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A Study Of The Relations Of The Philosophy Of
Pragmatism And Religious Activism

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INTRODUCTION

Christianity today embodies an ever increasing programme of activism. The growth of this element in the Christian religion during the past sixty years has been contemporaneous with a similar development in the field of philosophy.

Towards the end of the last century, the philosophy of pragmatism became an important and a most popular element within the main body of philosophy. Pragmatism, with its distinctive interest in the practical life of man, had a swift and widespread appeal, and as a result became established in certain schools as the most important element within philosophy.

It is the subject of this thesis to investigate both the religious activism of Christianity and the activism of the popular movement of pragmatic philosophy, and to discover over the relationship between these two movements.

It is of importance that man should understand the origins of the ideas which are affecting and stimulating his thoughts and actions. Such an understanding raises man above the present and gives him an insight into the meaning of his life within the context of history.

Today as never before organized movements, institutions and governments are influencing man's life so that he can no longer live in isolation. If he is to make the right choices when decisions are forced upon him, he must rise above a hand to mouth existence. Man must see himself as

as a social being, influenced by innumerable pressures which come from various sources and which determine the complex civilization of which he is a part. It will be of value therefore, to make an investigation of two important trends within the many pressures of our society, and to see their relation and their interaction.

Due to the fact that man, to a great extent, unconsciously participates in both religious activism and pragmatic philosophy it will be necessary to establish their position. It will be necessary to sort out their influences from the social pressures of the total environment before we can study their relations. The procedure in this thesis is as follows: first, evidences of religious activism in process shall be cited; second, the various forms of religious activism in theory shall be investigated; third, a consideration of how far religious activism is due to pressing events and pragmatic tempo shall be made; fourth, the pragmatic philosophy as put forward by William James and John Dewey shall be examined with special emphasis on their contribution to religion; finally, we shall consider the philosophy of pragmatism as a ground for the religious activism as evidenced in the first two chapters.

CHAPTER I

Religious activism is essentially a spirit of reform for the present society of man. It is that spirit within religion which dares to attempt to bridge the gap between the ideal of the totalitarian rule of the kingdom of God and the reality of the present rule of the kingdom of man. It is that spirit, inspired by the teachings of Christ, which turns to the world of reality with the intention of bringing about revolutionary changes within it. There are definite interpretations of the teachings of Christ which are necessary for the basis of religious activism, but these theological questions will be dealt with later. Here, the essential spirit of reform in religious activism, should be stressed.

The manifestations of religious activism are many and shall be dealt with under two main divisions, religious activism in process, and religious activism in theory. The evidences of activism in process will be dealt with in this chapter. They will be divided into two; major examples will be cited first, so classified because their influences cut across national boundaries and touch upon issues of world importance, then minor examples will be cited, so classified because they are concrete illustrations of the major evidences on a smaller scale.

The first and perhaps the most profound evidence that a spirit of reform exists within the Christian community is the attitude of self criticism of the church and of the ministry. It has always been a choice answer of the backsliding Christian to excuse his loose connection with the church by pointing to the hypocrisy within the community of the church. Such a criticism is not valid. The vital criticism of the church comes from the man who, while realizing and condemning the hypocrisy and failings of the church, at the same time accepts a measure of responsibility and does his utmost to bring about reform. His criticism is of value since it results in a turning towards rather than a turning away from the church. His redirection, based upon his analysis, forces him to become aggressive and prevents him from adopting a self-righteous, isolationist position. This constructive and positive self-criticism of the church and ministry is strikingly illustrated in one of a series of essays prepared for the study of delegates to the Interseminary Conference held in 1947. In this particular essay by James Nichols, a Christian minister, a scathing criticism of the ministry is made.

The best American ministers, for all the talk about prophetic preaching, are overwhelmingly priests, nursing the need of their individual parishioners with faithful care, but trimming their public declarations and the action of their congregations rather carefully to what the traffic

will bear. There are various ways of trimming. One of the most popular is scapegoating with the liquor trade. Commercialized alcohol involves serious issues, but there are deeper reasons why church groups so frequently make rum the primal curse of modern civilization and pursue it as if here they could staple down the spiked tail of Lucifer himself. This is the common device of the journeyman preacher. The aristocrats of the trade have subtler techniques. There is, for instance, the tacit conspiracy by which the more discerning clergy and their congregations ease their consciences, the preachers by telling a good bit of truth in the pulpit, and the congregation by submitting to listen, both thereby preparing to return more comfortably to their fraternizing with evil. Radical decisions can thus be rendered unnecessary by radical talk.

.....
 The clergy as a whole specialize in devices for keeping up the appearance of successful congregational life without the reality. 1.

This is a criticism not only derogatory to the church and the ministry of the church, but one which finds its way into the very heart and soul of the religious life of the type of community to which it refers. Many are the organized bodies which thrive on just such opiates as the tirade on the liquor traffic or the sin of the smoker. The emotional appeal of such tirades is coupled with self-righteousness^{BOTH OF} which prevent the individuals of the organization from appreciating the necessity for delving into the causes of the liquor traffic and which also serve to blind them from the necessity of meditating on their own sins.

The criticism, by a minister, which points to this

1. The Challenge of Our Culture, The Interseminary Series Vol. I Harper & Brothers. Publishers New York and London.

type of deception, designed to deceive both individual men and women within and without the church, is an evidence that the spirit of reform found in the Christian Community is really a genuine movement. It is a force working through and fused with a desire to clear away the rubble of Christian thinking in order to find once again the dynamic of the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

As this process of self-criticism has proceeded, the reawakening in the minds of the reform leaders has caused them to turn an equally critical eye upon their own worldly and secular community which is the wider home of the church. The depth and seriousness of the criticism of society is illustrated in the attitude of the reformed body of the church to the capitalistic economic system. There are many shades of opinion concerning the capitalistic economic system, but it would appear that the majority of the leading theological thinkers of the day are in agreement in their denunciation of the system as being inherently evil.

The consensus of Christian political and economic discussion tends unmistakably to a declaration of war on capitalism and on the sovereign national state, neither of which organizations lacks means or willingness to defend itself. 2.

This denunciation of capitalism by a vital force of the

2. Ibid

Christian Community is real proof that Christianity now embodies a programme of action. Of course the above quotation is the end result of a good deal of Christian thinking on the economic problem and the supporting arguments for the quotation will be cited in the theoretical evidences of religious activism.

A further major evidence of religious activism in process is a serious attempt ~~to~~ on the part of the church to grapple with problems arising out of communism. Communism's claim upon the individual is a totalitarian claim and as such it is in direct conflict with Christianity which also seeks the allegiance of absolute loyalty.

A final major evidence of religious activism in process is that of the inculcation of the spirit of reform within the missionary programme of the church. No longer is it the one and only aim of the mission~~ary~~ boards of the church to send men and women to foreign fields in order to save the souls of ignorant heathen from suffering eternal damnation. Now missionar~~ies~~ are so equipped that they are capable of giving to their people the potentials for living a more abundant life upon this earth. This innovation is a reflection of the spirit of reform in the church as a whole. Soon after a new set of ideas ^{is} ~~are~~ adopted by the established

church the extension programme on the foreign ^{Field} is affected.

Such has been the case with religious activism.

"Today," as Gerald Birney Smith says, "the missionary enterprise is being shifted from a program of rescuing a few souls from eternal disaster to the ideal of a long campaign of education and social reconstruction in the non-Christian nations."

.....
 In these new developments it is implied that the mission of the church is broader than has previously been recognized. It takes in the whole man. The older negative and ascetic attitude toward life is being given up. Life as a whole in all its normal unfolding is coming to be regarded as sacred. 3.

