

research for the minister to pursue in the privacy of his study; (2) to provide an assurance of intellectual self-respect and confidence, vitality, and vigor for use in pulpit work.

In the pulpit, only the well-digested, matured results of this work should appear and should be presented in language plain and dignified, as befits a prophet of the divine message.

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## MAKING CHRISTIANITY SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY

### II. DEMOCRACY AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

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#### I. The Meaning of Religious Experience

What is religion? To define it in terms of content is perhaps impossible in view of the great variety of beliefs and practices which we find. But it is not difficult to ascertain what men are trying to do when they are religious. They are reaching out into the invisible realm for such help and companionship as may be found there. So vast is this realm, and so little is known about it, that all sorts of experiments have been made in order to discover how best man may relate himself vitally and fruitfully to the environing mystery which possesses such potencies for good or for evil. To make the powers of the universe propitious, so that such blessings as good crops, success in hunting or fishing, good health, protection from wild beasts, hostile men, plagues, and pestilence, or deliverance from death, may be secured, are some of the aims of religion in relation to primary facts of experience.

Now in the course of the centuries of human experimentation, religions change. Some experiments prove to be successful. Others prove to be disappointing. New ways of living in relation to human beings suggest new ways of approach to the gods. The history of religious ideas and practices bears a vital relation to the changing culture of men. Professor Coe has said that the meaning of a conception of God is the "conviction that what is most important for us is *really* important, that is, respected and provided for by the reality upon which we depend."<sup>1</sup> If this is true, the religion of any group of men or of any generation will consist in trying to obtain from the invisible realm the aid necessary to secure the things most valued in that particular group or generation. We have had a recent illustration of this in Germany where men appealed to the "good old German God," and, in the words of one of the foremost living German philosophers, declared

<sup>1</sup> *Psychology of Religion*, p. 106.

that the world-spirit speaks in the German spirit. Where, on the other hand, national provincialism has been outgrown, it seems like sacrilege to identify the purposes of God with the exclusive interests of one nation.

When we speak of religious experience, then, we must beware of picturing it in any one stereotyped form. This has been a limitation of much Christian thinking on the subject. Theologies have standardized a definite sequence consisting of conviction of sin, faith, conversion, and sanctification, and have often left the impression that all persons, regardless of differences in culture or education or occupation, will have this standard experience. Every pastor, and above all every missionary who comes into contact with foreign culture, can tell how varied are the religious experiences of mankind. Not only the good which one hopes to attain but the way of attaining it is conditioned by the culture which a man shares.

The historical study of the Bible has made us familiar with the fact of development in the religious experience of Israel. In the early period in order to gain a foothold in the land of Canaan military success was a primary necessity. An important aspect of religious experience was the quest for divine reinforcement in battle. Thus we have in the books of Joshua and Judges conceptions of God which seem incredible to us moderns. That God should be described as "a man of war"; that he should command the slaughter of non-combatants; that he should be angered when Saul did not utterly destroy the Amalekites; such ideas confuse and trouble us. But we find the explanation of these religious

ideas in the fact that the stress of war made these things of supreme importance to the Hebrews; therefore their religion made much of them. It was only with the development of broader and higher interests that there came the better conception of God.

In our discussion of religious experience, then, let us remember that a vital religion must shape itself in relation to the interests of living men. If it does not do this, religious emotion becomes side-tracked, making frantic motions, while the main trains of culture pass by. It is true that religious groups may by intensive discipline keep attention so focused on subsidiary factors as to keep alive a provincial kind of faith; but such a faith is constantly embarrassed by its inability to enter positively and constructively into the total life of men.

## II. Religion in Terms of Autocracy

In judging modern movements in Christianity, we must constantly bear in mind the fact that the standard Christian doctrines and practices were organized before there was any democracy in the world. While it should never be forgotten that Jesus proclaimed and made real an intimate relationship of men with God which in our democratic age is finding an eager welcome, it is also true that when Christian people in ancient and mediaeval times attempted to put into thought and practice their religious ideals, they inevitably expressed in their theology and in their personal devotion the relationships which shaped their life in the civilization which they knew.

