

What's Right With the Church

by Russell DeLong

The Church is the greatest institution in the world, and its preservation is essential to maintaining the benefits of a Christian society.

Scripture: Matthew 16:18, Acts 2:42, Romans 12:4, 1 Corinthians 12:27, Ephesians 4:16, Ephesians 5:25, Colossians 1:18, 1 Timothy 3:15, Hebrews 10:24, 1 Peter 2:5

Topics: "Church Revitalization", "Christian Heritage"

Description

Russell DeLong emphasizes the importance of recognizing the Church as the greatest institution in the world, highlighting its significant contributions economically, socially, intellectually, physically, culturally, morally, and spiritually. He challenges critics to focus on the positive aspects of the Church rather than magnifying its faults, urging individuals to support and strengthen the Church rather than tear it down. DeLong warns of the consequences of disconnecting American civilization from its Christian roots, stressing the need for individuals to return to God and the Church to preserve civilization and prevent moral decay.

Transcript

Scripture Reading -- St. Matthew 16:13-18

Text -- And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church;

and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

With all of its faults the Church is the greatest institution in the world. The Church at its

worst is so much better than any other institution at its best that there is no basis for comparison.

No one is more cognizant than I of the weaknesses of the modern Church. Such spots should be strengthened. But to accentuate the low points to the exclusion of the high is like pointing out the one black sheep in the flock of a hundred, forgetting the ninety-nine white sheep. It appears customary for critics to magnify one or two black marks against the Church and generalize that the entire Church is black. Instead of crying out constantly, "What's wrong with the Church?" why not reverse the process and ask, "What's right with the Church?" It might help our general perspective.

No one denies that there are some unworthy men affiliated with the Church. It would be

foolish to claim that all church members are genuine. Certainly there are hypocrites in the Church. But -- is it not true that there are hypocrites in all organizations of men whether that organization be educational, fraternal, business, or social? Why demand that religion be completely free of imperfect, insincere, hypocritical men? Why specialize on the exception and forget the mass of good, clean, sincere, honest church members?

It is one thing to criticize the Church; it is another thing to correct it. Tearing down the

greatest institution in the world without proposing constructive solutions is like kicking the crutches out from under a cripple, letting him sprawl on the ground helplessly.

It is much easier to criticize than correct, to tear down than to tone up, to destroy than to

rehabilitate. The Church is attacked by skeptics, infidels, and atheists, from without and by termites and parasites from within. Of course there are wrongs in the Church -- But there are so many more rights for every wrong that it is to pull the picture all out of focus and ruthlessly distort it to accentuate the wrongs and minimize the rights.

The Church has made an unequalled contribution to society:

1. Economically.
2. Socially.
3. Intellectually.
4. Physically.
5. Culturally.
6. Morally.
7. Spiritually.

Yes, the Church has made a sevenfold unique contribution.

I. Economical benefits.

The Church lays the foundation upon which business can be transacted safely and securely. Credit is based on confidence. Confidence is founded upon integrity. Integrity is guaranteed by religion. Wherever the Christian Church has gone business has prospered and flourished. Take the Church out of the community and you immediately lower real estate values. Who wants to live where there are no churches? Even selfish businessmen who denounce the Church and refuse to support it insist on living in communities where there are thriving, active churches. Why? Because there is less crime, less vandalism, less property destruction, fewer bad accounts, fewer murders and suicides in a Christian community.

Irreligious businessman, why don't you be consistent and play the game fairly? Support the thing that supports you, by your presence and your money. If you don't like the Church, why don't you go to Patagonia, Africa, or Russia and try to do business where you will not be bothered by the wrongs of the Church. You know, and every thinking man knows, that the Church from an economic standpoint, is the most valuable institution in the community.

II. Social contribution.

The Church raises the standard of living wherever it goes. One needs only to remember

frontier days or to view heathen countries to observe the low plane of living before the Church came. Wherever Christ has gone the people have risen above annual levels and approximated standards God designed for human beings. Cannibalism, cave-man stuff, cruelty, murder, disregard for womanhood have been transcended by Christian civilization.

The Church gives meaning to such terms as "mother," "mercy," and "fellowship." These are by-products of Christianity. They are unknown among heathen peoples.

III. Intellectual benefits.

The Church is the mother of education. The high plane of literacy and the universal

prevalence of schools in Christian countries is the result of the emphasis which the church placed upon education centuries ago. The Church sponsored great universities during the Middle Ages. The outstanding modern American universities and colleges, for the most part, were started by churches. Such is true of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Chicago, Boston, Oberlin, and many others. In fact, even today of the nearly 2,000 institutions of college level in the United States, two-thirds of them are sponsored by churches.

IV. Physical contribution.

Another child of the Church is the modern hospital. It has always been the Church which

has led the way in alleviating suffering and pain. Mercy, sympathy, altruism, have been attributes of the Church, resulting in the establishment of hundreds of hospitals. Medical and dental colleges, hospitals, dispensaries, and clinics have been furthered by the direct leadership of churches. Even today, most hospitals are under control of religious organizations.

