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THE SEMINARY AND DEMOCRACY

REV. OWEN H. GATES, Ph.D.*

The traditional scope of democracy is being latterly extended to the world instead of the country, and from political control to control of all the interests of the people; on the other hand, when we study the qualifications of the people for democracy, the controlling unit, the people, is found to be reduceable to the individual. Democracy is simply the rule of a man because he is a man. The essence of democracy is that no man has a right to be master of another man.

What then, does a man rule? Himself. If he controls another in any respect for a period, he does it at that other's direction, and he is responsible to him for his acts.

THE RELATIONS OF RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY

Democracy is just men, just human souls like ourselves. The evolution of democracy is the development of character in men; and development of character in men inevitably fits them to play their part in democracy. Democracy must come, has come, if strong men are bred. Material, processes, results are identical. They are really two names for the same thing.

The infant is the whole world. There is nothing else. All is to go into his mouth. He is the center, and soon to be the circumference. Then the child discovers that it is more fun to shake his rattle than to try to swallow it; and then that, if he is to shake it, he must give up the idea of swallowing it. Here is a conflict of desires, and the one is renounced in the interest of the other. Sacrifice it is sometimes called; better, a sense of values. And this is the story of his whole life. The refined, courteous, unselfish man is a perfectly normal development from the child that was all mouth. Arrest the development at any point, and you have a man, unbalanced and immature, a cripple, a menace to society. Put a club into the hand of a strong man who has not learned that other men have rights and that he serves himself better when he is kind than when he is cruel, and there will be trouble. Let a sense of power permeate a social group uncontrolled by well-developed finer qualities, and only a miracle can prevent disaster. In a community of ten thousand men of inferior mental and moral development are found all

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essential social phenomena, and the several stages of political control. There is the control of the weak by the strong; combination to extend or to break this control, the discovery that too gross exploitation defeats its own ends, and that free men are more useful than slaves. As men develop mentally and morally, as they gain in self control, democracy appears spontaneously. It is the natural status of mankind when human nature has learned to function perfectly. A democracy of unintelligent, or vicious, or even of unmoral men, is impossible.

At first blush democracy seems to imply the altruistic instinct developed in opposition to the selfish. Really the issue is between the conflicting interests of the man himself, the lower and the higher. The social instinct is as much of a self-interest as the instinct to satisfy hunger. We leave hunger unsatisfied at times, in order to satisfy other desires. We leave the instinct of acquiring property unsatisfied at times, in order to satisfy æsthetic taste. In the same way we satisfy our social interests. A man is always ready to pay what he values less for what he values more; and this is what he does when he takes his place in democracy. He has found that his own highest interests are bound up with those of others, and so he works for the common good, which does not conflict with his own, but includes it.

The spectacle of a hundred million people ruling themselves in true democratic fashion, is merely the spectacle of each of the hundred million ruling himself according to his own best nature, with true perception of values, and with no conscious clash between the demands of altruism and self-interest. If there is flaw in the larger picture, it is because of flaw in some one or some millions of the smaller pictures.

There is of course such a thing as mob psychology; but if a crowd will act as no man by himself would think of acting, that simply means that in a crowd there are novel influences at work on each individual, inducing him finally to do the strange acts. When thoroughly master of himself, he will retain his poise in the crowd, as when he is alone. The problem of moulding a democracy is the problem of moulding the conduct of a man under the special stresses of the democratic system.

I find no novelty in democracy; it is the old, old story of man and his salvation. Salvation to the uttermost will include democracy. When men are what they should be, the world will be safe for democracy. And when men are what they should be, then will come to pass that other and greater miracle, that democracy will be

a safe thing for the world. The real conflict is a moral conflict, and it behooves the forces of righteousness to be ready against the time when this terrible barrage of war shall have cleared the way a little for the real advance.

Democracy's needs are not that some power outside of it, wise and patient and strong, should protect it, and make the world safe for it; they are the needs of its own imperfectness and local limitations. Democracy needs the help of democracy; strong and ripe here, it must come to the help of its crude weak brother there, as the strong man must help the weak. It needs more democracy, stronger and purer and better. The force that aspires to come to its aid must qualify for that service by being itself democratic to the core, whether the force be a man or a group of men, an institution or a philosophy or a culture, or, and here we pass to another stage of our subject, a religion.