For further proof of religious activism we shall examine some minor instances which are really more concrete examples of some of the major instances previously cited. First of all in the field of evangelism there are many examples of Christians gathering together to discuss problems of the secular world within a religious context. In December of 1947 some two thousand students, representing almost every university in Canada and the United States, attended the Fifteenth Quadrennial Missionary Conference of the World Student Christian Federation, held in Lawrence Kansas. The students were given the new concepts which are being used in relation to missions. In lectures, study groups and seminars they learned that missionaries must now have an interest in and an understanding of politics, economics, challenging

3. Albert Cl Knudson, Present Tendencies in Religious Thought,
 The Abingdon Press, New York. 1924 p283.

philosophies of life such as secularism, humanism, materialism and communism, and an understanding of such problems as racial problems and the great problem of division within the Christian Community, as well as ~~an~~ knowledge of the gospel and their own church doctrines. These new ideas served to broaden the outlook of many of the students in a very valuable manner. A great percentage of the students who attended the conference were grounded in that tradition of the Christian faith which remains ~~not~~ within that very limited and isolated field concerned with the self, the faith of the self and the saving of the self. For this type of student the conference was a planting ground of questions. It provoked them to think through the vital issues of the day. It forced them to reconsider and re-evaluate their own faith. For this reason alone the conference was a real accomplishment in the realm of reform for the future of the Christian community.

Another meeting of Christian students which attempted to go further, in that they put some actual content into their political pronouncements, was the National Council of the Canadian Student Christian Movement of 1947. The political commission of the Council gave directives to students to study the possibilities of socialism rather than capitalism as a

system with greater potential for building a kingdom of God on earth.

Because we believe that the land and means of production are ultimately God-given and that men should hold this property in stewardship for God, we feel that free enterprise, with its emphasis on the complete right of the individual to do what he will with his property, is basically anti-Christian. We feel that this system has depersonalized men by its emphasis on technology and production above the essential Christian regard for the worth of the individual. Therefore, we suggest that a system of economic democracy in which the land and means of production are operated by the elected representatives of the people to meet the needs of all is potentially more Christian than the present one and is, therefore, a goal toward which Christians ought to work. We nevertheless affirm that no political blueprint is completely Christian and that Christians must stand within but above any given system. 4.

A third evidence of reform in process of an evangelical nature is that of a profound change in the study of comparative religion. There was a time when comparative religion was commonly known as the study of such religions as Judaism, Buddhism and Mohammedanism, but now this study includes the examination of such religions as sectarianism, secularism and communism. An example of this is found in an article in the Inter-seminary series. "The New Comparative Religion, the faith of labor, Marxism, scientism, anthropocentric humanism, nationalistic mysticism...." 5.

In the political realm the citing of three examples

4. Commission Report No. 4, The Political Aims and Responsibilities of the Christian Student, Minutes & Reports Of the National Council of the Student Christian Movement. 1947. Pp.65 p34.
5. Interseminary Series Vol. II The Church & Organized Movements, Harper & Bros. New York & London. Pp255 p.26.

shall suffice to confirm the fact that the spirit of religious activism is in process within it. First of all innumerable churches across Canada have firmly stood on the side of the Japanese Canadians in the question of a breach of civil liberties by the Canadian Government. Church petitions from all parts of the country were sent to the government in protest against the loss of civil liberties suffered by Canadians of Japanese origin. Secondly the Churches of Canada voiced their opinion concerning the shipment of arms to China. The Church realized that this act on the part of the Canadian Government was a breach of the rules of the United Nations Organization of which it is a member. Therefore they asked the government to prevent the release of war laden ships from port. Thirdly the spirit of activism in the political realm can be realized in periodicals sent out by church organizations. One such example of special interest is a weekly bulletin sent out by the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth.⁶ In the issue of December 21, 1947 the bulletin denounced the American Foreign Policy and the Japanese Occupation. In the issue of January 18, 1948 the bulletin made an approval of the Wallace Candidacy. Certainly Christian

6. The Bulletin of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth originates in the Oratory of Saint Mary & Saint Michael, 21 Washington Avenue, Cambridge 40, Massachusetts, U.S.A. In the issue of Dec. 21, 1947 the Foreign Policy and the Japanese Occupation was reviewed under the following headings: failure of land reforms, repression of people's movements, encouragement of big business, repression of labour, rise of racism and fascism, ~~and~~ all due to the American occupation.

individuals have many times been known to write public articles in a similar critical vein but to the investigator this is the first time that an organized Protestant Body has made such a wholesale attack upon the foreign policy of the Country in which it was situated.

Having now proved the existence of religious activism through stating major and minor examples which affect various fields of action let us now turn to some theoretical evidences. Here we shall find much of the thinking which has effected the stated examples of religious activism in process.

CHAPTER II

There are three main aspects of modern theology which support the theories of religious activism. First of all there is a belief in social progress; second, a re-emphasis on the community life of the Christian and third, a real concern over the material well-being of the individual. These three aspects of modern theology are divisions of an over-all change in theology from that of an other-worldly concern to that of a concern for the life on this world; from that of a religious yearning for what may be in the future to that of a religious consciousness towards the present. The change has brought men face to face with new and difficult problems. Instead of philosophizing about the future life, the way to gain the future life and the punishment for those receiving an unworthy judgement, the ministry in modern times is looking to the nature of man in his present status, to the nature of the environment of man and is attempting to discover what the gospel has to say to these problems.

In posing these questions modern theology has become self-conscious to a greater degree and has once more become acutely conscious of the inadequacy of man, the sin of man. However the sin of modern man also has

its differences from the theories of sin propounded from the pulpits of the other-worldly Christianity. The sin of man which was once looked upon as individual is now viewed upon a social outlook as well.

Man is no longer free to choose how he shall live . His desires, sentiments, traits, ideals, beliefs are not necessarily his own responsibility to the degree that they once were. Today man is a product of his society to a greater extent than ever before. His personality is developed in the midst of a highly complicated, mechanistic, organized society. The myriad pulls of society upon one's loyalties go towards the making of man's life an infinitely complicated and potentially frustrating existence. Society is shot through and through with class, economic, and political systems, all equipped with the power of modern science, which create within society a new interdependence of one man to another and one system to another.

Now that theology has decided to consider the present she has had to lay down certain principles which will allow her to keep the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith. Christianity is concerned with the individual and basically interested in teaching that individual to live the 'good' of the 'abundant' life. The abundant life is one which necessarily requires a fair portion of material goods and a sufficient degree of time in which to cultivate the mind.

However within a society which has depersonalized millions of men and has created great gulfs between the privileges of one individual from those of another there is definitely need for great changes, for great progress in order to give each and every man the right to choose whether or not he shall live an abundant life according to the principles of Christianity. If the analysis of these needs is true it is certainly understandable that modern theology should believe in social progress, the social nature of man and the material well being of man.

Now let us look to some of the origins of these ideas and to some of their present day applications. The change from a completely other-worldly religion to one concerned with this world stressed the empirical element in theology. One of the first men to bring this principle forth and to show some of its implications was Schleiermacher. He emphasized the social nature of religion, and the subjective experience of religion.

It was Schleiermacher (1786-1834) brought up in a Moravian school who first took the empirical principle inherent in Protestantism, especially in its pietistic form, and applied it in a masterful way to the reconstruction of Christian theology.

He showed that religion is not in its essence a kind of knowing or of doing, but something deeper than both, a kind of feeling, "the feeling of absolute dependence. 7.

...Schleiermacher brought out the fact that the empirical principle in theology carries with it the conclusion that it is in the positive religions, the actual organized faiths of mankind, and in them only, that true religion is to be found. 8.

.....
The older theology began with the objects of faith. It sought to expound and establish the correct teaching concerning God and divine things on the basis of certain objective authorities, laying the main stress now on the Bible, now on ecclesiastical dogma, and now on reason. By way of contrast with this method Schleiermacher began with faith itself as a subjective experience. 9.

However the modern elements in Schleiermacher did not immediately become manifest in the form of religious activism as it is now understood. For instance there was a group of theologians in Germany which took the experiential element from the theology of Schleiermacher and made of it the prime emphasis in religion.

B..there is another and more scientific way in which Christian experience has been made the basis of theological conservatism. This method is illustrated by the so-called "Erzlinger School" in Germany, represented by J.C.K.Hofmann (1802-1875) and Fr. H.R.Frank (1827-1894). These distinguished theologians took their start from Schleiermacher, making the Christian consciousness the source and norm of theology, but they interpreted the Christian consciousness in a somewhat narrower sense. They found its unique and distinctive element in the experience of regeneration and conversion, and out of this experience they sought to deduce almost the entire orthodox Lutheran theology. 10 .

In reaction to the over emphasis of the experiential principle alone by this German school, Ritschl developed a new doctrine which connected this element of Christianity with the practical and empirical temper of the day.

