



WHAT THE CHURCH  
MEANS TO ME



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A FRANK CONFESSION AND A  
FRIENDLY ESTIMATE BY AN INSIDER

BY

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THE Church to me means all who, consciously or unconsciously, are forwarding God's kingdom on earth. In the broad definition of the Master it means "all those who are not against us." The way in which men associate for worship, or in which they consider it most remunerative to invest their efforts to forward the kingdom, gives them no right to arrogate to themselves the title of God's Church. Any body of men saying, "We are the Church," seems to me ridiculous.

If they try to exclude at the same time those who approach their Maker, or who are endeavoring to do faithfully the things Christ would approve, only in some other way, then they become offensive also. I am firmly convinced the world is coming to this view, and I



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am glad it is already beginning to express it. Through "the Church" the salvation of the world must come. I have no use whatever for the critic whose heart is set on her destruction or who muckrakes it for a revenue. By this I mean the Church Invisible, known only to God's Holy Spirit.

### STANDARDS WHICH CHRIST WOULD CONDEMN

The "offense" of the visible churches that tells most against them today in the minds of educated men is not worldliness or unfaithfulness; it is their inability to shake off their untenable position as judges of others. The "Church" in Jesus' day judged him unfit to live. Upon Luther, Wesley, and many of the best servants of the human race the churches to which they belonged passed similar sentences. Even the suggestion of the "holding-up-of-skirts," of this "I-am-holier-than-thou" attitude, because I think differently, is repellent and has not yet met the fate that certainly awaits it, before there can be

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a reign of universal peace. Science has taught us that doubt, quite as much as faith, leads to the apprehension of truth. There are countless men, skilled in the exact sciences and in scholarship, possessed of wealth and rank, who find it impossible to define their position in words, yet whose humility and charity make us love them, whose deeds are just such as those which have come down the ages as Jesus' own selection for the most convincing evidence of his Sonship of God. We all know today men of inferior attainments and lives who not only know themselves to be infallible, but haven't the grace to leave even such men alone, and who have interpreted their call to the "ministry" as simply a mandate to set every one else intellectually right. I know that that which is hidden from the wise can be revealed to babes, and that our talents—namely, social position, wealth, and brains—merely enlarge in God's sight our capacity for service, and therefore our responsibility. But I know also that the prizes of our high calling can be purchased only by our fidelity in

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following, and that involves other than intellectual processes.

### THE CASE OF THE WORKING MAN

As for the working man, to my mind if he doesn't join a visible church today it is simply because he doesn't see any good in it. The teachings of the Church's Master still appeal to him, but the churches to him don't stand for them. He has seen the visible churches, organized to perpetuate Christ's teaching, striving for centuries only after privilege, patronage, and political power. Was ever such a topsy-turvyism? Instead of being a bridge over the great gulf between wealth and poverty, the Church still savors to him too much of the "be content where you are" sentiment. To him she is insincere, and consequently his pew is empty. He doesn't want an insurance agency only for the next world; he wants a kingdom of righteousness, joy, and peace, first in this world, where Christ intended it to be, as well as in the next. Church authority can no longer compel his interest; she cannot compete as

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a popular entertainer; only the proof of her unselfish love in matters of everyday life can save her from becoming a useless hulk, stranded on the beach of time. Rainsford, Stelzle, and others have shown that the downtown churches need not close if the message is given in Christ's own undeniable way which the people can't misunderstand.

Though I do see the various churches just beginning to rouse themselves—no longer wholly absorbed in making every one say “shibboleth” with an “h,” still just as in politics the party machine becomes God, crushing truth and righteousness before it, so the church machine is only too often a Jugger-naut's car, destroying all faith in God and man. The machine has usurped the pedestal of Christ, as in Rome and Russia, and nearer home, if Judge Lindsey of Denver is to be believed. For there the very clergy of 145 out of 150 churches refused to come out boldly against dives and brothels that were defiling the girls and boys of the city of Denver, because they dared not endanger the interests of their machine.

