

Modern Christianity at Work In the Country<sup>1</sup>

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Words—Symbols

Illusive—Religion  
Shell game—Cynic

Modern  
Christianity  
Religion. Basic fact of life, underlying all.  
Jung. Eternal aspect  
Mumford. Concrete expression in definite time and place

Petersham  
Three Churches  
Orthodox  
St. Peter's: Relations  
First Congregational Parish. Unitarian in Petersham  
190; 2/5<sup>2</sup>

History, Church of Christ in Petersham  
Gathered 1738. 16 men. Congregational polity.

Mumford: three divisions  
Family. What are we doing and what may be results.  
Importance of mating.  
Weddings.  
Routine.  
Flowers  
Reading of names at Christmas  
Church-School parties; social

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<sup>1</sup> A full text follows this outline. In a note on the manuscript Earl Davis has written, "This is an outline that I attempt to follow in speaking. E.C.D."

<sup>2</sup> From the text it would appear that these numbers refer to average membership (190) and proportion of the population of Petersham (2/5) ministered to by the First Congregational Parish Church.

High School parties  
Joining Church  
A trace of deepening interest  
Public Worship  
Renewal of Faith in the land  
Contribution of Country to Church to waning place of  
worship.  
Closeness to life processes.  
Renewal of Faith in self.  
Influence of Church on persons and community.  
Contributions of ministers in past.

### Modern Christianity at Work In the Country

Earl C. Davis

Words are symbols through the use of which one person seeks to arouse in the mind of another emotions, pictures and thoughts similar to those that exist in his own mind. Words are very illusive, none more so than the word "religion," which lurks in the background of the words, "modern Christianity." The use of that word sometimes suggests the sleek gentleman at the country fair with his little table, three shells and the illusive pea. "Under which shell, my friends, is the pea. Place your money." There are many shells on this table of the Modern World under which, it is hinted, this illusive thing religion may be found. One hears the cynic, standing by, say, "There is no pea at all. This whole game of religion is a shell game, just a clever and crooked device to allure whatever wealth of mind or money available into the hands of the Church." This is a very brutal way of staging an attitude of mind that one frequently comes in contact with. In fact, the existence of such an attitude offers a legitimate reason for the consideration of this subject, "Modern Christianity at Work in the Country."

Having undertaken this task, I had to face the very embarrassing fact that my experience as minister of a country church is limited to one period of eleven years in one community. In view of that fact I am compelled to be

very concrete and use the little microcosm world of Petersham, and the First Congregational Parish (Unitarian) in Petersham as the place of such experience and observation as may be back of my remarks.

Also you should be warned of a conviction, or a prejudice, of mine to the effect that religion is at work in our age in a more profound and searching manner than in any known period of history, unless, perchance you wish to trace the stream of religious thought and practice in the Modern World to springs of thought and action that emerged to the surface of life as the Roman Empire crumbled.

The late Mr. Justice Holmes was accustomed to say, "We must think things, not words."<sup>3</sup> What facts, then, forces, or influences in our times are symbolized by the word, "Modern," the word, "Christianity," and the word "religion," as used this evening?

I use the word "modern," not in the sense of being up-to-date, or as belonging to the twentieth century, or the year 1944, but rather as being germane to, and at home in that conception of life and the universe which we have been discovering, describing, and interpreting, with the process still going on, in terms of an age of science.

Likewise, the word "Christianity" is used as a symbol of an interpretation of religion in which, running through all its forms, there is a continuing element that is at home in and germane to, the modern world. So far as forms and mental attitudes are concerned, it seems fair to say that in the Old World of the Middle ages, away from which we are moving, the fundamental assumption was that religion, and in particular, Christianity, was a revelation, entrusted to an authoritarian institution, that commanded obedience. In contrast, the characteristic [modern] attitude is that of discovery, freedom and persuasion.

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<sup>3</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841-1935); supreme court justice from 1902 until 1932. He wrote, "We must think things not words, or at least we must constantly translate our words into the facts for which they stand, if we are to keep to the real and the true." in his 1899 *Harvard Law Review* article, "Law in Science and Science in Law," Vol. XII, No. 7, February 25, 1899, p. 460.