8. Ibid p156

9. Ibid p158

10. Ibid p 161.

...in his opposition to mysticism and Pietism Ritschl set the ethical and historical element in Christianity on high as had not been done before, and thus gave to Christian experience an interpretation that links it up in a striking way with the practical and empirical temper of our day. 11.

The advantages of the marriage of these two principles are twofold: first, "It tends to keep theology and life close together.", second, "It puts a check on barren theological speculation."¹². These two advantages of the theological position of Ritschl logically lead us into a discussion of the applications of the new ideas within the body of modern theology.

One of the main applications of modern theology is its justification of its own position through a denunciation of the traditional philosophy and theology and a positing of the fundamentals in its own. The denunciation of the old was directed against its dualism---the preaching of other-worldly doctrines only to a this-worldly man. This dualism within the religion of man made for a pluralism in the normal life of man. An other-worldly religion did not integrate the various interests, ambitions and projects of man's life. The result was that religion was just one of the many interests in the life of man. The identification of religion with the future tended to make man disregard his present sins. On the other hand the new theology

11. Ibid p173

12. Ibid p187

found a unity in making total claims upon the individual's life here and now. This unity took the form of a combination of action and thought within life. This combination became the reality of the new theology. Therefore the old philosophical problem of dualism, introduced into modern philosophy by Descartes and manifest within the body of theology by a similar emphasis on the life of thought, was overcome through a unity which did not consider the old problems of 'how we know' and 'what is the nature of substance', but which considered reality for man as being a life of thought and action.

Having arrived at the conclusion that the philosophical principle of the new theology is one of unity of action and thought, we can now examine its application in accordance with the ideas of social progress, the social nature of man and the material well-being of man within modern theology. These applications are illustrated in the theories of the social gospel which looks towards the reform of the political and economic systems of the world which are incompatible with the progress of a social being desiring to live an abundant life.

Within this body of theory which looks toward world reform there are many shades of opinion. There are the conservative reformers who have come to the

position of making an excellent analysis of the present capitalist system. They have pointed to the evils of the present society and have placed a degree of responsibility for the situation upon the individuals within the church. They have not, however, suggested a solution beyond a re-emphasis of the present religious expression of the official church. This re-emphasis ~~is~~ is what the more radical thinkers call a residual reformation individualism. A few of these conservatives have gone further in that they have outlined a pattern for future society which will be superior to the Capitalistic system. In reality, however, many of these Utopian theories are regressions, because of the fanciful leap from an analysis of society of considerable depth to an~~a~~ ethereal discourse upon a Utopia. Such a flight from reality is not warranted due the lack of method by which the individual would attempt to bring about just such a Utopia.

A group which is midway between these conservative reformers and the radical reformers is exemplified by those whose thinking has led them to deduce the implications of the analysis of capitalism and to decide that socialism is the method of reform in which man can better his present system. This group finds within the gospel no

revolutionary programme upon which they can pattern their behavior in changing society, but they do find revolutionary principles therein which bear upon the historical situation of today. This shade of opinion in turn seems comparatively conservative placed in juxtaposition with the more radical view, which finds within the gospel evidence that the Christian intention is now being manifested in the communism of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

This extremely radical theory claims that the only method of bringing about the kingdom of God is to use the Marxist doctrine in order to achieve socialism. There are of course many shades of opinion which are between the limits of the most conservative and the most radical. In order to point out the real spirit of religious activism within these views, we shall investigate the most distinctive theories which illustrate best the types mentioned above. We shall examine first the conservative type, then the radical, and finally the middle or moderate type.

The conservative type of theory embodying religious activism is found in the ideas of Walter Rauschenbusch. Writing at the beginning of this century, he partially realized the evils of his day,

and recognized the potential of the social gospel for the improvement of society. Although he kept the fundamentals of the gospel as a whole, in his conclusions as to what should be done he reverted to complete dependence upon the methods of individual rebirth and repentance. This method of changing the world is evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

It is fruitless to attempt to turn modern society back to conditions prevailing before power machinery and trusts had revolutionized it; or to copy biblical institutions adapted to wholly different social conditions; or to postpone the Christianizing of society to the millennium; or to found Christian communistic colonies within the competitive world; or to make the organized Church the centre and manager of an improved social machinery. The force of religion can best be applied to social renewal by sending its spiritual power along the existing and natural relations of men to direct them to truer ends and govern them by higher motives.

The fundamental contribution of every man is the change of his own personality. We must repent of the sins of existing society, cast off the spell of the lies protecting our social wrongs, have faith in a higher social order, and realize in ourselves a new type of Christian manhood which seeks to overcome the evil in the present world.... 13.

Very different indeed is the thinking of the radical reformers. John MacMurray expresses their philosophy well. He states that reality is found in action, and that therefore, "...the whole life of thought has meaning only in reference to the full reality of intentional action upon the world which includes it." 14. Following this definition he denounces all philosophy as self-defeating

13. Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis, Association Press New York, 1907. Pp 429 p412.

14. John MacMurray, The Clue to History, S.C.M. Press London, 1938 p.7.

because it is contemplation and thought which is not directed toward action. The whole western civilization, with its class systems, its will to power, its individualism, has been created because of the barren philosophy which sets contemplation at the top and labour at the bottom of the scale of human achievements. This civilization is inherently evil because it is not living its essential intention which is a "universal community of persons, with freedom and equality as its structural principles of relationship"¹⁵. His main thesis ends with the thought that the Christian intention is being carried on in Russia.

The clue to what is happening in the modern world is this. The Christian intention, which defines the continuity of Christian action in the world, was suppressed by its antithesis--the will to power in the Mediaeval world; and it was suppressed by the church. It worked in the unconscious. The ecclesiastical will to power worked out its own frustration, and the completion of this process, by weakening the forces of suppression, brought the Christian intention to consciousness. This is the inner significance of the Renaissance and Reformation. But because the dualism of mind and of society remains, and because the suppressing agency in society is the religious organization, Christianity asserts itself in consciousness as a secular movement towards freedom and equality and common humanity as the basis of society. ¹⁶.

.....
The disappearance of dualism is not complete in Soviet Russia. Russia is communist in intention, not in fact; and progress has gone so far that Russia is conscious of this. But the realizing of this intention depends upon the full discovery of the historic continuity of Russian socialism with its Jewish origin in the religious consciousness.¹⁷

15. Ibid p100

16. Ibid p168

17. Ibid p206

Of course as this book was published in 1938 MacMurray would probably say that the denial of the Communists in Russia to recognize that the best in their society materialized because it was rooted in the Christian intention, has resulted in a new will to power which is once again self-defeating.

It would seem that MacMurray has made an analysis altogether too simple, too directed, to fit our complex culture. However, there are groups of religious radicals that have adopted just such an analysis and have carried it farther than MacMurray in that they have adopted a method of bringing about the reformed society. These groups have adopted the Marxist Dialectic as a tool towards bringing about a socialist society. They believe in the complete overturn of the present economic system and present church. They regard the official church as a reflection of the present economic system. Their tactics are ~~manifest~~ exemplified in the encouragement and advice given to groups working subversively within official church organizations.

The Society of the Catholic Commonwealth, set within the framework of Anglicanism, is such a group. It proclaims itself an antithetical group within the church. ~~and the~~ The general spirit upon which it works may be seen in a quotation from one of the weekly bulletins

which it publishes.

...when one enters this society, he is not invited to support organized Christianity in any of its current manifestations, either Catholic or Protestant. He enters this Society to help in the overturn of the present Church structure in radical dialectic change; and to initiate the emergence of that Christian social organism--that Christian synthesis--which will eventually subsume in living integration the equally revolutionized secular structure of the now dawning socialist age. 18.

The middle or moderate path of radicalism in regard to world reform agrees with the latter group in the ideal for a classless society with the structural relationships of freedom and equality. They also agree that capitalism must go. They do not agree that the church must undergo a dialectical change. They believe that the reformation of society will come gradually and that the function of individuals in that reformation is to work through the official church organizations. In speaking of the political task of the church King Gordon gives three tasks to the church: "~~firstly~~

(1) The church must concern itself specifically with the economic distress which deepens as the crisis continues.