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*Vox populi* was right. They were presumably afraid to take up the cross, which real fighting the devil involves as much today as it did in Judea centuries ago. Many, outside all churches, support hospitals, orphanages, soup kitchens, relief funds, and so forth. Big corporations and even heathen armies on the war path support Y. M. C. A. work, because that is a demonstratively valuable working factor. The church which is afraid of offending rich members cannot have a faith in God which is worth anything.

Thank God for all the illustrations of her direct watchful vitality that she does show. As, for instance, when the Christian Endeavorers fought the question of prize-fight moving-picture shows and won out—or when a Parkhurst fought bravely for a clean police force. Even if the world today does not vex itself so much as formerly about predestination, original sin, the “actual presence,” or even the correct mental attitude to insure heaven hereafter, the churches may surely count it as a product of their work that the people *do*

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trust God more simply for the past and future, and are more in earnest about securing justice for the downtrodden and the square deal in the present. In this they need as much as ever the Church's leading.

### WHAT MAKES THE CHURCH ATTRACTIVE

That which attracts to a church today is not higher criticism, elaborate ritual, hair-splitting creeds, but fearless fighting for public health, for good government, for righteous labor conditions, for clean courts of justice. It was the leader of a darky revival who, when asked why he didn't *sometimes* read the Old Testament, replied: "No, sah. Dem commandments just upset de whol' revival." There is no need that taking up politics and social questions should exclude the preaching of the Christ. Men will follow today a Kingsley and a Maurice, a Lincoln, a Beecher, a Brooks, or a Worcester as they will a Heney, a Hughes, or a Folk or any man in whom they see plainly

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reflected the unselfish love of the Christ.

Who cares, as a matter of fact, which way these men said their prayers? They may have been Catholic or Protestant, or in<sup>1</sup> honest doubt, but we love them and will follow them. To us they stand for real love to man, and so real faith in God; for true pluck and willingness to take up their cross. Oh, if every member of the churches and every wearer of "the cloth" realized the privilege of standing by every uplifting effort, and was always so valiant for truth as to make a Rueff or any agent of the devil occasionally think it worth while to take the risk of trying to kill them—as in the case of this same Lincoln, of Heney, of Lindsey, and of the Master—the world would recognize then that the Church *was* worth while, and there would be no discussing whether it was going to die out or not. A little physical shooting wouldn't hurt the Church. The world wants a Church Militant, not a backboneless intellectualism. Only the "great Church victorious" can be the "Church at rest."

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Nowhere is this fact more unanswerably demonstrated than in the missionary field. Faithlessness in this respect and fearfulness of expenditure, both of men and money in missionary work, have always stood in any church for choked channels of spiritual power, and subsequently spelled anæmia, atrophy, and death. Constant metabolism is as essential for spiritual life as physical. A church must die that doesn't use up and give out energy as surely as a physical body. The period of latent physical life is not long. God in his mercy has seemed to prolong latent spiritual life almost unduly in the case of some churches. Those who love the Church are breathing a little more freely because of the Laymen's Missionary Movement.

### LACK OF CLEARNESS

To me personally it is hard to know exactly what the Church has meant; it is hard to "know one's self." The attitude of practically all men's minds is to excuse their own shortcomings by attributing the cause elsewhere. Thus



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Paddy blames the Government for the hole in his trousers, just as he does for the typhoid resulting from the dump heap in front of his own door. When I first essayed to write on this subject, I several times tore up the manuscript, feeling that I had written that which was calculated to rend her at whose breast my own spirit had first found life-giving sustenance and afterwards wisdom, encouragement, and aid.

Yet history seems plainly to show that there have been times when the world would have been more Christian if the organizations to which men often limit the name of church had ceased to exist. I presume the experience we have all had with organizations calling themselves "the Church" has driven us, at times at least, to the same conclusions in our own day about those particular branches. But this bears no reference to the body of men who love Christ better than their own lives. They are really the Church, and mean everything to me, to the world outside, and to all aspirants to the dignity of the name of Christian.