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THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHURCH TO THE DEMOCRACY OF THE FUTURE

WILLIAM ADAMS BROWN, D.D.*

The great war in which we are engaged differs from all the wars that have preceded it in that it is literally a war for the world. Two theories of world organization are contending for the mastery; autocracy and democracy—the soldier's theory and the teacher's theory—the theory that would unify by conquest, working from without, and the theory that would unify by consent, working from within. Between them there can be no compromise; in the end one or the other must conquer.

We have enlisted on the side of democracy. We believe that the bond which is permanently to unite the peoples must be an inner bond. Against the forces which autocracy commands, there is only one power mighty enough to prevail, and that is an ideal, and it is with the ideal that the teacher has to do.

But the difficulty with this democratic method of ours is that it is hard to carry out consistently. Autocracy's way of unifying mankind is a terrible way, but apparently it works. Men may hate, but they fear and in the end obey. But where shall we find the intergrading power in democracy? It is an ideal, we say, which must unite, but if it is to unite all men, then it must be an ideal as broad as man. If we cannot reach such a world ideal our hope of world organization will be vain.

This is the difficulty which confronts us today. When we have appealed to men on the basis of their present ideals we have found these ideals working for division rather than for unity. We see this in the intensified race consciousness which expresses itself in the desire of separate groups to break away from the larger units and to live their own life in independence. Where we have to do with homogeneous groups within the same territory we may hope for a unity which is consistent with freedom; but when men of different races are living side by side it is a different matter. A recent letter from Russia speaks of forty thousand Bohemians who were fighting with the Allies against the Austrians for the independence which has been denied them for centuries. This is typical of what is going on all over the world. Blood is thicker than water; the primary loyalty is that of a common ancestry.

But there are ties stronger even than blood. Spirit, as well as

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flesh, has its genealogy. The outstanding example is the nation. The nation may include men of different races, yet they have institutions, memories and aspirations in common. All the different countries of Europe have poured their streams into the broad sea that is America. The ancestors of the men who fought shoulder to shoulder at Gettysburg in defense of the Union had fought one another in the lands from which they came. And what shall we say of the men who are fighting today in France—men with names that we cannot spell, much less pronounce? In their new home, Pole and Russian, Bohemian and Italian, have found a loyalty that transcends all earlier loyalties. If ever a nation has gone into the war from motives that are international, it is we, and yet when we seek a formula to express an American's fidelity to the cause of world liberty we say, America first.

It is clear then that if we are to realize our ideal of world organization, we must reach some inner unity that shall do for mankind at large what the patriotism of the individual people does for each of them. It must be something real and concrete, rooted in habits and sentiments as well as in reason. For reason, as we have come to see, plays a very modest part among the motives which actually influence man. It must be something familiar and ancient, growing out of the past, which does not need to be explained; something that we can take for granted, as the nation takes for granted the loyalty of its citizens when the call to arms in the nation's defense has been heard. Without this inner bond all forms of outward organization will be futile. As the soul within binds the material particles together and makes them a living organism able to aspire and to dare and to sacrifice and to endure; so also does the spirit of the nation. If we are to have an organized world we must have a world soul.

There are groups in all the different countries which have come to feel this. It is notably true of the Labor group, whether they hold the Socialist creed or the more radical philosophy of the I. W. W. In each case they see that if the new world order for which they are striving is ever to be realized, there must be a community of sentiment as well as of interest among the members who compose it. And they are trying, in spite of all the turmoil and confusion of war, to create such a unity where it does not exist, and to give it an organ of expression where it is already present.

But they are handicapped in this attempt in two ways. They are handicapped, in the first place, because their appeal is a class appeal. For those belonging to the working class, whatever their country, they have a place in the new world order; but the rest are usurpers who must be deposed. If they will submit willingly, well

and good; but if not, they must be made to yield, cost what it may. So we see the Bolsheviki even while they talk of internationalism and brotherhood turning the guns which they have diverted from the war against Germany against their fellow-countrymen who refuse to recognize their authority, and demanding unconditional submission to the will of the proletariat as the first step toward realizing the true social ideal.

But there is another difficulty which the Labor Movement faces when conceived as a comprehensive program for world organization, and that is, its limitation in time. It is not only a class movement; it is a modern movement. Like all revolutions, it is ready to break with the past, if that is the necessary price at which it must buy the better future; but it has no adequate substitute to offer for that which it asks us to surrender. It has no great tradition reaching back across the centuries which expresses its unity with the men of other times and of other faiths; no common symbol which it shares with those who feel themselves the heirs of all the ages.

Here then is the opportunity of the Christian Church. Christianity, like Socialism, is an international movement, but it embraces men of all classes as well as all races. There is no spot, on all this many-faced earth of ours, on which it has not made itself at home; no social stratum from which it has not drawn its adherents. In time as well as in space it is ecumenical, reaching back through all the centuries and drawing its inspiration from each; but at the same time, its face is turned toward the future. Its great word is resurrection; its master is one who is coming again. Its word to the individual is: You must be born again; to society: The Kingdom of God is at hand. Christianity, I repeat, is a forward-looking religion, refusing to make past achievement the measure of future progress, but it carries with it into the future the experience which has enriched it in the past. Thus it has in it the combination of qualities which fit it to be the unifying element for the democracy of the future.

But alas, this ecumenical cnaracter of Christianity has not yet been realized in fact. Like all our ideals for the future, it is promise rather than performance. In the existing churches it meets us in a confusing context obscured by associations that spring from a narrow environment and hampered by lesser loyalties that limit the range of its endeavor. As nationalism may be the foe of democracy, so denominationalism is the foe of religion. We need to disentangle our common inheritance from its sectarian wrappings, to reinterpret it in all the magnificence of its breadth and reach, to make it in fact what it should be in ideal, the bond of unity between men who in all else are separate.