Does democracy need religion? Institutional religion has often opposed the freedom of thought required by democracy, and increase of democracy has often meant the rejection of historical religion. The religion which will be of help to democracy must be a democratic religion. As such it will be personal, whether historical or not. It will be ethical rather than metaphysical. It is the attitude of a man to his life, mental, moral, physical. If it is spiritual, it is so, not in distinction from these phases of his life, but because it marks the spirit of each of them, and of the external world as well. Religion is not agriculture, but it is in a man's attitude toward agriculture, if that touches his life, as it does. It is not commerce, but it is in his attitude toward commerce, if that touches his life, as it does. It is not in education, but it is in his attitude toward education. It is in church-going and forms and ceremonies, but only in so far as these affect his life. He may develop it into a system more or less elaborate, or it may remain inarticulate. Its strength or weakness is revealed, not in prayer or creed, but in the temper of his life and conduct.

A man in a democracy may speculate upon the infinite, and delve to the roots of the universe, but he does not think of such mental processes as his religion. His religion is as broad and as lofty as human nature, but what is beyond that does not have controlling power over his conduct. If he attains to a clear knowledge of God, it is of him as immanent in human nature, righteous and inspiring righteous conduct, rather than as a metaphysical infinite.

Is democratic religion a revealed religion? For myself, while I accept the religion which is called revealed, I prefer to justify my

choice of it by its obvious results rather than by its claimed source. In so far as a man is democratic, he does not inquire whether religious truth is "revealed." He will supply the credentials for himself. If it meets his needs, it is sufficient for him, whether the patriarchs had anything to do with it or not. If it leads him upward, according to his best sense of direction, he is satisfied. As to Jesus Christ, he is far more likely to use his life and words to prove his divinity, than to use his divinity to prove the value of his teachings.

What about the Church? The religion of a man in a democracy does not depend upon his connection with the institution of the Church. There has of course always been a provision in theology for an invisible Church outside of the rolls of the visible Church, but I suppose this has been a special dispensation, a comforting assurance held out to widows. Salvation as offered by the Church has ordinarily been for those who belong to the Church, visible or invisible. The task of the minister has been to bring men into the Church, where the salvation may be theirs. Failing in this, he can do no more, the case is hopeless, men are unsaved, and he turns to feed the sheep who are in the fold, the ark of safety.

This is not the democratic attitude. It is the assertion and development of what appears to the man on the street to be an essential distinction between men, the creation of an aristocracy; and this feeling reacts to alienate still more the people who are not members of the Church. The real democrat thinks that salvation should be brought to all men, to affect them in all their interests; that the Church exists to do this work; that the privileges which it enjoys at the hands of state and society are deserved for this reason rather than because churchmen are nice people, law abiding and easily managed. They think that the Church's function is to save, not to be saved; to work, not to rest. It is well fed, so as to fit it to work, not to fatten it. It is well taught and officered, as a training for work, not for the establishment of an aristocracy of believers.

These particulars I mention because of their connection with later paragraphs, not as a contribution to the literature of the subject.

DEMOCRACY AND THE SEMINARY

We pass then from this brief glance at the nature of democracy, at the nature of its needs, at the nature of the religion that it needs, at the nature of the Church that it needs, to the seminary, which is to furnish the minister of the Church that fosters the religion that democracy needs.

In entering upon the examination of the curricula, I have been puzzled to know how to proceed. My first care was to get all the catalogues so far as the schools would respond to a request for them. I first planned to go through them, noting the different subjects, and assigning them to classes on the basis of what I conceived to be their value for the purposes under discussion; and to give the results in tables of figures and in percentages. It soon appeared that I, at least, could not treat this subject in this way. Headings of courses do not reveal the real lessons that are learned through them. It is not the theme, but the spirit and temper of the study which is important.

Questionnaires would have yielded no clearer results, even if I had been clever enough to frame suitable questions, and even if answers had been returned.