(2) The church must concern itself with the increasing menace of international war.

(3) ...giving assistance to those forces which ~~are~~ are making for a new democratic society, national and international, organized specifically to promote the highest economic and cultural well-being of the mass of the people. 19.

As well as channelling their efforts through the ~~teaching of the~~ church the moderate reformers tend to

18. Bulletin of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth?
p4, February 22, 1948.

19. King Gordon, "The Political Task", Towards the Christian Revolution, R.B.Y. Scott and Gregory Vlastos Editors, Willett, Clark & Co., New York 1936. Pp251 pl67.

stay closer to the teachings of the New Testament for their analysis of society. They find plenty within the gospel to denounce capitalism and feel no necessity for using the Marxist dialectic.

'I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly. No verse of the New Testament sums up the mission of Jesus Christ more adequately than this. It is a 'spiritual' mission, indeed, but one that has economic consequences. And quite incidentally Paul throws out remarks exhibiting an ethic which cuts right across capitalistic practice: 'Owe no man anything, save to love one another'; 'If any will not work, neither let him eat.' 20.

.....
'If thou take thy neighbour's garment to pledge, thou shalt restore it unto him before the sun goeth down, for that is his only covering,'
'No man shall take the mill or the upper millstone to pledge, for he taketh to pledge a man's life.'
The first of these establishes the priority of human considerations over the 'rights' of money. The second is a radical application of the same principle; it forbids a financial operation which would separate a man from the tools of production on which his life depends. This is an axe laid unto the root of capitalism. 21.

Now that we have proved that there is definitely a religious activism in process and have looked into some of its theories--into some of the directions in which it seems to be going we---we shall in the next chapter consider how far this religious activism in process and theory is due to pressing events and pragmatic temper.

20. R. B. Y. Scott, "The Biblical Basis", Towards the Christian Revolution? p91.

21. Ibid p88.

CHAPTER III

The question for this chapter is the seeking out of the influences which have resulted in the religious activism mentioned in the previous chapters. What are the reasons for theology becoming interested in the present, and in all phases of the life of man? Has religion been stimulated by the pressing events of the day? What part of religious activism is due to the pragmatic temper of all life in all ages?

One is always posed with a difficult question when it comes to analyzing what effects the present has upon a movement in progress. It seems wise to attempt to see the modern world within the context of the history of thought. The origins of modern thought in the Renaissance. The Renaissance was a rebirth of thought which began about the 13th century and continued through the 16th century.

In the first phase of the Renaissance certain general attitudes were fostered. Man's great faith in the church was declining. There was a growing desire for emancipation from the church in relation to the thought-world of man. People were becoming interested in study for the sake of study. They were not so inclined to be directed in their thinking by the church as

they had been in the dominant period of its reign. Man was looking for a new authority other than the church. These attitudes were added to, climaxed, and given direction in the later Renaissance period.

The main contributions of the Renaissance to the modern mind were an exaggerated individualism and a self-consciousness. Man became interested in this life as opposed to an interest on the merits desirable for entry into the next. Man became interested in the world of facts, of natural objects and natural occurrences for their own sake. These new interests were reflected in an infinite variety of ways. As a result new discoveries were made in science, but unfortunately there was no principle to integrate the different fields of research. This deficiency was caused by refusal of the various sciences to give allegiance to philosophy, their common ~~parent~~ parent. In fact science became anti-rationalist and anti-philosophic.

Science...has remained predominantly an anti-rationalistic movement, based upon a naive faith. What reasoning it has wanted, has been ~~it~~ borrowed from mathematics which is a surviving relic of Greek rationalism, following the deductive method. Science repudiates philosophy. In other words it has never cared to justify its faith or to explain its meaning; 22

The result was that the world of new discoveries became

dominated by an interest in sensory knowledge." Our principal body of truth is scientific. Our science is primarily a nexus of empirical, sensory knowledge derived from observation of, and experimentation with, sensory facts." 23. The prevailing trend in the whole period ~~taxi~~ from the Renaissance to the present has been based on that form of truth which Sorokin calls, 'sensate truth'.

Out of this culture there have sprouted theories of economics and politics which have attempted to control the great new world. These secular theories have not been backed by moral principles. This unbalance, in turn, has effected the two great classes, the workers and the property owners; and all the trials and sufferings of an age of unprecedented wealth begotten of science which lacks the conscience adequate for just distribution of material goods. Modern society has within it the great paradox of the poor becoming poorer and the rich becoming richer.

Another great paradox has been born of the philosophy of the modern age. Even though the majority followed science and cared little for a faith, philosophers were busy trying to find a basis authority for life. Philosophers of the Renaissance have tended to stimulate an individualistic faith. Each philosopher has believed

23. Pitirim Sorokin, Crises of Our Age, New York, E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1942 p102.

in his own answers to the problem of final authority. Each philosopher has of course been influenced by his predecessors but has ^{had} confidence in going forward in the search for the final answer for him, in his own way. There have been group trends but the overall inclination has been toward individualism. At the same time as this tendency has been growing in the philosophical life of man there have been dialectically opposed forces penetrating into the material and physical life of man. Science has so affected the physical life of man that he is driven into a new sense of community from the local to the universal sphere. The resulting paradox is one of attempting to live a complicated life of interrelation with one's fellow-men while holding to a faith of individualism.

Both the paradox of the growing poverty within a world of increasing wealth and the paradox of diversity or individualism of faith within a forced unity of physical relations have aided, and added to the culmination of such events as world wars and depressions. These events have, in turn, added to, and made man more acutely aware of the rich-poor paradox on the international sphere. The tensions of the modern world have forced religion to recognize and to grapple with the problems which physical forces

have created for man. Therefore, our society because of its very nature has precipitated events which have forced theologians to make an analysis of society-----have forced religion to become sociological-----have stimulated a spirit of religious activism. Support for such an analysis as the one above is found in Rauschenbusch's comment on the Industrial Revolution.

The instrument by which all humanity could rise from want and the fear of want actually submerged a large part of the people in perpetual want and fear. When wealth was multiplying beyond all human precedent, an immense body of pauperism with all its allied misery was growing up and becoming chronic. England was foremost in the introduction of machine industry, and the first half of the nineteenth century was one of the darkest times in the economic history of England. While the nation was attaining unparalleled wealth and power, many of its people were horribly destitute and degraded. It is hardly likely that any social revolution, by which hereafter capitalism may be overthrown, will cause more injustice, more physical suffering, and more heartache than the industrial revolution by which capitalism rose to power. 24.

Another such analysis forced upon the Christian community was that of the affects of the first world war. After the war Christians began to see the necessity for a change of attitude within the social gospel itself, from a conservative social outlook, fostered by such men as Rauschenbusch, to a more radical viewpoint. 25.

Faith in progress induced in men the confidence that all their hopes would be realized through an increase that would come in the nature of things in light and sweetness and good will.

24. Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis?, Association Press, New York. 1912 Pp429 p217

25. See page 18 for discussion of conservative radicalism.

This confidence animated alike the social gospel and the ~~capitalist~~ Liberal theology.

But the world War and the subsequent disorder and disillusionment shattered this mood and revealed to men a tragic strain in their predicament with which all their optimistic assumptions were incommensurable. A temper of realism was forced upon them in place of their romantic illusions, and they came to see that man's salvation would not come through gradual or continuous improvement, but would require some radical reversal of his concepts and habits. It is in the soil and atmosphere begotten of this trend that the Religious Radicalism represented by this book has taken root and is maturing. Its intellectual and psychological milieu, therefore, is very different from that of the pre-war social gospel. 26.

Today, as never before, secular interests claim such a total loyalty that they are taking on a religious significance. Therefore, of necessity, organized religion has to be concerned with a returning challenge if it is to survive. Pressing events have within a sensate culture ~~had~~ profoundly influenced the spread of religious activism.

It is hard to separate the influence of pressing events within a sensate culture and the influence of pragmatic temper upon religious activism. Actually, the pragmatic temper is the functioning of an attitude which has an overemphasis within such a culture. The pre-occupation of our age with material values seems to make the question of utility imperative in all areas of life. We no longer have the majority of common men

26. John Line, "The Theological Principles", The Christian Revolution, Willett, Clark & Co., New York, 1936. Pp251 p40.

quizzing themselves as to whether or not an act, an opinion, a trend popularly held will be in accord with their religious beliefs. Rather does the modern man meditate as to the propriety of holding certain religious beliefs in a scientific world.

