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Church?



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Why Should a Young Man Support the Church?

SUPPORT of the church is not a subject to be brushed one side with a wave of the hand, as Podsnap vanquished his opponents, nor one to be dismissed with a joke as to the stupidity of the preacher. It is one of the questions which necessarily confronts every man. Like the questions, Shall I be a good citizen? Shall I be a good son or husband? so the question, Shall I be a good churchman? cannot be blinked out of sight. The church is as much a permanent institution in the world as the State or the family. To be indifferent to it is as unreasonable as to ignore one's obligations to his country or to his mother. I am not speaking now of any sect or any denomination. I am not arguing as a Protestant, a Catholic or a Jew. There is some church that stands before every man who thinks as *the* church, whether it is the great cathedral with vaulted aisles and solemn cloisters, or the little pine board meeting-house among the hills.

Churches are Treasure-Houses

The church, too, is more to every man than the meeting-house, whether it be of hewn stone or unhewn logs. It is the treasure-house of noble traditions, of high ideals, of great memories. It is the dwelling place of uplifting aspirations and ennobling hopes. It is made holy by the worship of innumerable multitudes.

Over the door of the great Buddhist temple at Kamakura, Japan, is this inscription said to have been placed there by Sir Edwin Arnold:

“Stranger, whosoever thou art and whatsoever thy creed, when thou enterest this sanctuary, remember thou treadest upon ground hallowed by the worship of ages. This is the temple of Buddha and should be entered with reverence.”

I always take off my hat in a heathen temple as well as in a Christian church, for it, too, has been hallowed by the worship of devout hearts.

The church should receive the support of every worthy young man because of the ideals for which it stands as well as for what it actually is. “Let us raise a standard,” said George Washington, “to which the wise and honest can repair. The event is in the hand of God.”

This noble sentiment is thought worthy of enduring record on the great memorial arch in New York City which commemorates the one hundredth anniversary of President Washington's inauguration. The government which Washington established has come short of his ideals, but it has a standard of liberty and righteousness which has attracted the wise and honest for more than a hundred years.

What if it Does Fall Short of its Ideal

The church may often fall short of its ideals, but it, too, has raised a standard of pure living, of charity, of heroism, of love which has attracted the wise and honest in all the ages. Where else do we find such a standard? Certainly not in politics, which is proverbially shifty and shallow; certainly not in business, for the first principle of competition, which is said to be the life of trade, is to look out for number one. Certainly not in society as at present constituted. One would be relegated to the ranks of the funny paragrapher who should seriously argue for its high ideals.

But here is an organization that calls itself

the church that says boldly: "My ideal is to minister, not to be ministered unto; my aim is to comfort the sorrowful, to feed the hungry, to visit the prisoner, to minister to the sick." Here is a society of men that says: "My purpose is to lift up the world and make it a better place for every man, woman and child." This standard itself, unless it is a sham and a decoy, ought to attract every generous young man.

But perhaps my reader will say: "What is the use of having a standard if the army does not rally around it? What does an ideal count for if it is never realized? It is all very well to talk of noble purposes, but I want to see them materialize. As an actual fact, the church is divided and sordid. It bids for a mountebank in the pulpit and a millionaire in the pew. It welcomes the man with the gold ring and tells the tramp to stand outside. It quarrels with its neighbors over a petty matter of doctrine or polity and strives to build itself up at the expense of its rivals. It crowds itself in where it is not needed, and starves its preacher, and disgraces its Master with its unworthy jealousies. Its ideal may be all right, but I am more concerned with actual facts. I take things as I find them."

No Other Such Force in the World

Well, I will accept your chosen ground, my friend, and venture to say that with all its catalogue of faults there is to-day no such uplifting, regenerating force in the world as the church. The American Republic has fallen short of Washington's ideal, and of the ideal of many a lesser patriot, but to it wise and honest men have repaired, and will repair, because its best men are seeking to make its ideal real. So it is with the church. With tenfold emphasis it can be said. The best men are striving to realize its highest ideal. When they have fully succeeded there will be no need of the church, for the millennium will have come. But even to-day, far off as the millennium seems, what good cause does not appeal to the church? A hospital is to be built or supported. A church collection is the first thing suggested. A needy family is to be relieved. In nine cases out of ten it is the church visitor who investigates the case and brings succor. India calls aloud for aid for her famine-stricken millions. It is the church that largely gives voice to the call of the church people who respond to it. Armenia spreads out her poor, gaunt hands for help. It is through

the churches that people see the piteous gesture and send help for at least some of her homeless orphans. Vast continents like Africa are in intellectual and spiritual darkness—"darkness that might be felt." The church first realizes this darkness, appreciates its horror, and sends men like Livingstone, and Moffat, and Paton, and thousands of other true men and women with their torches to enlighten it.

Churches Need the Young Men

Now the church that does all this is no automatic machine wound up and set going to do its work through all the ages. It has no corporate life aside from the men and women who compose its membership. The church is a body of like-minded people banded together for service. It is powerful and efficient in exact proportion to the power and efficiency of its individual members. It needs every earnest young man. It can use to advantage every ounce of his strength. If a generous man saw an overloaded horse straining up a hill that was too much for it he would be moved to put his shoulder to the wheel. Here is an institution that stands for every good cause; an organization that is struggling up

the Hill Difficulty because it has the burdens of humanity upon its shoulders. It asks the aid of all in carrying these burdens, and its strongest argument and appeal is that it needs help.