In our problem helpful criticism of the seminaries will not be rendered by displaying statistics and percentages that no one can gainsay, but by examining results achieved and not achieved, by noting the general temper of the work and the workers, the avowed purpose held up in printed statements, the measure of wisdom and zeal evinced in the daily work. Any impossibility of demonstrating their shortcoming by figures does not, in my judgment, imply that they are without fault, or that criticism, and severe criticism, cannot fairly be passed upon them. May I suggest that, as the faults do not consist in particular unwise courses, so the remedy will not consist in the tinkering with a course here and a course there, making slight changes in details. The real question is, as already implied: Do the seminaries adequately prepare ministers to lead the churches in training the people religiously for the rights and duties of democracy? I think they do not. I fear that I should not have the boldness to speak so bluntly, but for the great volume of similar criticism here, and just now on the other side, criticism which I believe, in spite of its many forms, amounts really to what we are considering.

Of course it goes without saying that many of the criticisms to follow do not apply to all schools; and many of the suggestions are already to be found practised in some of them.

ARE THE SEMINARIES DEMOCRATIC?

If the seminaries are to meet the needs of democracy, they must be democratic,—intelligently, intensely, contagiously democratic. Aloofness, indifference, reserve, superiority, condescension—these

things are recognised more quickly than one realizes, and they bring their own reward very promptly. In order to help democracy, the schools need to be sympathetic, warm blooded, enthusiastic, single minded. At one end of the line are the seminaries; at the other end are men that make up the people. The line is not to be broken between these ends. Ministers and Churches are between, but they are not breaks in the line of influence, only re-inforcing stations, where new power is applied. A seminary cannot say in general terms: A community thrives when the Church there is prosperous, the Church needs well educated ministers, therefore we must tell our students all about Sennacherib, and the Churches in Asia Minor, and the Papal court at Avignon, and the homocousios controversy. The argument rather runs like this: Up on a Vermont hill farm is a girl, and out on a prairie in Dakota is a boy, and in a mining town in Pennsylvania is a miner, and these depend for their virtue and honesty and prosperity upon the church in their village. And that church depends upon its minister, and this student is going to that pastorate. That girl and that boy and that immigrant may be lost to themselves and society if we do not equip the student to save them, save them to become workers in the same universal, eternal project of salvation. To this purpose we must bend all our energies; to this we must hold our student unswervingly fixed, to this we must urge the Christian Church; so help us God. Is this story over-drawn? In theory certainly not; and in practice? Well, I wonder what would have happened in July, 1914, and since then, if ever since the Reformation this had been the temper and the motto of all theological schools on both sides of the Atlantic! Is it a counsel of perfection? It is time for a few such.

Let me not be misunderstood at this point and throughout the paper. I do not make these criticisms of the men who constitute the faculties of the seminaries. Lack of time, and not of inclination, prevents me from complimenting them as personally beyond the reach of such strictures. Indeed it is precisely this incompatibility between the personal qualities of many of the professors and the work of the seminaries, which gives the point to my criticism. Men who are inspiring preachers, and can and do arouse their audiences to zeal and good works, who are sought as wise counsellors in missionary and benevolent societies, and in these days in public affairs, men whose absorbing human interests have abundant testimony, seem in their seminary connections to take the present conditions and methods for granted as being all right. They seem to be burdened and deadened by the institution, rather than finding

inspiration and aid therein. The schools react unfavorably even upon their own workers. It is time for the corporate aims and machinery to be readjusted to meet and carry out the personal convictions and enthusiasms and ideals of God's present day heroes.

If there were time I should like to urge, and urge emphatically, upon the corporations of our schools a more active interest in their work. Has the new sense of responsibility which has come upon corporations in a democracy extended yet to our boards? Usually a corporation has chiefly to do with the making of money; in this case the money end is the smaller end of the business, and trustees should be qualified, should qualify themselves, to conduct the real business of the schools.

I believe that as institutions the seminaries lack to a marked degree the qualities of human sympathy, warm blood, enthusiasm, single-mindedness—democratic qualities all—and that the lack can be traced in their organization, their course of study, in the various details and in the sum total of their work.

