

DR. HOLMES AND HIS WORLD WIDE CONGREGATION

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The dedication of the Community Church of New York on October 17, 1948, will rank among the memorable events of our time. The completion of the magnificent edifice, dedicated to the worship of God and service of man, is the climax of seventeen long years of uphill climb on the part of the members and friends of the Community Church and their beloved pastor, Rev. John Haynes Holmes.

While we rejoice in the completion of this splendid structure of bricks and mortar, of steel and cement, let us remind ourselves that the Church or the Meeting of Worship is not confined to a material structure. Wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of God and in the spirit of service to man, there we have a church or a meeting of worship. In that sense, people the world over have been building the Church or the Meeting of Worship ever since the emergence of the human mind upon this planet. That some of them have chosen to call their holy place of worship a temple (Hindus), a synagogue (Jews), a mosque (Muslims), or a church (Christians), is immaterial. The names and the rituals associated with man's cooperative quest for the good life have a significance, no doubt, within the cultural context. But the greatest common denominator of them all is Religion, which may be defined most satisfactorily as the cooperative quest for the good life by a group of people for each of its members.

Dr. Holmes' ministry of the Community Church is not only anchored in such a broad, truly catholic - that is to say, universal - concept of religion but it has also been a living expression of that concept of religion. The motto of the Community Church is not just an empty phrase nor a string of pretty words; my observations, associations and experiences with the Community Church for over a quarter of a century lead me to affirm the reality of the Church's motto: "Knowing not Sect, Class, Nation or Race, Welcomes Each to the Service of All." In what congregation in America, or anywhere else in the world, would you find Christians, Protestant as well as Catholic, Jews, Reformed as well as Orthodox, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists, Zoroastrians, Sikhs and Bahais, sitting side by side and worshipping the Common Father of us all? Such a representation of religious faith is an ordinary event, taken for granted, so far as the Community Church of New York is concerned. In some other place of worship a special event, a sort of attraction, would have to be arranged in order to bring together representatives of different faiths in a meeting of worship.

Within the wide fold of the Community Church there have been united in marriage Muslim and Catholic Christian, Hindu and Protestant Christian, Hindu and Jew, as well as Christian men and women. The blessings of Dr. Holmes and of the Community Church have gone to the newly born, the newly wed and the departed of every race and religion, nationality and creed, who have had association with the Community Church.

The Community Church is truly a fellowship of faiths. No one is called upon to forswear his religious loyalty: everyone is welcomed into the fellowship of the Church on the basis of worship of God and kinship of man. Constricting creeds and dogmas, which set men apart, are deliberately ruled out.

From the pulpit of the Community Church, you may hear readings from Emerson and Whitman, from Buddha and Gandhi, from Confucius and Loa-tze, from Moses and Zarathustra, just as readily and just as naturally as from Jesus and the Apostles. And you would hear Dr. Holmes' prophetic sermons, pregnant - with spiritual values, related to the day's headlines. That is the virtue of Eternal Religion - what the Hindus call Sanatana Dharma. That virtue is that Religion, true Religion, is as old as mankind and as fresh as the dawn, Dr. Holmes' thunderous outbursts remind us of the Prophets of Israel who in season and out of season continued to point the path to righteousness to unheeding generations. The burden of his exhortations is directed against the superstitions and delusions of our age and toward the eternal and abiding faith of the ages.

Whatever sunders human beings apart is anathema to Dr. Holmes and to the Community Church. Whatever binds human beings together is welcomed with open arms. Whether it be Tolstoy's non-resistance or Thoreau's civil disobedience or Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha, whether it be the last sermon of Buddha to his disciples or the Sermon on the Mount delivered by Jesus, whether it be opposition to war of the early Christian or of the modern Quaker - wherever a glimpse into Truth can be had, from whatsoever source, ought to become spiritual meat and raiment for us, citizens of the emerging One World of the twentieth century. In this spirit Dr. Holmes has been ministering to his congregation which is world-wide.

The Community Church of New York has had a distinguished record of spiritual ministrations for a century and a quarter. The last two score years of this ministrations are identified with Dr. Holmes. This evangel of Mahatma Gandhi, this prophet of a righteous world, this advocate of human fellowship transcending the barriers of sect and class, nation and race, this pastor of the Community Church has contributed more than one man's share toward the birth of One World in our time, which I am confident will be consummated in the not distant future. And we are fortunate in having as Dr. Holmes' associate Rev. Donald Harrington, a worthy pupil of a worthy master.

The dedication of the Community Church is an occasion for rejoicing: it is also an occasion for penitence! There is so much that needs to be done. Self-purification, as Gandhi would say, must be the order of the day.

As a contribution to the fellowship of faiths for which the Community Church of New York stands, I may conclude with a condensed version of the text of the Twelfth Rock-Edict of Emperor Asoka, who reigned in India from 273 B.C. to 232 B.C.

“There should be a promotion of the essential elements of Religion in all religions.

“This promotion of the essentials of Religion is possible in many ways’

“But its root of restraint of speech; that is to say, there ought to be no exaltation of one's religion and finding fault with another's on improper occasion, and there ought to be no

depreciation of another's religion on the and that occasion.

“On the contrary, others' religions should be honored in every way. By so doing one exalts one's own religion and does service to another's religion. By doing otherwise one injures one's own religion and harms another's as well.

“For whosoever does honor to his own religion and condemns another's – all through attachment to his own religion – in order to glorify his own religion, is in very truth severely injuring his own religion.

“Concourse, fellowship with members of other faiths, is there for commendable, to the end that they may hear and desire to hear further one another's Dharma (religion) ...

“Emperor Asoka values neither gifts nor honors so highly that there should be a promotion of the essential elements of Religion in all religions and mutual appreciation as well.”

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