For, consider for a moment what it is which the church holds in trust for humanity: Three indispensable things Christianity has to offer to the future world state; a common tradition, a common symbol, a common leader.

A common tradition. It is the tradition of the Kingdom of God. Long before what we call democracy had become a vital factor in world politics, the ideal was there in the vision of prophet and martyr and saint. The Kingdom of God—what is it but a world organized by consent? Men of different nations and of different races unite in it, but they look up to a common Father and own him as leader who is servant of all. Among its members are men of divers tastes and gifts, or varying antecedents and responsibilities, but each has his appropriate place in the life of the whole, and without the success of each, no one of the rest could realize completely his own destiny. It has been differently conceived in different ages; sometimes pushed off into the future; sometimes believed to be already present; now sharply contrasted with our present world conditions; again regarded as the consummation of the best which they contain. But always it has been an ideal of unity in variety, and about each new phrasing of the ancient hope have clustered the memories of all the generous and aspiring spirits who in the ages gone before have labored and prayed and sacrificed to bring its coming nearer. Here surely is a tradition which we need to conserve for the democracy of the future. Here is a foundation of sentiment and association upon which our building for the future must rest.

And with a common tradition, Christianity offers us also *a common symbol.* It is the symbol of the cross. The cross speaks to us of the moral significance of sacrifice, and that is the message we most need today, for it brings us closest to the heart of things. In sacrifice we face the two ultimates of human life, the mystery of suffering and the miracle of the unconquerable will. We see man's spirit meeting the supreme test and coming off victor, and with the sight there comes to us a new faith in the dignity of mankind, a new assurance of man's immortal destiny. But the tragedy is, as we see it today, that this assurance meets us in a context which is divisive. Sacrifice is set over against sacrifice, as ideal grapples with ideal. Rupert Brooke dies for England, and we feel that he died well; but to his opponents the moral uplift of his death is lost, because of its association with a cause which they disown. If only we could find some symbol which expressed the truth of sacrifice in a form that would unite and not divide! Such a symbol is the cross. Here we see love speaking a language that every one can understand. For there is no man, of whatever race or age, however far he may have

wandered from the path of right, however untrue he may have been to his own ideals, but looking at the cross of Christ, may say: He died there for me.

And with the cross Christianity offers us also the figure of Him who hung upon it; not as one whose work was finished with His death, but as a living spirit who is leading us forward into the future. I have spoken already more than once of Christianity as a forward-looking religion, but this cannot be emphasized too often. All the aspirations of those who are struggling for the better social order, for justice where injustice is now the rule, for education where ignorance has had free sway, for beauty, for sympathy, for leisure, for the right of childhood to its normal inheritance of self-development and happiness; for all the good things for which the Labor Movement stands and after which so many earnest spirits in all ranks of life are reaching out with passionate desire—all these find in the Christian Gospel their promise of fruition. No one has painted the sorrows of the world with a more poignant compassion than the Christian Apostle, yet none looks forward with more confidence to the triumph which lies ahead. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed to usward; for the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God."

So Christianity unifies our hope. As we meet them today, the aspirations of the different struggling groups collide with one another. We need a leader who can resolve the conflict by pointing to some common goal in which the desire of each may find its satisfaction. Such a leader we have in Jesus, the one man who belongs to all hunanity, the friend whom each struggling group claims as its own.

So we find in the Christian Religion *the unifying element* which democracy needs if it is to fulfill its world task. Three things are necessary for a stable society: continuity, reverence, faith. Continuity; it must have its roots in the past and find values there. Reverence: it must have its ideal in the present and find values there. Faith: it must have hope for the future and find values there. For in the unity of its values, past, present, and to come, a people finds its soul.

This then must be the contribution of the church to the democracy of the future: continuity, reverence, faith; a common tradition, a common symbol a common loyalty. From the first, the church has recognized the duty to save souls. Let her be true to that duty now. What she has done for individuals here and there, let her do for society as a whole; let her help the world to find its soul.

Are we told that it is too late, that the church has had her chance and failed, that she has been tried and found wanting?

If so, it is true no less of every other human institution. It is true of the school and of the university; it is true of the bar and of the bench; it is true of our chambers of commerce and our institutions of international law. No one of all the agencies of society has as yet risen to its full opportunity or measured up to the greatness of its task. But we do not let this fact discourage us. We are not concerned here with the past, but with the future. This war itself in its highest and most spiritual aspect is democracy saying to autocracy in the only language that autocracy can understand, that it is no longer content to make the world's past the measure of its future. We see now, if we have never seen before, to what depths of suffering the pursuit of selfishness unbridled and unashamed may lead men and nations. We are persuaded that there is a better way, and we are determined to find it. No matter who is to blame for our unpreparedness in the past, our present question is, who can help us in our instant need? If the church can do this, her future is secure. If she has what democracy needs and is willing to use what she has for the good of mankind, then no past failure can rob her of her present opportunity.

I have spoken of the church's contribution to the democracy of the future. One word as to her responsibility for the present. It is the same of which we have been speaking all along—to help the nation to find its soul. It is a good thing that as churchmen we have been giving ourselves to the practical tasks of ministering to the needs of our soldiers and sailors in the camps and training stations, strengthening the churches in the neighborhoods of the great cantonments, organizing our resources for the work of the Red Cross and other relief agencies, reinforcing the Government in its campaign for economy in food and fuel, taking part in all the thousand and one activities which make up the life of the nation in time of war. All these things we must do, and in doing them we are helping the democracy of today to win the battle against autocracy.