

## The Work of a Church to-day -

In much of the discussion that we hear concerning ~~the~~ questions of ~~the~~ various and sundry "Crises" that "The Church" is facing, the mind unconsciously imagines a sheet scene of a June evening when some number of ~~choice~~ <sup>choice</sup> were, by the light of a flaming torch, expounding the particular virtues of his brand of collar buttons. I came across ~~and~~ a farago of such suggestive qualities the other day. It discloses unconsciously the real situation, and in reading it, one is not certain whether it is written in dead earnest by a man who sees not, or hears, or in a humorous bordering strain by some wog. <sup>or</sup> The average Protestant layman, though he may be a nominal church member or fervent soldier, does not realize the vast importance of the Church. He does not clearly see or fully appreciate the fact that it provides the chief motives, ideals, restraints, and discipline of life; that it stands guard over the sanctities of the home; that it safeguards property with protectors that no police force provides; that it contributes to the market place the moral influences most needed there; that it equips the court with principles of justice without which human society would

disolve; and that it constantly refreshes the<sup>2</sup>  
enthusiasms that support education. While  
hardly intended as such, ~~this~~<sup>it</sup> is the worst ~~clawing~~  
cruel criticism that I have of the church that  
I have heard from friend or foe. To make the  
church positively responsible for the chief  
vices, ideals, restraints and discipline of  
of modern life is really too much. If  
to this time the ~~worst~~<sup>worst by all</sup> criticisms that I have  
heard, have condemned the churches more  
for the neglect of duty, or cringing subserv-  
iency, than for aggressive and constructive  
work in producing the conditions of our  
social order to-day.

Yet ~~are we not~~ right here, can we not put  
our fingers upon one of the greatest sources  
of weakness, one of the greatest causes of en-  
tarnement, in all this complicated "crisis"  
of the church? ~~To be sure~~. These pretentious  
claims of the church; to be what no one institution  
of society can<sup>do</sup>; to have what no institution can  
have; to do what no one institution can do; make  
any institution seem ridiculous in the eyes of

world. Modesty may at times be a virtue. This assumption  
 that "The Church" or "a Church" has some "wofully on"  
 'motives, ideals, restraints, and discipline of life', and  
 that it can grind them out, and furnish them  
 ready made in standard sizes, to all corners, is  
 an unworthy survival of ~~Merichauism~~, ~~and~~  
~~This is~~ to use a phrase, once used by John Muir, ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> smell of  
 the Prof's Kitchen. Much nearer the truth is it, to  
 say that the Church, with all its virtues and  
 limitations, is ~~the product~~, not the cause  
 but the product of "the chief motives, ideals,  
 restraints, and discipline of life." The contribution  
 of the church ~~that is~~, and the church that has  
 been ~~to the Church~~ <sup>superiority</sup> that still ~~be~~, will ~~come~~  
~~and can come only in so far as it be made~~  
 and can be made only as its ~~miracles~~ ~~and~~  
 gleaned from <sup>human</sup> experiences, can throw light  
 upon the tasks that are before us, and <sup>only as</sup> the  
 noble lives, ~~that~~ whose very souls have gone into  
 its ~~structure~~ <sup>tremendous</sup> structure, become strengthening helps  
 to those who, to-day, in response to the "motives, ideals  
 restraints and disciplines of life" are building the  
~~movement~~ ~~of~~ the church that still ~~be~~. Last  
 years foliage becomes, through disintegration,

a fertilizing feeder for this year's beauty.

So also in ~~all~~ human life. Thus the institutions of the past assist to-day. Thus what we are of building to-day shall assist in the work of to-morrow. The

real <sup>ritual</sup> historic continuity is not a continuity of form ~~not~~ of institution, but of spirit. That which has been produced is now dead. ~~The~~

~~ritual living force that is building to-day is~~  
~~in any way not be connected with the dead~~  
~~force is not the product of essentially of spirit~~  
~~is not necessarily related to the church." In so~~  
~~far as it is connected with organized religion~~

The ritual living force that produces "our chief motives and ideals, restraints and discipline of life" is not in the institutions, but in the human life, that supports, and builds the institutions. ~~Humanity as a whole~~

~~that~~. Why not then, do away with this "one-for-all-ills" presumption, and state frankly and frankly what ~~may~~ a church is. It is an organization of men and women, who come together for the purpose of learning, co-ordinating and utilizing the higher and nobler values of human life. This