People today are much more interested in the social utility of religion than in its abstract truth. For them "the real problem", Bishop McConnell says, "is not as to whether Christianity is absolute or not, but as to whether it is adequate or not." Is Christianity able to meet the demands of the present social situation? This question is not identical with that relative to the ultimate truth of Christianity, but it has an important bearing upon it; and for practical religion it is a question of decisive significance. 27.

The pragmatic temper can be found even in the evangelical programme in the church. As we observed earlier the social gospel has applied Christianity to the problems of the day. Now it is of interest to note that the utility element within religion can even be seen in the evangelical programme or method. Instead of memorizing the catechism, the ten commandments, the beatitudes, in Sunday School, the children of today are shown movies, told stories, taught dramatics and modelling to illustrate the teachings of the church. The children are taught the gospel through seeing it in action---- seeing it at work----seeing its practical value. They find the truth through inference. The slogan of this trend might be coined in the words, 'show the gospel in

27. Albert C. Knudson, Present Tendencies in Religious Thought, The Abingdon Press, New York 1924. p272.

action and it will speak the truth of itself.'

The same educational method is used ~~of~~ the adult level in the pulpit. A great percentage of sermons have been based on the idea that one is not necessarily a Christian because he knows the doctrines of the church, ~~and~~ has a knowledge of the Bible, and attends church regularly , but that a Christian is one who lives his beliefs; who has proved the worth of the gospel in his life; who has made his beliefs work. The pragmatic temper of this type of sermon gives precedence to individual human relationships at the expense of the God-man relationships as found in the social sphere of the church. This type of sermon implies that the successful working out of a number of moral principles in individual human relationships is main goal for the Christian~~s~~.

CHAPTER IV

The question of the influence of the philosophic movement of pragmatism upon religion is one of great importance for this work. In answering this question it will be necessary to get a background of the general pragmatic philosophy first of all.

Pragmatism is that point of view which deals with the question of effects rather than causes. Pragmatists find reality in action. Truth is found in action that works. Interest is centered in life as it is known rather than in life as it might be. Interest is centered in the present, in man, in this world rather than in eternity and the absolute God. Pragmatism is a philosophic movement which has applied its principles to the problems of a sensate culture.

The pragmatists have denounced traditional philosophy because they feel that it is a science tangled with a maze of terminology and because it has been concerned for generations over the same four problems which are of little consequence, "...the unity of the world; the existence of God, in some form of spiritualistic substance, from theism to pantheism; the immortality of the soul; the freedom of the will."²⁸ James says that the real function of philosophy ^{ought} not to be concerned with these question but

28. Horace Meyer Kallen, William James and Henri Bergson, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1914. p4.

should be , "to find out what definite differences it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one." 29 In other words the function of philosophy is to be concerned over bringining about an abundant life for man and the method of doing this according to James is found in the attitude of, "looking away from first things , principles, 'categories', supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts." 30.

Pragmatism is relative. Truth according to the pragmatists is found in change, in action. What is true need not necessarily be true in the future. It is concerned with the life of experience rather than the life of thought.

As a philosophic movement pragmatism has had a definite development. It started with Peirce and has progressed through James to Dewey. Each of these three men gave something new to pragmatism. Riley gives an excellent summing up of the nature and growth of pragmatism under these ~~xxx~~ men.

Hailed as a typical American philosophy, pragmatism has had three phases in its native growth, --the primitive of Charles Peirce, the developed of John Dewey, and the radical of William James. In this triumvirate of pragmatism Peirce taught that it was logical, ---a method to make our ideas clear; Dewey taught that it was instrumental, a useful tool for action; James taught that it was temperamental, a way to reach personal

29. William James, "Pragmatism", Modern Classical Philosophers, compiled by Benjamin Rand, Houghton Mifflin Co., New York, Pp 893 p836.

30. Ibid p838.

satisfaction. Finally, these three varieties of pragmatism had different applications. The first tended to be solipsistic, to confine itself to the individual and his doubts; the second to be social, to pass over the barriers of self; the third to be transcendental, to leap beyond human barriers, to reach a pluralistic universe of higher powers, earth-angels, world-souls, with which man may have intercourse. In order ~~of~~ of time pragmatism is primitive, or developed, or radical. In its point of view it is logical, or instrumental, or temperamental. In its application it is solipsistic, or social, or transcendental. 31.

Now that we have given the general pragmatic position we shall look at the influences of William James and John Dewey in more detail, with special emphasis on their influence upon religion. James had a profound religious consciousness and a deep interest in the religious experience of others. However, he was not orthodox in his religious convictions. He disagreed with, and discarded many of the traditional attitudes and doctrines found in the organized church. James' standard by which he held or discarded a teaching, of the established church, was his pragmatic philosophy. Through the use of his pragmatic gauge he was strengthened in his religious beliefs, he was able to build to his faith and he found a flow of strengthening energy for his general philosophy. In his, "Varieties of Religious Experience," James examined a great variety of religious experience in men and women who were above average intelligence. He found that each religious

experience had an individuality, a uniqueness which set it apart from all the others. This individuality of experience was, in turn, expended in an equally unique manner by each recipient.

It is on this individual and personal level in which James in his 'Varieties' is interested. He sees in the personal level a phenomenon at work; he sees actions; he finds a reality, a form of truth. In this working, active religion, James sees five major characteristics:

1. That the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance;
2. That union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end;
3. That prayer or inner communion with the spirit thereof--be that spirit 'God' or 'law'--is a process where-in work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world.

Religion includes also the following psychological characteristics;

4. A new zest which adds itself like a gift to life, and takes the form either of lyrical enchantment or of appeal to earnestness and heroism.
5. An assurance of safety and a temper of peace, and, in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections.³²

These characteristics contain a strong sense of liberality concerning doctrinal matters. It is not inner communion with God but rather "inner communion with the spirit thereof---be that spirit 'God' or 'law'". One can also sense in these characteristics the extreme pragmatic viewpoint of the philosopher in his emphasis upon the process wherein work is really done and effects produced

32. William James, Varieties of Religious Experience, Longmans, Green, and Co., New York 1904 p485.

within the phenomenal world; in the emphasis on security, safety and courage. Then, it must be noted that there is a spark of religious activism in these characteristics.

One of the most unorthodox implications of the 'Varieties' can be seen more clearly in James' 'Pluralistic Universe'. Here James presents the view that there is much more evidence upholding a relative rather than an absolute God. Why should we hold to a religion of rewards and punishments, of a God who keeps track of our trivial deeds and who is at the same time absolute, an unmoved mover, the creator of the world out of nothing? Such beliefs are anti-intellectual and anti-scientific in this modern age. If religion is stimulated by one God why is there such a diversity of religious experience? Surely if there was only one cause for all religious experience there would be a unity in all religious experience. James did not find such a unity in religious experience and therefore he could not uphold the view of an absolute God.

His unbelief in an absolute God did not thwart his participation in religion. He aggressively worked over the religious evidence and with his pluralistic view of the universe decided what in religion would work. James felt that the most adequate way to judge religious consciousness was to consider God as a personal

of an act of faith will aid progress towards an orderly system whether the belief be true or not. The belief in God is a working belief; it is a belief with dynamic .

In this pragmatic manner James persuades us, "to welcome God as man's Great Coadjutor in the warfare against all things evil." 34. In other words, James invites us to let God work for us. Exactly which God James refers to is not clear. There are so many claims by so many religions of having the only one God, each claimant supposing a unique set of characteristics for the one and only God, that men are indeed being foolish dreamers if they believe in an absolute God of the universe. The very fact that each claimant attributed different characteristics to the one and only God added to James' allegation that there must be many Gods. The inherent pluralism of this doctrine added to the worth of religion for James. It gave each man the right to follow his own religious inclinations. It meant that that religion was right for a man which worked the best for him in his attempt at effecting a better world.