In a previous article we showed how the ideals of life were organized in terms

of class distinctions, how it was taken for granted that government should be from above downward. This point of view was naturally retained in religious thinking. Christianity was interpreted as a system of truth and practices divinely provided for men and administered on their behalf by church officials. The religious experience of the individual was set forth as a work of divine grace. And grace meant the free, unconditioned benevolence of God. Exactly as in the ethical ideals of the time the free honor of a nobleman was felt to be finer than a mere commercial obligation, so the attitude of God to man was more spiritually significant if salvation were considered an act of grace on God's part rather than a mere reward for man's good works.

The conception of Christianity in terms of government from above involves certain conditions of religious experience which should be especially noted.

1. *The religious definition of man's status.*—The natural language of religion was that of extreme humility, not to say self-depreciation. Salvation could be granted only to those who were under conviction of sin. And this confession of sin was not simply the acknowledgment of the wrong-doing which the individual had committed; it was rather a solemn declaration of the inherent disability of human nature. Man had no natural rights which he could claim. He was totally dependent on God's mercy. It is true that the cause of man's present disability was declared to be the sin of Adam, and the matter was so put as to suggest a state of rebellion against God which necessarily prevented any positive relationship. But in the definitions of

the consequences of the fall, it is stated that human reason was corrupted so that man is mentally as well as morally incapable of righteous self-government. Says the Formula of Concord, "We believe, teach, and confess that original sin is no trivial corruption, but is so profound a corruption of human nature as to leave nothing sound, nothing uncorrupt in the body or soul of man, or in his bodily or mental powers." Thus man was inherently defective, a dependent who needed guidance and help from above.

The consequence of this definition of man's status was to place him helplessly under authority. He was not expected to know the way of salvation by any natural reasoning. He must learn from revelation what that plan is. To raise objections, or to criticize adversely the plan, was as heinous as *lèse majesté* in the political realm. Doubters and heretics were given short shrift. The "good" Christian, like the "good" Catholic today, would unquestioningly and loyally accept the teaching prescribed for him and would submit gladly to the plan of salvation divinely proposed. There was no hope for the salvation of anyone who did not confirm to the program revealed from above and administered by the clergy who received their powers and rights from above.

2. *The conception of God in terms of autocracy.*—A sentence from the Westminster Confession of Faith will show how the attitude of God was interpreted in accord with the ideals of unsullied honor belonging to class distinctions. We read:

The distance between God and the creature is so great that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him

as their Creator, yet they never could have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward but by some *voluntary condescension on God's part*, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant. [Italics mine.]

We have here expressed in religious language precisely that conception of honor which made it an unworthy thing for a king to permit himself to admit any obligation to inferiors. Whatever he did for his people must be an act of free grace. To enter into a covenant with men was a "voluntary condescension on God's part."

The Calvinistic doctrine of election is to be understood in the light of this ideal of royal perfection. The ideal government would be one in which an absolutely perfect ruler made laws for his people. Such laws would be infinitely better than the stumbling efforts of ignorant and weak people to govern themselves. For God to manage the destinies of men would be far better than to leave the matter to their fallible decisions. Thus the decrees of God are portrayed as "for the manifestation of his glory." Those of mankind who are predestined to be saved have been freely chosen by God "out of his mere free grace and love without any foresight of faith or good works or perseverance in either of them, *or any other thing in the creature, as conditions or causes moving him thereto.*" (Italics mine.) God is thus the absolute, unlimited sovereign, doing what he will with his subjects. That he is a gracious God, giving freely the wonderful gift of salvation to some of mankind is a subject for endless praise. But since salvation is a free gift upon which no man has any just claim, those

who do not receive it have no cause for complaint. It is a *privilege* granted by a superior, not a universal right.

What would be the inner content of religious experience on the basis of this theology? Would it be such as to reinforce a democratic ideal? Or would it induce a sentiment which would be a bulwark of autocracy?

It is difficult to answer this question categorically; for it should never be forgotten that a genuine Christian experience has always made men conscious of an eager desire to be of service in society, and has, indeed, brought a consciousness of divine fellowship in one's tasks which goes far to contradict certain other implications of that experience. But there is no doubt that multitudes of men less spiritually ambitious have been encouraged by a theology of autocratic arrangements to become docile dependents.