It is a fair and honest question which every honest man will be willing to face, "What am I doing to keep the church alive and make it more effective?" What if the church is imperfect? The narrower the church the more he is needed to broaden it. The less charity it has the more it needs the increment of the charity he will bring. Where else will he go to do the work that the world desperately needs to have done? There is no society, no lodge, no cult that pretends to do for the world what the church is doing.

Many Men Do Not Support the Church

A few months ago I spent a night in the monastery on the great St. Bernard Pass, high up among the clouds. A good room, an excellent bed, and a generous dinner and breakfast were given to all wayfarers, and nearly a hundred travelers passed that night upon the mountain's top in this hospitable monastery. No charge was made for the good cheer, but every

one put into a strong box in the chapel whatever he pleased. I was told—to the shame of human nature be it said—that very few travelers put into the box as much as they would pay for accommodations of the same grade at a hotel, and that the contributions in the course of a year do not nearly pay for the cost of the raw material used in feeding the guests.

So it is with many men who receive all the benefits a church can bestow in a well-ordered community, and never pay a penny toward its support, nor lift a finger to carry on its work. Every needy man, woman and child in the remotest corner of the world; every cripple in a hospital at home; every orphan and outcast who might or would be helped if the church had more power and wealth at its disposal, every good cause that needs assistance, every wrong that needs resistance, appeals to the young man to throw in his lot with the church to make it nobler, purer, more efficient in righting this old world's wrongs and hastening the coming of the better day.

If the church needs the young man for the world's sake the young man no less needs the church for his own sake. The national flag of

Korea represents two intertwined figures of red and blue on a white background. The initiated say that these figures represent the principles of good and evil, of light and darkness, in their interminable struggle for the mastery, each trying to swallow and destroy the other. Such a flag might be the personal ensign of every young man, for such a conflict is always going on within. The church with all its defects is his great ally in this fight, for its ideals, its precepts, its influence are all on the side of light and right. The man who forsakes the church deliberately forsakes his best ally.

What the Church Does for Men

It is worth while, too, to consider the company to which the church introduces the young man as he enters its service. The church of his choice may worship in a very modest, shabby little edifice, but it contains in itself the suggestion of the greatest ideas, and may arouse within him all the most exalted aspirations that reared Cologne Cathedral or Westminster Abbey. The noblest poetry in stone and mortar has been lavished upon the church. The greatest master-

pieces of painting and sculpture have been inspired by the church, and wrought to adorn the church. The young man who abandons the church voluntarily cuts himself off from the most exalted thoughts that can enter the human heart. He puts himself out of the company of Raphael and Rubens, and Thorwaldsen when he might live in the atmosphere that made them great.

At the very threshold of the church, before he enters its doors, he is met by the world's great architects who have lavished their best genius upon spire and buttress, cornice and architrave, not upon his church building, perhaps, but men inspired by the great ideas that have built his church and every other church. If Michael Angelo, and Sir Christopher Wren, and Inigo Jones welcome him at the door, Mendelssohn, and Beethoven, and Bach greet him as he enters. The organ may be spavined and wind-galled. The choir may be an aggregation of tuneless tyros, but if the young man has brought any worshipful music in his soul into the church the same uplifting sentiments that inspired the "Messiah" and "Elijah" will sweep the chords of his heart as the organist touches the

keys, or as the choir clears its collective throat and sings "Old Hundred."

He Will Find Himself in Good Company

But the church-going young man finds even better company within the church than Mendelssohn, and Bach, and Charles Wesley, and Ray Palmer. He comes near to David, and Isaiah, and to Jesus Christ. He will repeat the most beautiful lyric that was ever sung when he joins in the twenty-third Psalm. If the minister turns to the book of Job he will hear read the greatest tragedy of history, a tragedy which propounds and answers the question, "Why men suffer?"

If the morning lesson should be from Jeremiah, lugubrious and pessimistic as this prophet is popularly supposed to be, the young man would perhaps be surprised to find that he was listening to a young man of his own age, whose whole burden was the very lesson of patriotism and good citizenship which we need to learn to-day in our boss-ridden cities. He would be surprised to find that this same Jeremiah was a brilliant and racy writer, who had uttered many phrases that are still current coin. Jeremiah it was who originated the simile of the

“Ethiopian’s skin” and the “leopard’s spots”; who wrote, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge”; who spoke of those who cry “Peace, peace; when there is no peace.”

If again the minister turns to the New Testament our church-goer will hear perhaps from the world’s greatest philosopher—a man named Paul, who was once called Saul—or, best of all, from Him of whom it was said, “Never man spake like this man.”

Men Who Have Supported the Church

Whether the minister is eloquent or dull, breezy or prosy, learned or shallow, is a secondary matter. The church introduces a young man to the best men in all the ages, the best poets, painters, singers and thinkers. Here, too, ranged on the side of the church are the martyrs and the heroes, from Stephen to the last brave missionary who perished at Pao Ting Fu. To the church their allegiance has been given. For her support they have lived. For her glory and honor they have died. Their lives appeal to every noble sentiment in every generous heart. To them, too, the church

introduces its adherents and inscribes their names if they are worthy on the same heroic page. To get into such company, to breathe such an atmosphere, is indeed worth while.