

The Ethical Significance of the Changing Social Order in its
Bearing on the Institution of Government

E. C. Davis

Pittsfield, MA

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When Jesus was at the high pitch of his popularity, the Pharisees and the Sadducees flocked about him asking him to show some strange sign of his power and his faith of the Kingdom of God that he talked of and declared was coming. The only evidence of it that they could see was the rather startling remarks of this strange unknown young man, and the fact that a few obscure people had declared their allegiance to him. But in the eyes of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who measured things only by the power of established conditions, all this unseen force, which Jesus told them was in them, did not count. They could understand the strength of the Roman Army, and the grandeur of the Roman Government. They could understand the power of the Jewish Law, and the influence of Money, but they could not understand the power of an idea, the power of a new passion, a new social order that was even then under the influence of Jesus, beginning, to break through the crust of a dead civilization. Yet as history has shown, the power of that idea, of that passion, of that purpose which the subtle mind of Jesus felt was greater than all the wealth, all the power of the Roman government, the Roman Army, and the Jewish Law. The time came when all these had to bow before that strange subtle idea, that fed the minds of a few Gallilean peasants. So when the Pharisees asked Jesus for some outward token of the great movement that he talked about, he could answer them only by saying, to them, "Ye cannot discern the signs of the times."²

The Pharisees of all ages are blind, blind as a mole to the most powerful forces that are at work in society. Today we study

¹ There is no date on this manuscript. However, the paper-size and type—are identical to sermons that can be dated to Earl Davis' time at the Unity Church in Pittsfield (1905-1919). His early sermons (1905-07) there were hand-written. So this typed manuscript is later than 1907.

² Matthew 16:3.

the stock market reports, the news concerning the effect of the weather on the spring wheat crop, but how many of us can really understand the great human ideal, the great undercurrent of thought and purpose, the great spiritual passion that is working in this modern world of ours. With a power as irresistible as the swing of the earth through space does it grow and develop, sweeping aside old barriers, making, a new channel for its expression, interpreting strength in terms of its own genius.

I have been speaking of this great movement of our own times, pointing out its bearing, upon various institutions of society. I come this morning to speak of the influence of this upon government.

We are very much inclined to think that the institution of Government was a ready-made affair handed down to some king or chieftain and which society in its evolution has made over into a machine adapted to the conditions today. That which we now regard as final and fixed. The Government established on this continent by our revolutionary ancestors is the complete form. But all this is an assumption of the Pharisee in us. The institution of government is always in a state of flux, always changing, through the slow process of evolution, marked here and there by the more violent periods which we call revolutions. The government which is in a constant state of ferment is healthy. The government in which there is a passive and apathetic fixedness is dying. People lament because we are so up in arms in our times, but the danger is not from the unrest, but from the apathy.

The purpose of Government is to do together those things which we can most economically, and advantageously do together. To protect, and support life and the development of personality, to assist each other in the enrichment of life, as well as to perform the conventional tasks of maintaining law and order, all this is part and parcel of the function of government.

To the development of this function, men in all ages, under the impulse of an ever-expanding conception of democracy, have the best of their effort and thought. Today this same unseen spirit, working in the minds of men and women all over the land is changing the form and broadening the scope of the common efforts of humanity. Through the change is coming greater

freedom, higher development, and a sturdier, and nobler generation of men and women. It is the deepest and richest life of our times, not only to know that this unseen force working in society is bringing a new era, to still greater is the richness of life in feeling it develops, and being a part of it.