In our Modern World the word religion becomes a symbol for the sense of relationship that obtains in the nature of things between a conscious human being and his environment, whether in its immediate setting or in its total aspect of time and space. The closing words of Jung's *Modern Man in Search of His Soul* give a most illuminating suggestion of religion as an inherent and eternal fact in human history.

The Living Spirit grows and even outgrows its earlier forms of expression; it freely chooses the men in whom it lives and who proclaim it. This Living Spirit is eternally renewed and pursues its goal in manifold and inconceivable ways throughout the history of mankind. Measured against it, the names and forms which men have given it mean little enough. They are only the changing leaves and blossoms on the stem of the eternal tree.<sup>4</sup>

How profoundly true, and yet how easily the mind turns to the familiar words, "The kingdom of God is within you;"<sup>5</sup> "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us;"<sup>6</sup> "know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you."<sup>7</sup> Whatever the words or the forms used, the word "religion" is a symbol of a basic fact of human life, not to be evaded or side-stepped.

Another important aspect of religion is the way in which it finds expression in a given age and place, and the channels of human relations through which that expression becomes a vital force. In 1940 Lewis Mumford published a book called *Faith for Living*. One paragraph, partly by direct statement, and partly by implication, has much to say on matters of religion under consideration. "There are three areas," he says,

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<sup>4</sup> Carl Jung (1875-1961), Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology. His book of essays, *Modern Man in Search of His Soul*, was first published in 1933. This quote is from essay 10, "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man," page 250 of the W.S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes translation.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 17:21.

<sup>6</sup> John 1:14.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16.

where a swift renewal in faith and act and deed, must take place. These are the areas that have always been life-sustaining, life-preserving, and life-forwarding. One is the family. The other is the land, and the third is the self. These three areas interlock and interpenetrate; and what is more they bottom all our institutions, our schools and our factories, and our churches; our ideals of liberty and justice and goodness and beauty. Without a revamping of ideas and practices in these areas, without making them central, our efforts to preserve a civilized social order will be feeble and hollow, and our belated sacrifices will be vain (page 203).<sup>8</sup>

That is a rather searching statement. Having in mind the entire paragraph, substitute the word "Religion" in place of five words, "Faith and act and deed" and the first sentence would read, "There are three areas, in particular, where a swift renewal in Religion must take place. These are the areas that have always been life-sustaining, life-preserving, and life-forwarding." The family, the land, and the self.

Here, then, is the hint as to the nature and place of religion in man's struggle for existence. It is a symbol, weighted with all the imponderables, experiences and values of human history, a symbolic word for that "Faith for Living," the compelling and irresistible dynamic urge, that "Living Spirit" that we feel in ourselves, that we project as cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night leading and alluring us through history to a destiny we cannot apprehend. This driving "Living Spirit" makes us aware of life within and life without, full, abundant, passionate, universal, and creative. It creates, destroys, and recreates, forever fashioning itself anew, forever leaving its dead leaves behind to enrich the soil of human life, reabsorbing enriching material into its creative process. This, then, is religion, this inherent basic fact of human life. The most primitive human being, somewhat aware of Self, or the child at this moment just growing into

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<sup>8</sup> Lewis Mumford (1895-1990), American sociologist, historian and philosopher of technology. His book, *Faith for Living* was published by Harcourt, Brace and Co. in 1940.

consciousness of self and world, is dealing with the same basic fact of life as a Jesus of Nazareth in the Garden of Gethsemane, the eternal compulsion to discover the relation of any fact of life to the whole of things. "We are restless, O God, until we find rest in Thee."<sup>9</sup>

Emerging from this background of general considerations, we come to "The First Congregational Parish (Unitarian) in Petersham." That is our legal name, as a property holding, financially responsible Corporation in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The background observations are important. The vastitudes of space and time do come down to our own doors. All these forces and problems are to be found within this microcosmic world of Petersham.