One misses from the courses as they are described the democratic conception of religion, that it is an attitude of the man to his surroundings, to his whole life. One theological professor writes: "It is kept in mind that religion is a human product, and must stand the test of life's laws," and his courses are laid out accordingly; the principle is not so clear in other parts of the curriculum of that school, and is very exceptional in the schools as a whole. A single illustration must take the place of further comment. There are in this country a number of seminaries for the training of pastors for foreign-speaking Churches, or at least for Churches of continental origin and character. These people are here for the sake of the advantages to be had nowhere else than in a democracy, and one would expect to find in their schools great emphasis upon the genius of American institutions, and the various methods by which pastors can help their people to appropriate to the full the advantages of their new environment. The very opposite is the case. Apparently no connection is seen between the work of the pastor and the aspirations and ideals of the community as indicated by their migration to this country. Their religion is conceived as something wholly apart from their daily individual and community life. These schools do not touch many men, but they are a good illustration of a fault that affects us all in some measure, and handicaps the work of the Church for democracy.

What is the point of view generally taken by the seminaries as to the function of the Church?

THE DEMOCRATIC CHURCH

I do not find clearly present in the seminaries that conception of the Church which they should have if they are to serve the needs of democracy. In the curricula the Church as an institution bulks large; it does not in the minds of men who are thoroughly democratic. It is true, the traditional theory of the Church admits that it can change its form and organization without losing its divine character; but democracy insists that it *must* change its form and organization to meet current needs, or it certainly will lose, indeed has lost, its divine sanction and authority. It demands that the Church be a leader today and tomorrow, as well as yesterday. There seems no evidence from the curricula that men are going out prepared and inspired to lead the Church in a bid for the confidence and universal support of democracy on the basis of a practical program for the future.

The man in a democracy wants to get from the Church the religion which it needs. He wants the minister equipped to understand the community in all its interests, and to put the machinery and the spiritual forces of the Church to work to meet its needs. He wants salvation defined very broadly and inclusively; he would like to feel that his own efforts and aspirations enroll him automatically among the forces that make for righteousness. This does not seem to be the point of view from which the work of the seminaries has been developed.

The seminary curriculum does not seem to make it clear to a man that he is to work chiefly through others, and that his own work is to be the training of them for the work of the Gospel. What he learns he is to pass on, and it ought to be taught him in such shape that he can pass it on.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SEMINARY

You may think it a small matter, but I believe that the very style of the seminary catalogue or year book is symptomatic of this lack of the democratic spirit, of genuine sympathy of men with men. There are exceptions, but the great majority are stiff, stereotyped (or might as well be), statistical, painfully identical from year to year. When you think that in most cases this is the one publication which they place before the public during the year, the one vehicle for a message to any except their small circle of supporters, you must feel with me that only serious defect somewhere will permit

such an opportunity to be wasted. Certainly it should be possible for a faculty to speak more cordially, inspiringly, humanly than they ordinarily do.

At the very outset one is struck with the very meagre and insufficient statement of the purpose of the school. It is disappointing. It neither inspires the reader with a vision of the work for which men are trained, nor explains and justifies the details of the curriculum which is offered. The editors grow warm when they describe the location and modern conveniences of the school; surely there would be no less allurements to students in a paragraph proving by content and spirit that the faculty are just as keen to discover and meet the demands of the present day in arranging the work of the curriculum, as in these minor matters.

The same lack of skill in presenting to the reader the real message of the school runs through the whole pamphlet. Of course, routine information must be given, but this could be subordinated to more vital matters, varied from year to year, the whole making a pamphlet which it would be a pleasure to read.

The lack of democratic spirit appears in the absence of unity of purpose in the seminary. There is, of course, only one point at which all the interests can center which are represented by a numerous faculty, and that point is the fact that the seminary is a training school for ministers. There is a persistent tendency to develop the school as a theological university, to build up a well balanced course of study as a system, and to measure the success of the establishment by its contribution to the sum of human knowledge about theology. This is a praiseworthy aim for a man and for an institution, but the universities are more than ready to include in their own offerings research topics of every kind, and there is no excuse for the seminary to turn aside from its main purpose for such work. It has a very definite and essential duty to perform and that is to show the student how the material gathered and set in order by investigators can be applied to the effective work of the pastorate. This is task enough even for a well equipped training school; at least it is enough to fill up the time of the student for his traditional three years. Certainly the ordinary school should not attempt to follow the example of the few which are able to develop the university idea without injuring their training work.