In the first place the doctrine of inherent inability on man's part is much like the doctrine of class distinctions in society. If a person confesses himself an inferior, he is effectually prevented from aspiring to any share in the life of higher class people. To affirm one's worthlessness in the sight of God might easily reinforce the acceptance of an inferior status in the social order, and thus make men less ready to criticize the existing order. As an ardent advocate of social ideals in modern Christianity has said:

The poor crippled child who has been maimed by a falling rock, and the white-faced match-box maker who works eighteen hours out of the twenty-four to keep body and soul together have surely some sort of a claim upon God apart from being miser-

able sinners who must account themselves fortunate to be forgiven for Christ's sake.<sup>1</sup>

If in a democratic age there is less emphasis than there formerly was on the doctrine of original sin, may it not be due to the instinctive feeling that a religious experience which begins by a confession of complete dependence is likely to play into the hands of those who wish to keep men in social and political dependence?

A second important aspect of religious experience in terms of this theology was the portrayal of God's work in saving men as an act of benevolent condescension on his part. We have already referred to the language of the Westminster Confession on this point. In a recent book setting forth the work of Christ the same point of view is picturesquely expressed as follows:

God in Christ, we believe, came down to the plane of suffering men that he might lift them up. Descending into poverty, shame, and weakness, the Lord was stripped of all credit, despoiled of every right, humbled to the very depths of social and historical ignominy, that in this self-abasement of God there might be found the redemption of man. . . . He traveled far and stooped low that he might thus touch and raise the needy.<sup>2</sup>

The import of these terms is to suggest that the gulf between God and man is so great that there is something humiliating in the idea of God's "stooping" to touch us. That God is thus willing to condescend would be a powerful motive for gratitude if men were thinking in terms of class distinctions, if the gracious visit of a lord or lady with gifts for the poor would be remembered with

love and accepted as a sufficient evidence of virtue. But an age which is raising the cry, "Not charity but justice" is likely to resent a portrayal of salvation which suggests the charitable visits of my Lady Bountiful. Does such a picture do justice to the relations between God and his children?

In the third place a religious experience expressed in this theology is one of passive acceptance of what is provided from above. Any criticism of the "plan of salvation" is out of the question. The favor of God is secured by loyalty and gratefully conforming to the conditions prescribed. Is there any connection between this religious experience and a reluctance to engage in criticism of existing social arrangements? Democracy, as we have seen, is essentially a criticism of existing institutions, and an assumption of the right to change them for the better. Does a religious experience which emphasizes passive loyalty furnish the inspiration which democracy needs?

It should, of course, be recognized that these aristocratic interpretations of Christian experience represent only part of the truth. The zeal of some Christian people for social reforms is an unquestioned fact of history. But it is also a fact that all such reforms have met with opposition from other Christians who were bound more by the autocratic aspects of doctrine than by the human call of need. In so far as the foregoing elements are given primacy they tend to induce a religious experience which is unprepared to appreciate the motives and the ideals of democracy.

<sup>1</sup> R. J. Campbell, *The New Theology*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> H. R. Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Christ*, pp. 466, 477.

### III. The Democratizing of Religious Experience

Mediaeval Catholicism was the consistent organization of religion in terms of autocracy. According to Catholic theory, God had provided in completeness the way of salvation, and had endowed the clergy with authority to administer it. Man's religious life must begin, continue, and end in an attitude of loyal submission to regulations prescribed from above.

1. *The Lutheran Reformation.*—The first great step in the democratizing of religious experience was taken in Luther's reformation. It was not a revolt against the theology of divine sovereignty. Luther strenuously upheld the doctrine of original sin, and portrayed man as completely worthless in and of himself. Salvation must be by the grace of God alone. The sinner must not trust in his own works, but must throw himself on the mercy of God and hope for unmerited favor. This continuance of the mediaeval conception of God made for the retention of much that was undemocratic in Lutheranism. One aspect of this I shall hope to make clear when we discuss the relation of Christianity to political democracy. We must not think of Luther as a pioneer in democratic thinking.

Nevertheless, in one realm he rendered heroic service to the growing cause of humanity. He uncovered and defied the autocratic church of his day. He declared that it was intolerable for religious men to be held in subjection to a hierarchy. The Christian must be a free man among his religious equals.

<sup>1</sup> Address to the German nobility.

Take the following utterance of this great religious leader and see how he strikes straight at the class system of Catholic religion:

It has been devised that the pope, bishops, priests, and monks are called the *spiritual estate*; princes, lords, artificers, and peasants are the *temporal estate*.