We create our churches, and kindred institutions dedicated to the particular need of stimulating our awareness of life, discovering its nature, seeking to understand its meaning, and in some degree, transmitting the heritage of faith and wisdom. In this year, 1944, we as a unit consist of 190 odd members. Not all of these are residents of the town. Some live anywhere from 100 to 3,000 miles away, but are here some part of the year. Beyond the nucleus of legal members of the Church, are the children that belong to the families in the Parish, and all those who in varying degrees of interest make up the total of the town who look upon the First Church as the expression of whatever feeling or needs they have for that part of their religious life they associate with the Church. On the whole, I would say that 2/5ths or perhaps close to ½ of Petersham might be included among those who in one way or another might be ministered unto by the First Church.

There are two other churches in town. On the North Church, or Orthodox Congregational Church, which dates from the split of the Congregational order during the Unitarian Controversy. Our relations with that Church are most friendly. Union services three times each year during Holy Week, and for the past three years we have had a Union Communion Service held in the First Parish Church. Last Winter we united for a period of three months in union services. That will be repeated this year. Scarcely a trace

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<sup>9</sup> Saint Augustine (354-430) from his *Confessions*, 1,1.5.

is left of the issues that once seemed important enough to violate the fundamental principle of the Congregational Polity, and the deeper faith that, under freedom, truth will prevail.

Then we have as neighbor, St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church, ministered to by the Priest in Athol. There is a pathway between the two, worn by people who travel one way or the other for weddings, funerals, social events, and marriage connections.

Across the Common from our Church is a building which once housed a Baptist Church, witness of an orgy of sectarian efforts of a hundred and more years ago. Methodist, Universalists, and Baptists tried to invade the town, but with only fleeting success.

As a property owning corporation we have a very beautiful meeting house, with a fairly adequate basement arrangement that serves as a Parish House. We have a Parsonage and 3 ½ acres of land, which gives the minister all the physical exercise he needs. This real estate is carried on the town books at a total valuation of \$25,350.00. We like our property, and freely admit the beauty of our Meeting House. Also we have an endowment fund sufficient to keep us from exhausting all our energies raising money.

We have a standing in the community, not only as a result of history, but also because of contributions being made to the community life by people who make up the Church. The minister of The First Parish inherits a place in the community as a result of the quality and character of his predecessors, and carries certain responsibilities that have been more-or-less associated with his place in the town.

Subject to variations due to local conditions, I judge that the above is a picture of all country churches. But to get an idea of the long-range and subtle influence which a particular country church exerts upon the faith and practices of a community, one must have an idea of the years that have made it.

There are three things about the history of the Church in Petersham that have a decided bearing on its present relatively healthy condition. It was gathered in October 1738 by sixteen men organizing themselves into the Church of Christ in Nichewaug, changed in 1754 to The Church of Christ in Petersham. They elected their own officers, and signed a covenant that puts the signers among the liberals of their day. Aaron Whitney was their minister from 1738 to 1775, until relations were severed over the issue of the Revolution. He was an able man, distinguished for his personal integrity, both as a minister and man, and for his wisdom and aggressive work as a farmer. Like other Massachusetts churches, this Church of Christ in Petersham followed the pure Congregational Polity, an institution organized to interpret religion in terms of the Christian tradition within the town of Petersham, and to have fellowship with similar organizations elsewhere. They claimed and exercised all the rights and responsibilities of a Church universal that appealed to them as valid. They were subject to no other ecclesiastical body, and submitted only to the authority of their God as they saw him revealed in Christ and transmitted in the Christian tradition. While the name of the Church in Petersham has been changed, it has preserved the form, and I believe, the spirit of the Congregational Polity of that Church of Christ in Petersham. One of my convictions, or prejudices, is that the tradition of Congregational polity is the most precious factor in our heritage.