V. Cultural benefits.

The Church has been the spearhead of culture along every line. The finer things of life have been made possible because of the leadership afforded by the Church. The great masterpieces of art were produced either by churchmen, or their subject matter was taken from the religious truths espoused by the Church.

Look at the array of names in the field of music and ask yourself the honest question - did the Church inspire and father such -- Beethoven, Bach, Brahms, Mozart, Handel, Haydn, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, and Gounod. Certainly one of the most outstanding of the masterpieces is Handel's "Messiah."

The fields of sculpture and painting are filled with men whose masterpieces were inspired

by the Church. Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo are representative of hundreds.

In the realm of literature suppose you discard all the great works which deal with religious subjects or which were inspired by the Church. Many of the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, and the other great masters would be destroyed.

Let the critic of the Church confront the fact that the Church has been the mother of the best in art, painting, music, and literature.

VI. Ethical contribution.

The Church has always given its blessing to any moral crusade. Morality is the handmaiden of religion. Religion gives the dynamic for ethical conduct. Where the Church has gone, morality has followed. When the Church has lost influence, the moral conditions have become deplorable. The Church raises the ethical standards of the community. Honesty, truthfulness, purity, and regard for the sanctity of life, have always been by-products of the Church. A member of our Army Air Force gave this testimony: "When we were shot down over a South Sea island, we were afraid of falling into the hands of head-hunters and man-eating savages. As we trudged through the underbrush, we saw smoke coming from a native village. We hesitated in our approach, but as we

were able to get a clearer vision we spotted the spire of a Christian church. When we saw that, we were relieved and thrilled, for we knew we need not fear. The church guaranteed our safety. Sure enough, the natives rushed out to meet us and bound up our wounds and nursed us back to health." Yes -- the Church changes communities and lifts the moral standards. Some would lead one to believe that civilization came first to the heathen and then came the Church. Oh no, first came the missionary with Christ, and then came the doctor, nurse, teacher, engineer -- as by-products of Christianity.

VII. Spiritual benefits.

Of course, the greatest and primary contribution which the Church has made to the race has been spiritual. It offers answers to man's greatest questions. Where? Who? What? Whence? Why? It offers a remedy for sin, a comfort for sorrow, and a hope beyond death.

Today there is a tendency to substitute lodges or service clubs for the Church. It is too true that the average professional man gives himself to his lodge, his service club, the Chamber of Commerce, and gives very little time or money to the Church. It is the Church that has made lodges possible. It is the Church that has guaranteed the continued existence of service clubs. It is the Church that has made commerce and business profitable. Don't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. Put first things first. Put first institutions first.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that we can have the wonderful by-products of

Christianity and discard Christianity itself. Such will ultimately drive us to paganism with the loss of all the acquired benefits of a Christian society. Beware! Take heed! If you would preserve your home, if you would guarantee the perpetuation of your business, if you would continue the high standards of living, if you would increase culture, if you would guarantee progress in music, art, and literature, take care to preserve the institution which makes such possible.

Our American civilization may get by for a time and enjoy the by-products of Christianity without paying the price our forefathers paid for religious freedom, but sooner or later our moral and business structure will crumble. It reminds me of my automobile. Suppose I am driving down the highway sixty miles an hour and then turn the ignition off, disconnecting the motor from the car. For a time I sail along more smoothly without vibration. It is glorious and velvety. But soon I begin to slow down and eventually will stop unless I turn the ignition on -- unless the motor and the drive shaft become connected. So it is with America -- we

may think we are getting along nicely and

smoothly without religion. It may appear we do better without the Church. We have disconnected the motor from the drive shaft. We have cut religion off from our civilization. We have forgotten God and disregarded the Church. We give ourselves to our lodges, service clubs, and pleasures. But -- We are slowing down. Crime is increasing alarmingly. Our children are going to the devil at a fast pace. Moral standards are all broken down. Selfishness, murder, suicide, burglary, and all manner of crimes are stalking the land.

Social service, education, and philosophy are impotent to meet the need.

My plea is: come back to God. Give yourself to His Church. Save civilization by giving your support to the Church and the Christian gospel.

American civilization and the Christian Church must become connected vitally. It is only as individual persons reaffirm their faith in the truths of the Church and place themselves in the hands of Christ that new life comes to the Church. Our forefathers paid the price for our glorious civilization. We are in danger of losing the benefits by our unwillingness to repent of our wrongdoing. America must return to God and the Church or face ruin and annihilation.

Such a return must begin in the hearts of millions of men and women. Christ is making a

strong plea to you this moment. He is knocking at your door personally, begging for admittance. Let the faith of your father and the religion of your mother become yours this hour. Do your part to save our civilization by first letting Christ save you. When He does you will become a member of His Church of which He is the head.

Prayer

O God of our fathers, we return to Thee for help in this hour of need. Our civilization is

tottering on the very brink of despair. The plans of men have failed. The benefits of our civilization are about to vanish. We have forgotten that God alone is the guarantor of the by-products of Christianity. We pray that millions of our people, particularly our business and professional people, may come back to Thee and let Christ into their hearts. Help us not to turn Thee away, for if we do, to whom else can we go? Thou art our only hope. Save us we pray. Amen.

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