The ministry is a profession, and as such involves all the features of a business. It must be well understood, well organized, actively promoted, honestly audited; and this none the less because it is a spiritual business. For such a work the seminary is the only institu-

tion for preparation. Here if anywhere the young man must get his training; and upon the thoroughness and fitness of the training depend, not only his personal success, but the fate of the Church as an institution. It is most emphatically the need and demand of democracy that the training idea be kept at the front all the time.

From this point of view the balance of courses seems very imperfect. The standard division of the work is into five departments: Old Testament, New Testament, Church history, theology, and the practical department. The amount of required work is about the same in the five. The fifth, the practical department, alone seems to have developed the training school idea, and its instructors have to be practical for all their colleagues. In the smaller schools one man has to cover a great variety of subjects, with results that leave much to be desired in the way of thoroughness and effective work. For the larger schools relief has come in part by adding instructors to the department, but this does not ordinarily change the amount of work which is required in the department, and is not a satisfactory remedy. The duty, often burdensome, of maintaining the spirit of the institution as a training school, ought to be shared equally by all the departments. All ought to be practical. And if in the case of any course it is felt incompatible with its proper conduct to keep the practical value in mind, so much the worse for the course, and for that particular method of conducting it. It ought to receive honorable discharge from the ranks of a training school for ministers, with cordial recommendations to the university, and its place be given to work which is unmistakably of practical value. And there is a long waiting list of subjects.

Perhaps it seems unwarranted and ungrateful to single out the history-studies for criticism in this respect, they are so well liked, and so much good work has been done in them. However, from the point of view of the needs of democracy as we conceive them, the formal historical courses have too large a portion of the field. I realize that one cannot know the present except as he knows the past; but in the case of a man who has to go to his work only seven years after his fitting school days, and has all the pressure of a busy life upon him, it is only by courtesy that you can speak of him as knowing either the past or the present. Not one in a thousand pastors learns practical wisdom for his little parish better from a course in Church history than he would from occasional conversations with his home missionary superintendent. It is much more important for him to know what drove his predecessor away, than to write a thesis upon some ancient heresy.

The study of Church history itself, as indicated in the courses listed in the catalogues, seems to me to have the emphasis at the wrong point. The title "Historical Study of the Church" would better express the proper aim in the course. Ordinarily the required work scarcely touches the modern, not to say the present day Church; often it is limited to the period down to and including the Reformation. Certainly the Church of today ought to be thoroughly studied, and for obvious practical reasons, the particular denomination in which the student is to take his place as a worker.

It is customary to put the historical work into separate courses. It would better conserve the unity of the seminary work, if the historical treatment which a subject requires were introduced into it by way of illustration, just as it will find its value to the pastor in his future life.

It is surely a long step forward that religious education is gaining a place in the curriculum. The good work has just begun; speed it in every possible way. Is there not, however, a possible infelicity in developing it simply as a separate course of instruction chiefly directed toward the future?

I wonder if we are ready for a campaign of insistence that sound pedagogical principles shall underlie all the work of the school itself? So far as the adjective "religious" is pertinent in the title, it must cover content as well as method. If religious education implies content, it invades the field of other chairs, and has a right to do so. The Old Testament instructor ought to teach his subject with full use of the best pedagogical methods. And it becomes him, as well as the instructor in education, to remember that his pupils are to become teachers of the Old Testament, and to introduce a large element of normal instruction into the work.

There will of course be abundant occasion for special instruction in pedagogy as a method; if such instruction has not been given in the college, it should be provided in the seminary; but it will be the crowning glory of the department of religious education, when the school itself shall have become its best exhibit. God speed the day!

REMOTE FROM REALITY

Absence of a controlling democratic spirit is seen in a decided lack of such studies as give knowledge of men. One feels that men are not the center of interest; but if the seminary is to be of help to democracy, they must be. The minister must know the people, collectively in the wide movements that sweep over the nations,

individually in the life and ideals of single men. As in the pastorate the center and sum of his work is men, so in the training school his supreme and avowed study must be the same; men as the material of study, as the object of effort, as the agents to multiply his own influence. He is a salesman, and he has a good line of goods, but he needs a salesman's training. He is a leader of men, a foreman, a superintendent, and he needs the training of such. He touches men at many points, and most intimately in their spiritual life; no other career needs such thorough knowledge of human nature, such consummate skill in moulding it, such delicate and aseptic instruments; but psychology does not appear among the standard courses in a seminary, and if a student brings his A. B. from college, few questions are ordinarily asked about his college psychology.