Churches, like individuals, plod along through periods of routine, more-or-less faithful attention to the ordinary chores of life. Then suddenly a situation arises that really tests fiber and character, whether the church or the individual. Between the years 1802 and 1842 in Petersham, as roughly during the same period elsewhere, the Church of Christ in Petersham lived through three critical situations, and emerged bloody but unbowed, into the First Congregational Parish (Unitarian) in Petersham. The first of these episodes was a most distressing controversy, during the ministry of Festus Foster, over the issue as to how much salary should be paid the minister. In the background was the question of support of the Church by taxation. There was a strong anti-church party. The people most interested in the church came to the rescue,



supplementing the town subsidy by voluntary contribution, a method soon to become the established procedure in the state, and a fulfillment in fact of the Pilgrim concept of the separation of the Church and the State. A great step forward.

Then in 1819 Luther Willson, whose relations with the Church in Brooklyn, Connecticut had been severed by the action of the Council, and against the will of the Brooklyn Church, was called and installed in Petersham in accord with the congregational tradition. Within a very few years the Church of Christ in Petersham was split into two branches, Orthodox Congregational, and the First Parish. By the year 1842 had sold its Meeting house, located on the Common, to the town, and built a [new] Meeting House of its own in the site where the present Meeting House stands, and began its rather uneventful century as the First Congregational Parish (Unitarian) in Petersham. In my own mind, I still think of it as The Church of Christ in Petersham. Its doors are open to all who wish to enter; its ministry is to all who feel its need; while it would not intrude on the domain of another, its minister is minister to all. It has maintained its Congregational polity. Its record is clean, and on the whole it is fair to say it has been faithful to its implied obligation of enriching, interpreting, stimulating, and transmitting religious thought and practice. Measuring these influences is impossible.

Even in so small a town as Peterham I cannot speak for our two neighboring churches. From the point of view of current things, what may be worth considering will be grouped under three heads: the family; public worship; and the influence on the community.

Lewis Mumford calls for a speedy renewal of faith in the family on the ground that there is something serious happening to the family life of America. But from time immemorial the family has been the concern of religious life. Its literature is filled with poetry and imagery centering around the family. In the liturgical churches most, if not all the sacraments center around aspects of the family. For an affectionate term for deity we turn to "Our Father." The country church and the country town is

aware of all [the] terrific forces that are operating in the direction of undermining faith in the family; they even reach into the community, and leave their scar. Yes, people in the country know all about those scars; they know all about each other; and then some. But they know something more. They know something of the hazards of the mating process; they know, not too clearly, but in a half-understood way, that the whole superstructure of social life has been created to provide opportunity for youth and maid to take full measure of each other and find their proper adjustments in mating. At the present moment this minister of a country church has the faith to think that there is something prophetic of better ways stirring beneath the surface. These insidious forces of city-block life, of commercialized pleasure-movies, commercial dance halls, night clubs and their like-do not touch us directly, but they do have an effect, and one sees the effect in spots in the country town and the country church. Yet there is an undercurrent of another character. It may be just a hangover from the past, but I think, rather, that it is an increasingly healthy attitude of a deeply religious character that has been fostered by the healthy approach of the church to this whole matter of the family. Of late years an increasing number of young people have come to the First Church to be married. One couple comes just to stand before the communion table and beneath the pulpit, along with the minister of the church to be married. Another couple with just a brother of the groom and a sister of the bride. Another couple with just the four parents. Frequently the minister announces from the pulpit at morning service that on a given day John and Mary are coming to the church to be married. "You might be pleased to be present." Another young man says, "I would not feel that I were married, unless it were done here."

Of one wedding in the church recently I must tell you. It is not typical, but it has some interesting implications, especially about what we do. It illustrates that subtle and illusive influence that operates in the background of human relations. Several years ago a person in the Church came to me to ask if I thought it would be all right if the family put a tablet in the Church with the names of five generations who had been closely connected with its life from the early days down to 1917. In due time the tablet

appeared, very simple, almost austere. "Do you wish it dedicated?" I asked. "Oh, No." "May I speak of it at a morning service?" I continued. "Just say that it is there." Although the name on the tablet is no longer carried by any person living in Petersham, there are four generations of the family now connected with the Church.

Last summer one of that family came to me to say that her niece, who does not live in Petersham, but was born there, hopes to be married when her Marine returns from the Pacific. She wants to be married in the Petersham Church, and by its minister. Do you think that would be all right?