Luther recognizes clearly that the essence of Catholicism consists in maintaining a class system, in which those of the so-called temporal estate are completely dependent on the spiritual estate for their religious welfare. This conception he challenges in uncompromising fashion:

This is an artful lie and hypocritical device, but let no one be afraid of it, and that for this reason: That all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them save of office alone. . . . As for the unction by a pope or bishop, tonsure, ordination, consecration, and clothes differing from those of laymen . . . all this may make a hypocrite or an anointed puppet, but never a Christian or a spiritual man. Thus we are all consecrated priests by baptism.

For whatever issues from baptism may boast that it has been consecrated priest, bishop, and pope, although it does not be- seem every one to exercise these offices. For since we are all priests alike, no man may put himself forward or take upon himself without our consent and election to do that which we all alike have the power to do. For, if a thing is common to all, no man may take it to himself without the wish and command of the community. . . . Therefore a priest should be nothing in Christendom but a functionary; as long as he holds his office he has precedence of others; if he is deprived of it, he is a peasant or a citizen like the rest.<sup>2</sup>

What a revolutionary doctrine is here proposed! Instead of government from above by a mysterious divine right granted exclusively to a priest, we have the doctrine that the priest may enjoy his authority only with the consent of the governed. The layman may claim equal right with the priest. There are no class distinctions in Christendom. All alike are free and equal in the church. There are phrases in this address of Luther's to the German nobility which might be paraphrased so as to suit the political struggle for democracy in later times in America and in France. The privileges of the upper class are claimed for the members of the lower class, and an equality of opportunity is proclaimed for all alike.

We see, then, that just as those that we call spiritual or priests or bishops or popes, do not differ from other Christians in any other or higher degree but in that they are to be concerned with the word of God and the sacraments—that being their work and office—in the same way the temporal authorities hold the sword and the rod in their hands to punish the wicked and protect the good. A cobbler, a smith, a peasant, every man has the office and function of his calling, and yet all alike are consecrated priests and bishops, and every man should by his office and function be useful and beneficial to the rest, so that the various kinds of work may all be united for the furtherance of body and soul, just as the members of the body all serve one another.<sup>1</sup>

The far-reaching effects of this democratization of religious experience are evident. It makes possible first-hand religion for every man. Instead of being dependent on the priest, a man may come directly to God and enjoy the

blessings of salvation as a vital personal experience. Justification by faith means that every person has an immediate access to the source of spiritual power and joy by the simple exercise of personal faith. The word of God was not intrusted as a monopoly to the church. It is as free as the air we breathe. The treasures of the religious life are thus taken away from autocratic guardians and distributed freely among laymen. And the result of this is the ennobling of common life in extraordinary fashion. Whatever is inspired by this simple faith is religiously consecrated. The peasant or the servant may, if his life is renewed by faith in God's word, become just as important in God's sight as a bishop or pope. We have a wonderful revival of that insight of Jesus who exalted the giving of a cup of cold water in the right spirit above all formal aspects of religion.

The Lutheran Reformation thus broke completely with the autocratic power of the priesthood over laymen, and established a genuinely democratic ideal of the equal access of all Christians alike to the grace of God. But except for this emancipation of believers from the control of the Catholic church, Luther retained in the main the ideals which had been embodied in the mediaeval theology. He insisted vehemently over against Erasmus, for example, on the innate sinfulness of man. For any human being to approach God claiming any rights seemed to Luther to be monstrous. Religious experience, if it be genuine, must take the form of a humble dependence on the grace of God. Luther's polemic against good works is the reflection of the aristocratic feeling

<sup>1</sup> Address to the German nobility.

that whatever is done by a superior for an inferior must be a free grant of personal privilege, not a bargain. To conceive of God as a benefactor, doing out of sheer mercy something which he is under no legal compulsion to do, seemed to be finer than to assume a philosophy which makes God responsible to laws, and obligated to render services.

The consequence of this retention of the ideals of aristocracy is reflected in the sharp line which was drawn by the early reformers between Christians and non-Christians. The saints, who have received God's special favor, occupy a higher rank in the divine estimation than do those to whom he has not vouchsafed his grace. A Christian can assume a patronizing attitude to non-Christians on the subject of religion. In a Christian society believers as a matter of course are to enjoy privileges not granted to others. For a long time in Protestantism, the full privileges of citizenship were withheld from those who did not present the proper religious credentials. For Christians who held the divinely appointed religious faith to dictate to anyone holding "wrong" doctrines was regarded as entirely proper. By the mere fact that a Christian had been transformed by divine grace so as to be a member of the society of God, such a redeemed soul might with his redemption acquire a share in the superiority of God over his creatures.

