be lost. The organization of every form shall have their excuse for being, not because they serve as a place of refuge for saints, and a shelter for hypocrites, but because they serve all. The church like the saints exists to meet a social and individual need. It has no special plea to be honored except insofar as it can justify its claims by service just as a hospital justifies its claims. The churches then of the religion of democracy can lay claims to no honor or respect or special privileges for the church as such, but it may ask and will receive honor and support based upon its efficient and important service, and above all else insofar as its performs its work, and becomes an institution of worth in the religious life. It will receive the homage paid to it as a symbol of the highest relations of human life, just as we pay to our flag an honor as the symbol and emblem of a nation of freedom.

The individual's attitude towards the church in the religion of Democracy must of necessity be changed from what has been and still continues to be one of the great causes of the fake atmosphere within the church, and the false attitude without. For centuries the church has been regarded as a sort of gateway to heaven, and the people have been taught to look upon it as the natural channel

through which they may enter into salvation of their own souls, one of the most despicable, and yet one of the grandest ideas ever held. But this no longer holds in a Democracy. The church becomes one institution of spiritual service, and the individual identifies himself with it not for the benefit which it will be to him, but for the good that he can do to the world through the agency of fellowship in the church, and through the reciprocal influences of the fellowship of the noble life upon him, in keeping undefiled his personal integrity and keeping {???} his Divine nature. It is the fellowship of "noblesse oblige."

These are the general lines along which, and the aims towards which, the movement of religious ideals, and religious life in this country are progressing. The religion of democracy is yet to become widely accepted, but its spirit is abroad and its forms are establishing themselves with tremendous rapidity.