On Sunday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October this lovely girl of 19 and her Marine, with three years in the service, and almost two years in the Pacific area, 20 years old, with his earned stripes, personal citation for bravery, company citation, and three stars, indicating the battles fought, came to be married in the Church of her ancestors. It was simple, clean, beautiful, and for the moment it seemed as if all the imponderable forces of life were focused there. The vital affections and hopes of the young couple, the witnessing friends and families, even the tablet on the wall seemed to come to focus as the little Church in Petersham gave to this marriage the blessing and benediction of the Living God.

Observe the extent to which the customs, the literature, the imagery of religion, as interpreted in the tradition, center about this everyday fact of human life in the family relation. To use strictly ecclesiastical language, we may step from the sacrament of marriage to the sacrament of Baptism, to confirmation, to burial, all rooted in this idea and ideal of marriage. All our social life, even our church schools, our young people's societies, are in fact but efforts to provide a clean and wholesome atmosphere, and training for mating, and marriage and the transmission of the heritage of the race, under the conviction that this Living Spirit moves on a power that is sometimes called a Loving Father.

What does a church in the country do in the way of molding attitudes in this whole matter? First of all, when a child is born, flowers go to the mother and child from

the Alliance. Then at the Christmas season, at a special Vesper service the names and parents' names of all children born, or Christened in the Parish during the year are read in connection with the Birth Story in St. Luke's gospel. At the Christmas tree a gift of one dollar from the Church School or the Alliance goes to each child. Then as soon as the child is old enough he goes to the Church school. In spite of difficulties of transportation, of teaching personnel, and, above all, the difficulty of developing that attitude of mind that is implied in the word "worship," a rather successful Church School is maintained, which includes most of the children in the Parish.

It has become the established custom for all these young people of the Parish on the Sunday after they graduate from High School to join the Church. That seems to have a deeper meaning for them than they would admit. At least two boys, who were called into the service, and had to leave before the day when their classmates were to unite with the Church, came and signed the book and I gave them the right hand of fellowship in private.

In addition to the above customs, we provide some oversight of their social life. Parties on occasions for the younger children, in the vestry, Halloween, May Day, Valentine, and picnics out-of-doors. To these parties they invite children of other churches. That, I think, is very valuable. Christmas is a very important occasion, with a Parish Supper primarily for children, but sometimes we have two hundred there. That is followed by a Christmas tree.

At times dancing classes have been arranged for older children and young people, with a competent teacher. Since the war, under the direction of four women selected by the Alliance, two mothers of boys and two mothers of girls, small social dances have been conducted, open to all pupils of the High School and others whom they might wish to invite. From time-to-time boys would be called into the service, and this same group would have a special party for them, giving to each one thus going a small gift of remembrance, all this quite regardless of whether a boy were a member of the Parish or not.

One more item in a country Parish illustrates a contribution that may be made to the subtle influence of a church upon this whole matter of the family, as looked at from the point of view of religion. Ever since the year 1842 the First Parish has carried on what is known as the Petersham Levee, a supper, traditionally turkey, in the Church Vestry, followed by a dance in the Town Hall. Once during the Civil War, and for two years in this war, the Levee has been omitted. It is the big social event of the year, and largely attended, people coming from Boston even, to share in the gaiety. The important thing to be noted is that families come, young and old, father dancing with daughter, and mother with son. Conditions controlled by those who share in the pleasure of the occasion. That has made a contribution.

All these customs and methods that have become a part of the way in which religion works in a country church center about the family, mating, and domestic life. The question often comes to the front as one looks at the world and its trends: Are they survivals of the past to be left behind in the rapid process of change, or are they prophetic witness that a deepening and broadening conception of the family, coupled with growing suspicion that religion does underlie all life, and that, somehow, underneath all are everlasting arms? To put all this into a concrete single question: "Does Eleanor come to the Church of her ancestors for its blessing on her marriage just because it is a family emotion working in her mind, or does she come because she sees something deeper and far more interpenetrating in that adventurous companionship of marriage than just a mere social and civil contract? The life in a country church does suggest a positive, but qualified answer to this question. There is a promising and prophetic current moving through the woods and meadows of its varied life. Religion, as interpreted in the Christian tradition, is at work.