2. *The rationalist movement.*—The next step in the democratization of religious experience therefore took place outside the circle of orthodoxy. It found radical expression in the movement which is popularly known as rationalism; but it also made itself felt

in the Christian church in Arminianism, and came to practical expression in some phases of the Methodist movement.

Religiously, rationalism may be characterized as the attempt of men to claim the full rights of religion without submitting to the autocratic dictation of creed or scripture or church. Orthodoxy had said that any man who desired to enjoy the blessings of religion must accept from above the conditions under which he could be saved. His beliefs must be determined for him by the Bible; or rather, by that interpretation of the Bible which was authoritatively declared to be correct. He must acknowledge his natural complete unworthiness and make no claims of his own. He must gratefully accept the provision made in the work of Christ for his salvation whether this did or did not accord with his own notions of what is proper. Anyone who refused thus to allow the content of his religious experience to be dictated to him from above was excluded from Christian fellowship.

A fundamental feature of rationalism is its rejection of the doctrine of original sin. The practical result of this doctrine was, as we have seen, to compel everyone who had not gone through a standardized experience of regeneration to start his quest for God as an acknowledged member of an inferior class. It is an interesting historical fact that rationalism had its greatest vogue in England during the century of the struggle for political democracy. Some of the men who were pioneers in establishing the doctrine that men, as men, have inalienable political rights, and that these rights do not depend on the good pleasure of a king, proceeded to apply the same



principles to the relation between men and their heavenly king. They declared that the light of natural reason was sufficient to guide men to God. No one need go to a priest or to a church or even to the Bible in order to be saved. The natural capacities of man were sufficient to furnish a knowledge of God and of the kind of worship which God desires. God does not make arbitrary demands on men. He has no right to do so. The content of religion should be simply and solely those things which men know to be right. As the deists put it, the true worship of God consists in morality. And morality is something which every man is capable of finding out by his innate powers.

The democratic impulse lying behind the rationalistic movement can be readily seen if we compare this position with that of Luther. Luther had released men from bondage to the autocratic church; but he had not suggested any release from the authority of the Bible. The Protestant churches insisted as strenuously upon submission to the Bible as Catholicism insisted upon subjection to the pope. In England, those who did not thus submit to the interpretation of the Bible held by the religious group in political control were made to suffer serious disabilities, exactly as in Luther's time any dissenter from the Catholic church was compelled to suffer disabilities. The rationalists in England were the champions of religious toleration; and they based their arguments on the plea that *natural reason* which all men have alike is sufficient to give to any man the full privileges of religion. It is a further democratization of Luther's doctrine of the universal priesthood of

*baptized men*. It asserts a universal religious competency of *all reasonable men* whether they have been baptized or not.

Rationalism, however, had one serious religious defect. It retained the monarchical conception of God; but it stripped him of most of the power which makes a monarch imposing. While God originally created the world and man, and implanted in him the principles of right reason, so far as men now are concerned there is little or nothing which God needs to do for them. They are sufficiently equipped with their original rational powers, and need no regeneration. They need expect no miracles to evidence the power of God. They should not look to the Bible for anything different from that which they may obtain from their own reason. They cannot trust in any special work of Christ for them; for this would argue favoritism in God. What then is left of religion? The practical activities by which Christians had experienced a living personal relationship to God are all omitted. While democratizing human nature the rationalists neglected to democratize the conception of God. The inevitable consequence was that there was no sufficient inner vitality in their attempt at democratic religion. God suffered much the same fate in rationalism that the king has suffered in the democratization of England. The real business of governing England has fallen to citizens. The king is almost a supernumerary. If the dynasty should suddenly cease to exist it would cause no real revolution in English political life.

3. *The evangelical revival*.—The rationalistic movement effectually criticised the autocratic features of the conventional

Christianity of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It set men entirely free from the dictation of the church. But it left God aloof from men, a spectator and a rewarder of virtue, but not an active participant in the religious life of man. While rationalism might furnish uplifting themes of contemplation for men with leisure and power to think, it had no message for those who were overwhelmed by toil and suffering. It remained an essentially upper-class movement.

