

Religion in a Democracy.

To run along in a sort of placid contentment in regard to many pressing problems is natural, for we do and indeed must confine our attention to clothes near at hand, giving only occasional glances to devices that are to be made in the future. The momentum 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 re-adjustment

of religious ideas and forms made
necessary by the growing and ex-¹³
panding spirit 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 person-
alities in the establishment of our
Democratic nation, were openly at odds
with current theological notions.
Of course the fundamental tenet of
the government, that all men are
created equal over & proportion allotted
only to political problems. But it
contains an implicit denial of every
dogma of the 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 that³
the religious life in a democratic com-
munity 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
world 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 Christians~~to stand~~
on the religion of Islam, or gave
rise to the great Methodist move-
ment of the eighteenth century. But
the form of interpreting this spiritual
force, is ~~to~~ simply the mirror of
the current political conditions.
The Catholic Church is nothing more

or less in its form, and its worth,
than the product of old Puritan political
and State ideals, affixed to the problem
of organizing the religious life of
the people. Protestantism is simply
a readjustment of, or a reinterpreta-
tion of the spirit religion in terms
of the new political ideas that
were developing during the
several 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
fidelity of the Congregational churches,
of this country, of the various
denominations of this country who
follow the so-called Congregationalism.
But even here, the spirit-crystallized
before democracy had developed
into form. Many, in fact most

of these churches bear the mark of the
New England Democracy ~~Democracy~~⁷ hierarchy
rather than the spirit of the democra-
cy of the United States. So it has
been that we have yet before us
the task of re-interpreting the spiritual
power of life in terms of a church
system which shall embody the
principles of national life.

As we look over the religious con-
ditions of the country to day, we find
a peculiar, even ~~an~~^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 Middle-evil Europe. The Episcopal
Church belongs to England. Other
bodies represent the Commonwealth

Congregationalism represents the 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 spirit 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 deepening the principles involved has not yet extended very widely.

In fact this is the religious problem before us to-day. The increasing acuteness of the friction between the decaying forms

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both as to folly 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. Crofsey of Rochester
New York. The point at issue is
one of folly, not of truth. It is
simply the question of whether or
not the subject is to enjoy the
rights of free speech. Dr. Crofsey
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 those principles, and
has been very bold and free

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to say so. Now the question at issue⁸ is not whether the statements of Dr. Aofsey 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 liberty. 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 any one doctrine as a binding

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authority. In other words we are changing our a priori. 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 over being conducted bear 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 us to attempt to forecast the outcome of this

great religious movement. Yet one
is blind who cannot see some-
thing of the tendencies, and perhaps
one of the most striking, possibly
the fundamental characteristic of
the fermenting 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 in-
volved 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 takes the form of confi-
dence in the practicability 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 discern this ideal
system, and adopt them-
selves to it. This implies the
denial of the Divine Right to Rule,
and its attendant offshoots. The
high officer is the servant of all,
and his fitness to rule rests not
upon any supernatural endow-
ment, but upon the personal integ-
rity, and ability for ruling. His
election to office, rests not upon any
inherited supernormalism, 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 creedbook, 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 our 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

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that maintains such a system
and does not enforce it, is of
course flagrant clericalism, and de-
serves no recognition. The religion
of devoutness 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 a noble
noble life, and zealous efforts
along the line of their work.
The Religion of faith in God, and
faith 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 14
priest, or church, or book, to maintain
the standards, what say, and to keep for-
ever in 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 in-
vestigator. An illustration of the
natural development of public
opinion under such a system
and the exceedingly powerful influ-
ence 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 give

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themselves by man, his word along particular lines gives force for great worth. A particular illustration in point is the rapid development of the curative value of persian. Acting upon the exact testimony of eminent physicians, this method of treating many diseases has become common, and popular opinion has become so strongly insistant of this method that tacitly or deligent physicians have to adopt the new methods, or they are left behind. The authority of religion in democracy must rest upon a similar basis. A method, a doctrine, to 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 was unworkable method to¹⁶
come to light. The great weakness
of the Christian church to day
can be traced to this one point.
Being bound hand and mind
by ancient ideas about which a
certain glamour has been cast,
the church have not been free
to cast aside the superceded
doctrines and ideas, and adjust
itself to new truth. A notable
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

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as fairly erroneous its doctrines once proclaimed as divine truth, or to enter into a long period of worthlessness, and negative obligations. 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 has as often before has been weakening to the church, and its work, and now it is trying to forget, and cover 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 fixed, for example the law of gravitation, and similar ones. Questions that are in any way open to doubt are held in a tentative, until their probable truth is demonstrated by their workability. Worse than that the door is always open for new truth and the constant expectation of new scientific truth is a powerful stimulus to constant investigation. In the world of religion we must remember that we are finite beings attempting to understand

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our relations with the infinite.
It is somewhat presuming to
~~there~~ assume that we know any-
thing final, and the claims to
a complete and final revelation
such as the claim maintained
in regard to the Bible, immediately
checks every effort after new
truth, and transforms the work
of the church into defensive glo-
rification. In the developing church
of democracy, there are, and
will be no claims to absolute
in all the doctrines developed
to interpret religious experiences.
The windows and doors will
always be open for the light
of new truth, and the bars
of iron will be removed.

But one thing will at least very
be voted, the ^{religious} church of Democracy
will be most be inclusive. It
cannot permit that one sheep
shee be lost. The organizations
of every form still 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 saint exists to meet a
social, and inclinical need.
It has no special fles to be
hounded, except in so far as
it can justify its claims. By service
first as a hospital justifies
its claims. The church then

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of the religion of democracy, can lay claims to so honor or perfect or superior privileges for the church as such, but it may ask and will receive honor and support to the extent of ~~for~~ its efficient and important service, and above all else in so far as it performs its work, and becomes in substitution of worth in the ~~the~~ religious life, it will receive the homage paid to it as a symbol of the highest relations of human life, ~~and~~ as we try to unfolding 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 the one of the great causes of the jolts atmosphere

within the church, and the ¹²² ~~folk~~
outside without. For centuries the
church has been regarded as a
sort of a gateway to heaven, and
the people have been taught to look
upon it as the natural channel
through which they may enter into
the soliloquy of their own souls, one
of the most desirable, and yet one
of the grandest ideas ever held.
But this no longer holds in a
democracy. The church becomes an
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 recipro-

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influence of the fellowship of the noble life upon him in keeping undefiled his personal integrity and keeping unbroken his Divine nature. It is the fellowship of obliges oblige."

Here 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.