Such are a few hints as to the way in which a country church may influence family life. What may one say when it comes to its contributions to individuals and the community through the institution of public worship? Here there are many disturbing facts and factors to be noted. Seventy years ago the average attendance at services of public worship in the First Church was upward of 125 for the year,

by actual record. During the past eleven years, the average has been just about 50, with a marked falling off since the war. What does it all mean?

If you look at the facts from the point of view of statistics, and the satisfaction that a minister may derive from large and overflowing congregations, the record is most disquieting. On the other hand, if you look at it from the point of view [of] what is involved in the process of adjustment to the Modern World, there is something profoundly encouraging and prophetic about it. Based on every scrap of experience, many conversations, and much reading, all confirmed by the intimate associations in a country church, the persistent boycott of public worship is saying something profoundly important to such as have great concern that the churches fulfill their obligations in this age. To put their attitude, as I see it, in the first person plural, it would go something like this: "We are no longer concerned with religion as magic, or a device for appeasing a God of Magic; we are no longer concerned with sectarian quarrels, past or present; we somewhat resent the commercial and organizing pressure that churches are prone to pester us with; for better or worse we are engaged in the adventurous journey from a bondage to a disintegrating old world through a Red Sea of wars and revolutions, slogging through [a] gloomy forest of an industrial materialism, towards some promised land, where again we may feel the dignity of life, a sense of our own worth as human beings, and a family life that shall be the expression of a great heritage to be transmitted. What have you of the Christian tradition to contribute to our up-rooted lives? Have you something that will make us sing again? You cannot corral us into your fenced enclosures, but if you can make us feel the epic character of human life, that we are, after all, within the great tradition, then we can feel that the values we seek and the truths that you cherish will flow like two united streams, into the river of life."

All that may seem to you just words, but the intimate experiences in a country parish lend weight to the thought that the same human need and passion that once built the great cathedrals, and created such forms as the mass of the Roman Church to meet its need for feeling somewhat of the presence of eternal values, that same need and passion is

at work in this year, 1944, both in the lives of those who still share in public worship, and those who shy away from it. It's the Living Spirit at work, not a spectacular annual, but something that gives promise of another sturdy oak, drawing its sustenance from the rich soil of contemporary life, as well as from the deposits of the ages.

What things suggest, and nurture this thought? When Lewis Mumford speaks of the renewal of faith in the land, thoughtful country people know at once some of the implications of his suggestion. Lonely cellar holes in the woods, abandoned farms, and crumbling buildings tell the tale that is recorded in the census reports for a hundred years. On the other hand, this industrial and urban development has made returns that have had an effect on country life. The electric current, household equipment, power machinery, improved methods of transportation, the telephone, the radio, all these devices have had a marked effect on our ways of life, mental attitudes, and social customs. The base of our interests has been broadened, our outlook on the world has changed. We feel ourselves less isolated, more tied into the great currents of life that sweep on through the years.<sup>10</sup> One who looks at the contrasts from the point of view of religion at work, is disposed to say that the fact that we live so close to the life processes, that we work with them to earn our daily bread, that we feel directly their irresistible power; that they have standards and ways of their own to which we must submit, and in submitting to them earn our own sense of freedom and dignity, all of that comes to focus in vital public worship. Whatever may be the fate of an individual country church, each has a contribution to make, by bequest if it dies, or directly if it survives, its contribution is a sense of the awareness of life, in nature and in the human souls, as the foundation and function of Public Worship.

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<sup>10</sup> Here it seems that the following sentence was crossed out, "As the country, town feels the effects of these changes, and tries to measure its gains and losses, it is becoming more-and-more convinced that life in the country has a certain quality, or spiritual value if you wish, for which there is no equivalent in the city environment."