The evangelical revival was a movement dominated by a genuinely democratic interest in the "submerged" portions of populations who were virtually without any original religious rights. These people counted for little in the established churches; and they had neither the leisure nor the philosophical ability to find satisfaction in rationalism. This revival continued to make use of the theology which rationalism criticized. In this respect it perpetuated ideas which belonged to the mediaeval rather than to the modern world. But it so used these doctrines as to create a genuinely democratic religious experience. It revived and carried farther the Lutheran emphasis on man's individual capacity for a full religious experience without the mediation of any autocratic agency.

As is well known, the Wesleyan movement was stimulated by John Wesley's new religious experience induced by association with the Moravian Brethren. The very title of this group is suggestive of a religion of religious fraternities as contrasted with the formal religion of established churches. Membership in this religious group meant personal responsibility of a serious and significant

kind. To be saved meant not simply to receive the grace of God passively. It meant above all an active participation in the life of God and its expression in a strict control of ideals and behavior. But above and beyond this it meant a zeal for evangelical and missionary work. The Moravians share with the Pietists (whose ideals were akin) the credit of being the pioneers in missionary endeavor and in the creation of social institutions for the wider practice of Christian ideals.

The evangelical revival, as did Lutheranism, pictured man hopelessly ruined by original depravity. But instead of laying emphasis on the ecclesiastical means of grace, evangelicalism exalted the importance of an inner personal experience of conversion. By trusting the gospel message the poorest and weakest sinner might be transformed into a strong, self-reliant child of God. In this experience there came into life precisely that which rationalism lacked—a real activity of God in the individual soul. The poorest sinner, when converted, was as precious and as important in God's sight as the highest of earth's magnates. All class distinctions within the Christian community were abolished.

The form of organization adopted by the Wesleyan revival is significant. "Societies" rather than "churches" were the centers of religious life. The purpose of a society is declared to be mutual religious edification and help. It is "a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness; united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out

their salvation." This is genuine religious democracy. No priest stands above the layman to direct him. No sacraments or rites are interposed between the soul and God. In free conference where personal religious experience is the sole prerequisite, the Christian life is directed and stimulated.

The Methodist movement thus set on foot and organized a democratic religion without that adverse criticism of autocratic theology which rationalism had undertaken. It could do this partly because the humbler people whom it reached were untroubled by theological doubts; but more especially because it created a practical democratic organization in which the Christian experience could find wholesome expression. The encouragement of laymen to undertake specifically religious tasks, the organization of meetings in which workingmen and uneducated persons might testify to the power of the grace of God, the pragmatic testing which came from the evangelistic desire to give to every man, no matter how apparently insignificant, an uplifting experience of membership in the brotherhood of the saved were all effective and widely successful means of developing a democratic religious experience. Evangelicalism became during the nineteenth century the most virile religious force in the world, and it has already virtually taken complete possession of the ecclesiastical bodies which at first drew back in aristocratic distrust. It is today eagerly and vigorously extending missionary efforts, feeling out after an effective way of dealing with social problems, and more and more is giving to laymen a large share of responsibility in the activities of Christian endeavor.

4. *The development of modern mysticism.*—Alongside of the growth of evangelical Christianity there has been a marked development in recent times of a characteristic kind of mysticism due to a changed conception of God. When God was conceived in terms of absolute sovereignty, so that his primary concern was to declare his own glory, fear and reverence rather than a sense of intimacy would be natural. There was, indeed, a sense of security on the part of those whom God had elected to save, and a confidence and love would grow out of the sense of gratitude at thus being the recipient of God's grace. But the content of such love would be dignified rather than intimate. Within the past century, however, there has come to be a way of conceiving the relation of God to the world which makes possible a simple and direct religious experience of real intimacy. The point of view here referred to is often called the idea of the immanence of God. But the word "immanence" is too philosophical to express the religious aspect of this modern attitude. Tennyson has voiced it in the well-known lines:

Speak to Him thou for He hears, and Spirit  
with Spirit can meet—  
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer  
than hands and feet.