A man is made or marred by his surroundings; every forward step in the salvation of men involves the modification of those surroundings, either in the process or as a result; and yet the same indifference is met in regard to sociology.

The student learns his theology as a system, not in terms of his own experience; no one in his parish, child or grown man, comes into his religious knowledge according to any such sequence or method as his textbook follows. His study leaves him helpless when he comes to try to foster the religious life of the growing parishioner.

His college ethics was necessarily elementary, perhaps farcical; on the strength of his maturer thought and his new view point, he ought to supplement the earlier work.

Indeed the relation of the seminary to this whole group of college studies ought to be reconsidered. For example, shall it be Christian ethics in the seminary? But ethics is ethics, if it is sound, whether you call it Christian, or social, or just ethics. The theologian needs to know, not a different kind of ethics from what his people have been taught, but how to connect his own teaching and practical work for the community with what they already know from their college days.

In all the work as laid out and described, one misses the note of genuine and irrepressible sympathy with men. The instruction in itself is fine, and the professors are learned, but where is the insistence that as a result of it all the student is to become the big brother, learned indeed, but also strong and warm hearted, the best example that his people will ever know of the life and love of Jesus Christ?

Absence of the democratic spirit and aim is shown in the lack

of flexibility. The seminaries are too rigid. This is especially true of the older ones. It is natural. All old people are apt to get stiff in the joints. We are usually pleased to call it dignity, and to disguise stiffness in one joint by walking stiff in all joints, and so we fool ourselves and some other people, until along comes a lively young person, all joints, supple as a rope, exceedingly undignified, we assert, and the eyes of the whole community are turned to our young rival. And by and by we discover that there is a dignity, a worthiness, in adaptation as well as in rigidity, and then we hurry for some liniment.

The fact is, our schools, divinity schools as well as others, are loaded down with rules and regulations out of the past. On my typewriter as I write I notice one member that is made up of two short pieces of metal spliced together. Four holes had to be bored, two of them threaded, and two screws used to join the two pieces. The member could have been a single piece of metal, and I suspect would have been, but for that earlier model! And our educational system shows the same faults. Democracy must be rid of the unnecessary formalities.

This part of the paper would naturally go into many details, the nature of which will be obvious to any one who has followed me thus far; because of lack of time I propose to give merely the headings which rightfully should be discussed.

Subjects remain in the curriculum by inertia from the past, rather than because of their present value. * * * There should be more flexibility in the times of entering and leaving the seminary. * * * Entrance requirements should be reconsidered, with more rigid insistence upon the essential elements of preparation, even if the formal demand of a college degree be waived. * * * Time needed for other courses can be secured by better and more intensive methods of work in the class room. * * * It is no longer open to question that church workers other than pastors can advantageously be trained in the seminary plants. * * * The granting of degrees is to my mind more harmful than beneficial; at any rate the candidate for the degree in divinity should not be required to take Hebrew when he would not otherwise select it. * * * There should be greater flexibility in length of residence required. * * * There should also be full provision for extension work for graduates and for untrained pastors, and for all sorts of church workers. * * * Seminaries which cannot offer certain essential technical work might profitably send their students to other centers for short intensive courses.

The seminaries should take earnest counsel together how their work may be made more effective. We have been thinking in the past that perhaps democracy has been lacking in singleness of aim; we are learning otherwise. We have thought of it as perhaps weak in organized effort; it is proving otherwise. We have thought of it as unwilling to submit to authority; we discover that it will concede to men of its own choice more authority than rulers can maintain in any other form of government. When the vision of duty comes, organization springs into being, and leaders are bidden to use it to the full. To my mind such a crisis is on our democratic Church in America. In the name of democracy we call for organization and leadership. Theoretically the seminaries and their faculties are available as rallying points and as leaders for a new departure in religious life and work. Are they practically available? The most disheartening thing about the examination of the year books of the seminaries is the lack of any real co-operation between them, and the evidence of duplication of work which every one must pronounce wasteful; and wastefulness today is intolerable. Who will be big enough to summon the Christian Church to its obvious supreme duty, and bid it set its machinery in order, and build its schools of Theology into a single great engine of spiritual power?