Not until you read the literature of religion with it in mind do you begin to realize how much of the experience and observation of life has been incorporated in its structure by the enriching process of [a] country environment. Who but one who knows and understands the strength and tenderness and the implications of the poetry of "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall now want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters; he restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." What does that mean to Boylston Street or State Street<sup>11</sup> or the sidewalks of New York? There is no record, but if you translate that into the language of modern psychology, you come close to saying exactly what Jung said about "The Living Spirit." The changing leaves on the eternal tress; surely good and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Somehow country church people absorb that thought and feeling.

In the church there is always a visible witness that the close tie with nature and human nature in the shape of flowers on the communion table. Much is made of them. They come from our own gardens. We know who planted and cared for them. We can detect [who] arranged them. They follow the seasons. In the autumn there will be the brilliant colorful foliage, at once a suggestion. That the leaves fade [and] drop off, but they are pushed off [by] the buds of next year. In the winter comes the evergreens, life eternal say they. In due time the pussy willow. These all mean something, product and witness of living processes in cooperation with which we work, to whose compelling standards we submit. Only one who felt the impact of this whole process could say:

So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit

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<sup>11</sup> Boylston and State streets are large streets in Boston, Massachusetts.



is brought forth, immediately he putteth in  
the sickle, because the harvest is come.<sup>12</sup>

All that is the very meat of life, however expressed in words. With the constant reminder of transient character, the blade, the ear, but the unbroken stream of life that is transmitted from generation to generation. Somehow the faith that even if the hurricane comes and destroys our stands of trees, thousands of seeds will be left in the soil to create a new forest. Man does not know how, but there is the eternal fact. Somehow that attitude finds its way into the atmosphere of worship in a country church, giving it a foundation of reality, and a place in human life. It suggest the words in the fourth gospel, "God is Spirit, or God is life, and they that worship him must worship him in life and in reality."<sup>13</sup>

During the year probably close to 200 different people come to the First Parish Church for public worship. The average for the past ten years has been fifty per Sunday. The high point of the year is Easter, sometimes going as high as 160 people, or more. But the attitude and atmosphere that they create is invariably an atmosphere of real and honest worship. Easter in a country church brings to a high all the varied values of life, not alone a release from the winter rest in nature, not alone the traces of new life appearing, not alone the promise of refilling the empty storage places of food and grain, but also a feeling of joy that again fruitful and intimate cooperations with the life forces is at hand. The rule of God is like that, and somehow it becomes the most natural thing in the world to feel that within [a] human being, whom you know and talk with and work with, this eternal life process, there is an indestructible element that we call immortality. Public worship is by its very nature an affair of the congregation. The minister has a very difficult function in the service. At times it makes him feel overpowered by it. There are two steps in the ascent to the hilltop of insight to which he must seek to climb where from the point of view of present conditions this minister holds that care should be taken. Reading of the Scripture is a reaching back in the past for a sense of

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<sup>12</sup> Mark 4:26-29.

<sup>13</sup> John 4:24.

relationship to all that is behind us. There a mellowness, and dignity and universality, an imponderable dignity about those passage from the Bible that we read. To bridge the chasm of the centuries, to say in effect that God not only was, but is, that he still speaks in human life, it seems to be almost an irresistible necessity to supplement the old by something comparatively modern, that says in substance that the God of our fathers is still our God.

Again in the sermon, both as teacher and preacher, the minister is under the terrible obligation of picking up the threads of life about him, tying them into the past out of which we have emerged, and somehow carry people to the point of feeling and understanding that all the great things that have been, and are remembered, have been thought or done by just ordinary human beings, that all the past and all the future are now flowing through our veins, that all these everyday labors, all these community ties, the church and family relations are just the same raw material out of which people have gleaned those standards and values that we cherish, and seek to transmit.

As the country church looks at the city church, after giving full recognition to the assets and limitations that each may have, the country church is disposed to assert that living so close to these natural processes, close to the soil, close to the land, both in ownership and labor, involves a factor in a healthy interpretation of religion in this age, especially in terms of the Christian tradition, for which there is no equivalent. Neither the flat, nor apartment, nor a penthouse is the equivalent of the homestead. The minister of a country church ventures the assertion that in the phrase, "A renewal of faith in the land," is to be found a clue to a renewal of faith in the institution of public worship.