The French theologian Sabatier has expressed it in his statement that man is "incurably religious," which means that man has the natural right and the natural power to realize the presence of God. Schleiermacher voiced it at the beginning of the nineteenth century in his famous *Discourses on Religion*:

The reflection of the pious man is only the immediate consciousness of the general

existence of all that is finite in the infinite and through the infinite, of all that is temporal in the eternal and through the eternal. To seek and find this in all that lives and moves, in all becoming and all change, in all doing and suffering, and even in immediate feeling to have and to know life itself only as this existence—this is religion.<sup>1</sup>

The same experience of immediate fellowship with God is the constant theme of Emerson. It expresses itself, often in crude ways but with unquestioned popularity, in the New Thought Movement of our times. It has led to a sympathetic appreciation of the positive religious content of non-Christian religions, and to a feeling that God is more universally accessible than man has hitherto dared to believe.

The significant thing about this religious attitude is its complete abandonment of the theological structure which interpreted religion in terms of an autocracy. If God be "closer than breathing," there is no need of mediators. Every soul has direct access to him. In consequence there has developed a new kind of valuation of rites and ceremonies. The Bible is being studied, not as a book of directions prescribed from above, but as the record of men's religious experience. It testifies to the possibility of intimate communion with God rather than interposes itself between man and God. The sacraments, which in former days were indispensable means of grace, so that absence from the sacrament was a cause for church discipline, are more and more coming to be viewed as rituals which may be employed to promote a sense of communion with God, but which may also be of subordinate significance in

the Christian life of one who, for temperamental or other reasons, does not gain through them an enhanced experience of the divine presence. It is commonly acknowledged today that there is a large amount of genuine Christian experience which does not find adequate expression in the conventional ecclesiastical channels. To a large extent this modern "religion of the inarticulate" is without definite organization. Perhaps it is so mystical that it can never be definitely organized, but it is a powerful factor in modern life. It is a spontaneous outbreak of genuinely democratic religious aspirations. And it is destined to influence profoundly the Christianity of the next generation.

To a remarkable extent religious experience today has been democratized in Protestantism. So far has this movement gone that today some men are raising a query which would have seemed incredible in the Middle Ages. Radical democrats are actually asking whether the Christian church as an authoritative institution will continue to be needed in a thoroughly democratic society. For formally, the creeds, the organization, and the inherited ideals of the church come down from an aristocratic age. Thoughtful men have little fear that religion will disappear. It is simply a question as to the form which religion will take. Our modern Christianity is feeling the power of the democratic movement. Partly within the churches and partly without it there is coming to expression the conviction that our human endeavors may have a divine reinforce-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by McGiffert, *The Rise of Modern Religious Ideas*, p. 65.

ment not arbitrarily limited to any prescribed channels. Since the welfare of democracy is something to be worked out by men themselves, the God of a democratic religion must be a co-worker, an intimate companion, rather than a transcendent Absolute. The Great War, with its shattering of conventional complacency, has made men more than ever conscious of the need of such fellowship

with an immanent divine power. Are not the main traits of a democratic religious experience already becoming evident? Is not the time ripe for a confident, positive reconstruction of Christianity in accord with democratic demands?

Our next study will be concerned with the relation between democratic ideals and church organization.

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## THE NATURE OF SPIRIT AND ITS BEARING UPON INSPIRATION

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I purpose in this paper to define inspiration from the standpoint of spirit conceived as energy, or force in operation. The standardized conceptions of the nature of spirit are so involved with spirituality in the abstract that it is difficult to determine with any degree of exactness what the essential reality embodied in the concept is. It is understood in an obscure way that spirit is an element in the soul, its highest constituent; but its nature is generally apprehended so elusively as to prohibit successful definition. Because of this vagueness we have been content to substitute the term soul for that of spirit in common use, and thus surrender the distinctive reality of spirit to the mercy of logical abstractions or to dissipate its being into mere qualities of spirituality. Let one ask himself what he means by spirituality and it will be recognized at

once how susceptible the term spirituality is to indefinite connotation.

The conception of soul also has suffered much throughout the history of religious thought, but less than that of spirit; for fortunately we are always driven, sooner or later, to the simple Hebrew notion of soul as the living organism (cf. Gen. 2:7). Soul therefore is inclusive of spirit, or rather it is matter and spirit in unity. Consequently the point of departure for an investigation of the nature of spirit itself should be the correct understanding of the nature of soul.

But here the notion of what spirit is halts. To attempt to discern more exactly what spirit is we should go back beyond the idea of soul as a living organism and trace the initial meaning of the term spirit apart from the composite structure of soul. The word *ruah*