Continuing in this view of individualism James would say that it is nonsense to expect that an intellectual scientific man should have the same religious cravings as an unlearned simple man; it is nonsense to believe that those cravings should be satisfied by the same God

34. Howard V. Knox, The Philosophy of William James,
Dodge Publishing Co., New York 1914 p7.

as the simple man; it is nonsense to believe that the fruits of the intellectuals' religion should be the same as those of the simple man.

In strengthening and explaining his belief in relative values and in a pluralistic universe James says,

For pluralists...time remains as real as anything, and nothing in the universe is great or static or eternal enough not to have some history. But the world that each of us feels most intimately at home with is that of being with histories that play into our history, whom we can help in their vicissitudes even as they help us in ours. This satisfaction the absolute ~~is~~ denies us; we can neither help nor hinder it, for it stands outside of history. It surely is a merit in the philosophy to make the very life we lead seem real and earnest. Pluralism, in exorcising the absolute, exorcised the great de-realizer of the only life we are at home in, and thus redeems the nature for reality from essential foreignness. Every end, reason, motive, object of desire or aversion, ground of sorrow or joy that we feel is in the world of finite multifariousness for only in that world does anything really happen, only there do events come to pass. 35.

Here we find as we did in the religious activism of Christianity that James is trying to find a religion that will work for the modern era, that will speak to the problems of men today, and yet will not cause them to disregard their intellectual knowledge acquired and stimulated in this era.

The practical religion which James advocates is

35. William James, Essays in Radical Empiricism and A Pluralistic Universe, Longmans, Green & Co., New York 1943 p49.

cut from the bonds of the traditional. The question is not what is right in the light of all history but what will work for today in human relationships. Although evidence points⁶ to a world outside the experiential world, men cannot experience it and therefore cannot postulate concerning its attributes. However, it is in man's nature to believe in something beyond and therefore, so that this element in man's nature should not work towards the frustration of the rest of his nature, man should discipline his religious consciousness in relation to his life of experience which he can know. In line with this James speaks of God, "...as man's great Companion, his helper. Often he speaks of God as a being very much like man,--conscious, personal, and good, --but somewhat more powerful than man." 36. James held that man's will to believe could be best satisfied in this type of a God.

Another fundamental difference between James and traditional theology is found in his view of the nature of man. While traditional philosophy believes in a soul within man which is immortal, James recognizes the belief but parts company with it because he has no experiential proof for its existence. However, he finds reality in the belief itself when it fosters a

strengthening of the human outlook towards this life.

James, instead of considering man as mind, soul, and body, thinks of man as a combination of mind and matter .

Mind he considers a kind of behavior.

Recent representatives of Realism are the Positivist, Auguste Comte, and the Pragmatists, William James and John Dewey. Although these men differ in many respects, they agree that mind is a kind of behavior. We have, for example, acts which are of such a nature as to be held mind-less. Other acts have a different nature, and we can refer to them as minded or having the characteristic of mind. Thus, for these philosophers mind is not a thing but is rather a kind of behavior. 37.

The philosophy of John Dewey, in its relation to religion, is much more easily deciphered. Dewey is not a man who has a religious consciousness as had James. Dewey considered religion from a much more objective viewpoint than James. He was not really concerned with religion personally and in his great bulk of writings he uses very little space in considering traditional religion. As Riley said, Dewey is a developed pragmatist, stressing the instrumental and social elements of the pragmatic philosophy. And it is in this character in which Dewey considers religion.

John Dewey places religion and traditional philosophy together as being fellow-seekers after absolute certainty. Their search is carried out in the

37. Ibid p275.

form of an escape from the peril of a life of uncertainty, to the sphere of absolute certainty attained through cognitive processes which are divorced from practical spheres of life. Dewey feels that the energy used in both these sciences is dissipated in a search initially prompted through misunderstanding, through ignorance.

In forming this thesis, Dewey begins by saying that religion grew out of a quest for security in the midst of a world of great risks. Man did not understand the nature of the universe, its workings, nor how it could be controlled. Therefore, when crises of life were faced, due to external causes which he could not understand, primitive man turned from the natural to the supernatural for help. Gradually natural phenomena which could not be comprehended were classified as supernatural and became objects around which rituals, magic, and ceremonies were performed. This picture is summed up in the following quotation,

As a drowning man is said to grasp at a straw, so men who lacked the instruments and skills developed in later days, snatched at whatever, by any stretch of imagination, could be regarded as a source of help in time of trouble. The attention, interest and care which now go to acquiring skill in the use of appliances and to the invention for means for better service of ends, were devoted to noting omens, making irrelevant prognostications, performing ritualistic ceremonies and manipulating objects possessed of magical power over natural events. In such an atmosphere primitive religion was born and fostered. Rather this atmosphere was the religious disposition. 38

Philosophy, in turn, picked up the thread of the division of the natural and the supernatural, the ordinary and the extraordinary, and made itself concerned with the same realm of thought as religion, but offered salvation through reason rather than by means of cults and rites. Philosophy taught that in knowledge which is occupied with universal and immutable truths, one is raised above worldly needs into a realm in which communion with an absolute God is made possible. And in this communion man finds his true destiny, his highest ~~achievement~~ achievement, his greatest good. Communion with the perfect absolute God takes man from his earth-bound body to his true self. In other words, by ignoring all practical needs and activities man comes into touch with the eternal.

The popularization of this doctrine of reality in thought as opposed to reality in the practical life, Dewey charges to the Christian Church.

How far this glorification by philosophers and scientific investigators of a life of knowing, apart from and above a life of doing, might have impressed the popular mind without adventitious aid there is no saying. But external aid came. Theologians of the Christian church adopted this view in a form adapted to their religious purposes. The perfect and ultimate reality was God; to know him was eternal bliss, The world in which man lived and acted was a world of trials and troubles to test and prepare him for a higher destiny. Through thousands of ways, including histories and rites, with symbols the doctrine of

classic philosophy filtered its way into the popular mind. 39.

Having analyzed the religion of the day as a channel through which human energies are dissipated, Dewey goes forward to give his answer to the problem. First of all Dewey makes a marked distinction between a religion and a religious attitude or consciousness. A religion is an institutionalized and exclusive organization of people who give to their emotional and intellectual faculties the limitations of a set of creeds and dogmas which supposedly express the ultimate road to salvation and the only key to the knowledge of reality. On the other hand he defines the religious attitude as one in which a man finds a source of wealth whereby he may make realistic achievements in the social world with the ideal of the brotherhood of man. "The sense of the dignity of human nature is as religious as is the sense of awe and reverence when it rests upon a sense of a human being as a cooperating part of a larger whole." 40. It naturally follows that we must allow people to be free from dogmas, to break their ties from institutions which build ideals completely detached from life and to turn their energies towards the betterment of man. In place of God we must have a religious consciousness towards social ideals. Dewey feels that if we are really to achieve the goal of the brotherhood of man then

39. Ibid p292

40. John Dewey, Intelligence in the Modern World, Edited by Joseph Ratner. The Modern Library, New York 1939 p1021.

we must of necessity break up the exclusiveness of institutionalized religion. He believes that those who say they have found security in a religion act as if they have a monopoly on the truth. The result of such pride is the building up of an opposing force against the goal of brotherhood.

Dewey is confident that the new religious emphasis will have a real vitality never experienced by the traditional religions. This vitality will come through a combination of ideals and practical activity. Then, too man will not be so complacent. He will not have security in any absolute answer. He will therefore be stimulated to go steadily forward working for truth with faith in the possibilities of his work.

The results of the pragmatic philosophy upon traditional religion and upon religious activism in particular are indeed far reaching. The views of James and Dewey combine to make a total challenge to the Christian religion. The God of James is a puppet subject to man's whims, while the God of Dewey is humanity itself. However, we shall leave the ensuing problems between the religion of the pragmatists and that of Christianity to the last chapter. Now we shall look as the effects of the pragmatic philosophy on religious activism.

The Pragmatic Philosophy has had such a widespread appeal on the North American Continent that the affects upon religion has been to give an added emphasis to pragmatic principles within Christianity itself. If the church is to communicate to people who for six days a week act and think upon pragmatic principles which have been justified by a school of philosophy such as Dewey's Chicago school, then the church must speak pragmatically also. The church has to show how it can apply its theological principles to practical situations. However it is difficult to find direct references in which theologians have taken the philosophy of either James or Dewey and used it as the message of the church. The direct influence of the Pragmatic movement upon the church as upon education has been so great that it is difficult to recognize. We all live by pragmatic principles to such an extent in this generation that it is difficult to see objectively the influence of pragmatism upon our age.

