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"WHY MEN DO NOT GO TO CHURCH."

THE alleged decrease in church attendance during the past few years has called forth much discussion, and many reasons have been offered for the phenomenon. The cause has been variously attributed to the church itself, to the individual, to society as a whole, and sometimes to all three. This latter view is that taken by Dr. Cortland Myers in a little book entitled "Why Men Do Not Go to Church." The author begins with the weaknesses of the church, and his most important arguments may be thus epitomized:

Men demand a church adapted to the dawning hours of a new century. Everywhere new conditions arise which have to be met, and the minister must see that he advances with the advance of civilization, and not remain in the old ruts. The intelligent application of the Gospel is what is more needed: usefulness is to be considered before attractiveness, and a true religious sentiment is to be awakened before many worldly comforts are thought of. The financial element in church life should not be a prominent factor, as it is in so many instances at the present time.

Again, if we consider the minister, and his power in the pulpit, sincerity must be at the heart of all that comes from him. Men are drawn by earnestness and honesty, and frankness, more than by the beauty and fragrance of flowers. Truth is what man wants, not the straining after effect, which results in verbosity, for he will come only to hear the unvarnished truth, red-hot from a courageous heart.

On the subject of courting the rich, and boasting of wealthy parishioners, Dr. Myers writes:

"In our great cities, up-town has its church magnificence, and down-town has its church reminiscence. The population in the poor districts has been increased by the thousands, while the churches have decreased for the thousands in a greater ratio. A gulf is fixed by traitorism to divinest truth. We have splendid buildings and able ministers and uncounted money, but we fail to reach the men, because we have run away from the place where most of the men live, and run away from the supreme mission of the church to seek and save the lost, and to recognize one of the lost to be just as valuable as the other. We discuss and mourn, but fail to act and remedy."

A positive theology, thinks Dr. Myers, with its unvarnished application to the common affairs of life, should replace the theory of evolution, which leads to adverse criticism of the Bible. When men go to church, they go to hear spiritual interpretation, as applied to themselves, and they do not care for individual criticism, which in most cases ends in doubt and skepticism. "The demand is for the Bible, not changed, but adapted." "With all the faults of this age," says Dr. Myers, "it admires reality, and hates 'cant' and hypocrisy." We are all fellow men, in a world of many evils, and the way we are to be aided spiritually is by the human touch, by what is commonly called personality, or personal magnetism. One of the great faults of the church is "the lack of real living brotherhood in church life"; outside, in this busy world, we see union in all branches; the church should stand for unity, because a disagreement "means empty pews." Dr. Meyers continues:

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"The cold world wants warm words, warm smiles, warm welcomes, warm hearts, warm prayers, and the warm atmosphere of the brotherhood of man in the place where they teach the fatherhood of God. There is another evil related to this one, or rather an expansion of it, in the lack of the brotherly relation, and of cooperation between the various churches. The world is not schooled in doctrinal distinctions, and can not easily recognize the necessity for church separation, and sometimes church opposition. No period in the world's history has witnessed more significant changes than this age in which we live. The tendency of the time in the political and business world alike is unquestionably toward consolidation and centralization and cooperation. The man who fails to recognize this fails in his undertaking. The church which fails to adapt itself to this characteristic of the age must also fail to reach the men of this age. Cooperation must be one of the watchwords of the church in the dawning hour of the twentieth century. Organizations have been multiplied, and even different denominations separated into more divisions, and religious efforts have been scattered and weakened, and fields have been neglected while others have been crowded, and no great and united effort has been made toward cooperation in spending money and utilizing effort to reach men. Denominations with vital principles should live, and can live, even if we destroy sectarianism and bigotry."

It is this division which has driven men away from church, says the writer. "All denominations should get together, as business concerns, and, in the spirit of the age, map out the work and utilize the force," and in so doing, "denominations need not mean less, but Christianity should mean more."

In his other chapters Dr. Myers discusses ethical and social defects in man, and in society. The first duty of the church, he writes, is toward man spiritually, and the church will become a benefit to human society only so far as it benefits the individual. But man's misunderstanding of society and of himself, where, firstly, the church can not enforce, and where, secondly, the individual is blind to his proper position in the world, leads to unjust criticism and narrow views. Many outward influences are to blame for the absence of church-goers. Home life also has suffered material changes. "The tendency in this age is toward the destruction of some of the essential features of home and home life. Our great centers of population are practically homeless. Families have an existence within a few square feet of space enclosed between brick and mortar, but they do not live in homes."

Among other faults of society, the author in his final chapter criticizes modern invention, as encroaching on the Sabbath day. He berates the Sunday newspaper, which he calls "the modern criminal," for "it vitiates literary tastes, deadens religious feeling, destroys desire for worship, and drives worshipers from the house of God."

Social clubs, the encroachment of the bicycle, the evils of the saloon, and the predominance of materialism over spiritual things also come in for their share of Dr. Myers's condemnation.