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fellowship of people has no special monopoly  
upon either truth, goodness, or beauty. They do  
not speak by any special prerogative, nor with  
any special authority. The vitality, the worth,  
the efficiency of this fellowship depends entirely  
and solely upon the moral and spiritual  
esprit-de-corp of membership. A hundred  
pleasure seekers and manna worshippers  
do not and cannot make a church to which  
they offer to belong a spiritual and vital  
organization, essential to the life of humanity.  
Even the glorious tradition, which many a dying  
church enjoys, is lost when entrusted to  
such hands. Not presumption, not formality,  
not ritualism, not wealth, <sup>not tradition</sup> nor any other  
~~accidental~~ external thing, constitutes the  
vitalizing life of a church, but just its but  
just the intensity, and nobility of its moral  
and spiritual purposes, registering the moral  
and spiritual purpose of its living members.  
determines the value of "The Church" as a church  
to human society. Human society does not  
carry dead values very long, and it does  
not cast aside real live values. If the

"The Church" or a church is not fulfilling a vital function in society, no amount of potent medicines administered can preserve it. By no means can it be said that ~~the~~ the "crisis" that confronts the Church involves the destinies of civilization. The same God spirit that produced the Church in the first, is working even until now. The task is not to preserve the church, but to discover, utilize, and conserve the <sup>enriching</sup> values of human life. If men attend to this nearby task, the organization through which that work is done may be <sup>called</sup> a church or it may not. Whatever its name it will perform the function that the churches at their best have performed in the past.

Now all this has been said, not to criticize or extol, condemn or praise "The Church" or a church, but simply to present a point of view. From the point of view thus suggested I want to make one or two observations. Those, ~~to~~ ~~into~~ ~~whose~~ hands who may chance to read this are presumably related in some way ~~to~~ churches with churches. I believe in the value of ~~the~~ the vital church life to the community. I believe that society would never

I have produced such a widespread institution  
as the whole church system is, unless there  
were a solid human need for it in the  
social economy, not alone their loyalty to an  
institution, but their deeper conviction that  
the real foundation of the church is that of  
human necessity. Bring home to them  
with great acuteness in these days of criticism and crisis, the  
task of determining just what that great  
human need is, and how it may be satis-  
fied. The question is two-fold. - First, what  
is the function of "the church", and second,  
how may "the church" or a church, fulfill  
that function?

In the above the phrase "the church" has been  
used frequently. It seems to have been assumed  
by many that "the church" is an organization that  
is in the world, and not of it; that it is a homo-  
genous entity that can have a conflict, program  
and a clearly defined purpose; that it can at will  
direct all its members constitutively with  
a unanimous consent upon any given task,  
and solve it as it will. A slight but

of reading in history, or even a few moments  
of careful reflection will seem to show that  
there never has been, and can hardly, in the  
nature of things, ever be such an institution  
as above contemplated. Churches are a part of  
the social economy. They enjoy the same  
advantages, and the same limitations as the  
society in which at any given time and place,  
they exist. "The Church" as an organized entity  
does not exist. There are churches, ~~but~~ these  
individual churches, ~~are~~ constitute a group  
of men and women, more or less like-minded  
and on substantially the same plane of moral  
and intellectual, and spiritual development. Per-  
chance many of these churches are grouped  
into a larger fellowship, more or less organically  
related. In the individual churches changes  
are constantly going on. New truth, new experience  
new values are constantly coming into ~~the~~ focus. Old forms  
old values are constantly on the wane. The same is true of  
groups. There is a constant tendency to re-grouping, at  
times the tendencies become very active, and old  
relations are severed, and new ones are made.  
Amid all the changing of the scenery, it seems

to me that the great underlying function of the church is to seek for the true values of human life, - to search for and discover, and conserve those pursuits, and ideals of life that are worthwhile. This is the unifying function of the church; this is the great need of human life for which the church exists in the social economy. At one time the society, speaking through the church organization we said that the great pursuit of life was to ~~obtain~~ secure the good will of God, through various sacrifices, - at another through formal praise and the sacraments; at still another time through the pursuit of eternal felicity. In our own time the great values are the higher attainments of human life in this world.

If two or three, or a dozen, or a hundred men and women enter into a fellowship for this purpose of determining, and realizing the deeper and abiding values of life, there is a church. But this is not a mere intellectual pursuit, or speculative investigation. It is not to determine in an abstract way, whether it is better to serve God than <sup>or</sup> man. It is

merely for the purpose of profounding the ideals of life, but much more of working those values into every-day aims. I may intellectually assent to the proposition that it is right and just to love my neighbor as myself, but of what value to either myself or my neighbor, or the world is that intellectual assent if I spend all my active hours in murders effort to gain advantage over my neighbor. The values, which serve in their value, if they do not become the real dominating guides and directors of practical conduct. There seems to be a notion abroad that any attempt to put a great value into practical operation, to make a serious attempt at realizing the ideal, is to descend that ideal. So the function of learning, <sup>and</sup> ~~surrounding~~ the values of life, has its terminus ad quem, not in the ideal, but in the real; to make the word flesh that it may dwell among us.

This task then involves the fulfillment of the function of the Church.