Virgilus Ferm brings this point out when talking of pragmatism.

The vagueness of the movement and the name is shown in the fact that it has also had a direct effect on religious thought chiefly through James' stress on the right of the individual, 'other things being equal', to trust his emotions, including his hopes and spiritual ambitions. In recent years Dewey and the 'Chicago School' have affected methods and objects of religious education by interpreting religion as a life of practical devotion to social ideals rather than intellectual acceptance of a theological creed. 41.

Finally pragmatism has stimulated an activism within religion through its emphasis upon a totally social religion, as mentioned in the quotation above. The effects of this new religion shall be brought out in the next chapter which will deal with the possibility of the pragmatic philosophy as a ground for religious activism.

CHAPTER V

Our investigation has brought to our attention religious activism in process and in theory. We have looked into the applications of religious activism and tried to find its basis in theory. Then we spent considerable time attempting to discover the several influences causing religious activism. In this search we found the great influences of pressing events, of the pragmatic temper in all life and of the popular movement of pragmatic philosophy. Our examination of the pragmatic philosophy was a positive presentation and in it we did not link up the popular pragmatic philosophy with the earlier analysis of our civilization in which we found the influences of pressing events upon religion. In this chapter we shall consider the pros and cons of pragmatism as a ground for religious activism and then we shall attempt to see our results in the context of our previous analysis of our present civilization.

First, let us list the values in pragmatism for religious activism. The greatest contribution of pragmatism is its fundamental teaching. Seek ye that type of knowledge which will give you practical results. This would seem to be a very good measuring rod for the policy makers of a religion upon taking some project on in the world at large. The simplicity of this principle lends itself to universal use. If, as has been held in mathematical circles, that the simplest formula is the

correct one, then certainly this pragmatic principle has truth. James followed this idea when he examined religion. He looked for those elements in it that would work. The result was that James gave man freedom from religious creeds and doctrines and pointed men to the liberty of religion. One of the greatest drawbacks to religious activism on a world scale is the inconsistencies of the creeds and doctrines held by the various religious denominations. James has been called the last great liberator of the human spirit, and in this respect it might be said that a lack of the inhibitions of creedal religion will make for a growth of personality in new areas. This is surely a contribution to religious activism. Finally, James recognized religious experience of all kinds and in so doing stimulated a spirit of toleration highly desirable for cooperation in religious activism. These ideas would be inadequate for a real activism in religion without the contributions of Dewey.

He advanced arguments for James' liberation of the human spirit in his analysis of religion as a science based on ignorance and engaged in the universal quest for certainty. Dewey suggested that in order to direct man's energies towards social ideals, for the brotherhood of man, it was necessary to be free from

religious inhibitions. Man must use his intelligence, the tools at his disposal and must not be thwarted in his purpose by philosophies which do not work. In this regard the philosophy of the pragmatic school tended to bring religion closer to the scientific method of the day. Both the scientific method and the pragmatic method look for results for truth. Therefore if religion were to take on a pragmatic viewpoint it would of necessity be brought closer to science.

...pragmatism brings religion and science close together. Each uses the test of consequences; indeed each speaks of ~~experiment~~ experiment--- or at least eighteenth and nineteenth-century Christians often referred to "experimental Christianity" an empirical testing of religion. 42.

Finally, the pragmatic philosophy as taught by Dewey is of great value as a basis of religion in a pioneer country. Dewey speaks of the need for the freedom of the human spirit so that men may be courageous and launch out into activities of a social nature. Certainly everyone would agree that countries like the United States and Canada which are not entirely developed physically we have need of people endowed with ambition and a spirit of adventure which will carry them to a standard of civilization enjoyed by those of older lands. Certainly a young country without a long history, without a cultural tradition,

42Edgar Sheffield Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, New York: 1940 Prentice-Hall, Inc..Pp539 p 127.

needs a vital and dynamic religion to guide its people. "The utility of pragmatism for religion lies in the support which it brings toward the construction of reasonable religious beliefs or philosophy of religion." 43 Such a religion cannot be filled with doctrines which have an unbridgeable gap between the ideal^{NP} ~~that~~ which is actual, real, and practical. The tensions built up by ideals suiting an established country are too great for a land suffering the pains of its growth and development.

Turning to the disadvantages of the pragmatic philosophy as a ground for religious activism we soon realize ~~that~~ the case against pragmatism far outweighs the one in its favour. Just as the greatest advantage was found in the fundamental principle of the pragmatic philosophy so the greatest disadvantage is its prime teaching. The pragmatist says that truth is found in that which works; truth is found in that which is practical. However, we must ask the pragmatist what he means by that which is practical, and by that which works. As Brightman says,

In one sense, every idea that we can fool ourselves or others with may be said to work to that extent. Belief in transubstantiation works among Catholics; it does not work among Methodists or Quakers; it is utter nonsense to Mohammedans or Shintoists. 44.

43. Eugene Garrett Bewkes, "Common Sense Realism", the Nature OF Reiligious Experience, Essays in Honor of Douglas Macintosh, Harper & Bros., Publishers New York 1937 p21.
44. Edgar Sheffield Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion? p127.

If we are to assume that truth is subjective as does James then each religious experience will work and be true for each person. However, this subjectivism will conflict with Dewey's ideal for social improvement towards the brotherhood of man. According to Dewey truth must work on a social and cooperative basis and must have humanity as its goal. But once again we are left without a point of reference for the ideal of brotherhood. What does it mean to be a brother according to pragmatism? What social ends shall we work towards in order to make a world wide brotherhood? The American idea of brotherhood is surely the one found in the system of democracy which uses the principle of free enterprise that stimulates a high spirit of competition in man. According to the American this is the way to the highest good for man. On the other hand the communist has a quite different viewpoint of the greatest good for man. He feels that brotherhood will be attained in a democracy which works under the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number. In order to get their ideal they feel that the greatest good will justify any type of means towards achieving that good.

We can see in the American and the communist viewpoints a conflict and we are forced to the question

of what does the pragmatist mean by the principle of practicality; of utility; what does Dewey mean by brotherhood? Surely the humanism of Dewey does not give us a basis, a directive upon which to work. The principle of pragmatism is certainly conducive to activism but what about its application to religious activism?

Religion of necessity needs a unifying principle, a God. Such a principle will break down the divisions between the goals of different ideologies. Dewey defines God as, "the unity of all ends arousing us to desires and actions." 45. There is in this definition nothing which transcends man. The ideal of Dewey need not necessarily be the ideal of every other man. If mankind is to find unity there must be a goal which transcends man. Durante sums this point up well,

If the new test means that truth is that which has been tried, by experience and experiment, the answer is, of course. If it means that personal utility is a test of truth, the answer is, of course not; personal utility is merely personal utility; only universal permanent utility would constitute truth. 46.

A further disadvantage in pragmatism is the tychistic theory. James strongly supported this theory in relation to his theories of religion and in particular in relation to the theory of salvation. He felt that for practical life the chance of salvation was enough.

45. Ibid p144

46. Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy, Garden City Publishing Co., New York. 1927 p562.

Knudson examines this statement, gives it credit for what it is worth and then refutes it with the authority of history.

William James says that "for practical life at any rate the chance of salvation is enough. No fact in human nature is more characteristic than its willingness to live on a chance. The existence of the chance makes the difference...between a life of which the keynote is resignation and a life of which the keynote is hope." In this statement there is no doubt some truth. There is a good bit of the gambler in man. It is also true that there is an immense difference between entertaining the chance of salvation and giving it up altogether. But if the religious history of mankind makes anything clear, it is that men have not been content with the mere chance of salvation. They want something more, they want assurance. 47

The assurance which man desires can not be found in the answer of Dewey or James. It is an answer which must transcend history, which must transcend time. The very assurance man seeks in the elimination of chance. Chance here does not mean the spirit of adventure but rather the lack of determination and purpose in the life of man and of the universe. Man wishes to embrace a unity which will give him the power of fitting all apparently chance happenings into a pattern.

The problems which confront man in gaining this unity are two. First of all man must have a knowledge of his own nature so that he may gauge his capabilities in achieving his goal. Second, he must have some means whereby he may know his ideal or his God which transcends

47. Albert C. Knudson, Present Tendencies in Religious Thought, p86.

man. Both these problems require an answer which is at once transcendental and intelligible. Here again pragmatism fails to help us. Dewey does not believe that we know that which transcends humanity. James would say that each of us may experience a God but that it does not follow that two individuals experience the same God. In one instance we cannot transcend our own person and in the other we find no unity upon transcending our person. Pragmatism does not give to a ground for religion any unity, any universal or any permanent. Therefore pragmatism undermines the very fundamentals of religion and serves as an enemy of religion in the true sense rather than as a ground for a religious activism.

The humanism and naturalism which the philosophy of Dewey recommends is one which seeks the fruits of religion without the religion.

The fatal defect in all this-world religion^s is that they try to get the fruits of religion without the religion. They are therefore condemned in advance to defeat. Religion as a social dynamic implies the supernatural. There is no real religion that does not in its faith transcend both nature and humanity. "The more-than human values of religion" are the distinctive and essential part of religion. 48

Another criticism of pragmatism for religious activism is its educational method. The educational method of pragmatism has already been mentioned. It is

48. Ibid p268.

found in Sunday Schools which teach the gospel through seeing it in action. It is found on the adult level in sermons based on the idea that one is a Christian if he lives his beliefs; one is a Christian if he has proved the worth of the gospel in his life whether or not he knows what principles or doctrines belong to Christianity. This pragmatic principle of education has not proved of supreme value. Certainly a recognition of a real value in the pragmatic principle of education must be made but as a basic principle of education in religious fields it is not adequate.

Today the secular pressures impinge upon man for six days a week and for most of the seventh with the exception of two hours at the most. The process of assimilation of truth through seeing the gospel in action cannot take deep root with but two hours a week. The pragmatic grasp of Christianity gives one a working knowledge of its teachings in certain situations. However, when one has not a sound hold of the basic tenets of the Christian faith they cannot apply their faith to new and varied situations. The pragmatic grasp of Christianity is really a Christianity which is an opiate. It fills one department of life and that a minor department. The pragmatic grasp of Christianity is not one in which man has surrendered his life to the

service of his God.

It would appear that the case against pragmatism as a philosophic ground for religious activism is so strong that we must discard pragmatism altogether in connection with religion. This does not follow. We shall see the use of pragmatism in religion upon establishing our needed basis for religious activism.

The essentials of a ground for religious activism are found in a religion which has an authority transcending history. There are certain characteristics desired of this authority. It is necessary that this authority or God may be known and that man may have a clear understanding of the goal to which he is to work in order to find brotherhood. Man must also look to that authority to get an objective viewpoint of his own nature, his own capabilities of following the given pattern. These essentials are found in the basic tenets of the Christian religion.

The authority of the Christian religion is a God which is revealed in a person both human and divine. He is revealed through His intervention into history in the form of a Man who lived, worked and taught principles which will lead man to that brotherhood which is in line with his essential nature. Through His victory over death this Leader transcended history and gave man the basis for a real faith in salvation and life after death.

Through His very presence we realize that it is man's nature to be of a God that transcends history. Man is made in the image of God. Through His words man recognizes his sin but does so with the hope of repentance which turns him toward higher levels. Through this Divine-Man, men may know of God, about God, have faith in God and experience with God. He may gain a unifying principle into which he may fit the patterns of this life and this world.

E.O. James in his book on the 'Social Function of Religion' comes to conclusion which give support to our criticism of pragmatism and to our preference for Christianity as a philosophic ground for religious activism.

To-day men everywhere are beginning to feel the need of a spiritual philosophy of life and the world which will meet their deepest needs answer the searching questionst that perplex them and give them an assurance of strength and direction here and hereafter. In a distracted age religion will achieve its purpose and function only if itx is presented, not as an ethical ideal or aspiration, not as an intellectual proposition or pragmatic system, not even as an evangelical acceptance of Christ as Saviour and King; in short, not as anything less than the inbreaking on human history of God Incarnate bringing to a world undone the gift of a new and endless life.49.

The ground of Christianity sounds at first simple and sounds very much like an absolutist, a final answer. Such is not the case. It is at this point that we find the real value of pragmatism in religion. There is a diffidulty in the Christian religion which has taken the energies of man for two thousand years without being resolved.

49. E.O. James, The Social Function of Religion? London, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd. 1940. p307.

This difficulty is one of interpretation and of application. There are periods in which man has interpreted Christianity as a religion which veers away from intellectual discovery. a religion which rests upon its laurels finding salvation in an acceptance of the man, Jesus Christ, without connecting the acceptance to active life here and now.

There are Christians who interpret their religion as one which gives them an absolute answer and the result is a stagnation of human striving, human progress. Such interpretations are in danger of forgetting man and his troubles altogether and it is at this point that the pragmatic philosophy comes to the aid of Christianity.

A specific example is found in the criticism of creeds by both James and Dewey. Such a criticism has made the church in this 20th century examine the value of creeds. Certainly no religion is valid for man which finds creeds as ends in themselves. Religion must use creeds only as a means to an end.

Then most important of all pragmatism has made the Christian Community aware of its own inherent pragmatic principles. "If we are to have a social philosophy capable of filling the gap between current Christian idealism and the necessities of world-government we must find ways of using these self-regarding impulses

for the improvement of man's lot."50 The influence of the pragmatic temper is clearly seen therefore and its value recognized. Pragmatists can certainly not speak of Christians who are attempting to bridge this gap through religious activism as tender minded absolutists.

The Christian community is now recognizing the necessity of becoming tough minded relativists just as the pragmatists.

On the application of the principles of Jesus to our society, socially minded Christians now tend to divide into "absolutists" and "relativists," The absolutists hold that no conduct incompatible with the direct observance of the law of love, for instance, is permissible to the Christian. The relativists hold that in actual experience these principles emphasized by Christians are sometimes in conflict with other principles also essential to human life, so that no one principle should be applied to the exclusion of others.51.

The Christians just as the pragmatists are faced with, "the conflict of discovery, And the dread interval between the question and answer." 52. That part of the Christian community which is interpreting the gospel as a totalitarian challenge is realizing along with all men today the complexity of the achievement of a common goal. Men under this pattern are experiencing the wonder of knowledge in all fields and are receiving a greater appreciation of the problems in this world of paradoxes. However the vastness of the task at hand is not frustrating ~~to the Christian because of the eternity consciousness which~~

50. Albert C. Knudson, Present Tendencies in Religious Thought, p356.

51. Ibid p354.

52. M. Louise Haskins, "Words", Smoking Flax, London, Hodder & Stoughton 1942 Pp124 p94.

to the Christian because of the eternity consciousness which he gains from his understanding of God. The Christian of the relativist nature realized that it is in his very nature to strive for truth in all areas of life. And yet he does not forget that in life there is a super-empirical experience,

‡super-rational reason, and a super-utilitarian utility, all of which are realized in religion.

It is this fact that accounts for the presistence of religion in the modern world and that so baffles the unbeliever. A recent writer in the Rationalist Press Association annual thus expresses the difficulty in which he finds himself. "Th gospel miracles," he says, "are the veriest trifles compared with the authentic, undeniabel miracle of Christianity's mere existence....Subjected to a bombardment of unexampled violence from every point of the material and moral universe, it shows never a sign of surrender.... Blown sky-high to-day, it presents an unbroken and smiling surface tomorrow....No other religion, be it remembered, is subjected to anything like the same ordeal....It is the survival of Christianity in the realistic atmosphere of the West that is such an amazing and impressive phenomenon. Defenses it has non; its last bastions were pulverized at least a generation ago. But still it rears its head, serene, arrogant, undismayed....It is just here that we find ourselves face to face with the miracle. Discredited beyond expression-historically, intellectually, morally bankrupt---Christianity is nevertheless as prosperous to all appearances as ever it was." In the face of this fact it would seem necessary to conclude either that man is a hoelessly irrational being or that there are depths to rason which the rationalist has not fathomed. The latter conclusion is the one to which post-Kantian thought has been steadily moving, and in the light of it Christianity need have no fear asit contemplates the futnre.53

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