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PRESENT NEEDS IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S WORK

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their modest attainments by these great sciences. I make bold to say that, for the average teacher in the Church school, this large discipline is not half as important as the two more humble attainments first mentioned. This is certainly true for the lower grades; and when the more advanced work calls for these higher forms of instruction, a teacher who knows the Bible stories and the general character of the Bible, can advance with the class into the higher levels of intensive and extensive study. For the work in a particular grade a teacher will of course acquire a special familiarity with those parts of the Bible and that subject matter best suited for that grade.

Great familiarity with the story element of the Bible, a reasonable point of view for the reading of it, and a fair knowledge of its historical and doctrinal content, are the biblical prerequisites for good teaching given in the order of their importance.

PRESENT NEEDS IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S WORK.

WILLIAM H. GEISTWEIT, D. D.,
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Unquestionably we are confronting difficult conditions in the work among young people in the churches. Those of us who have been actively identified with the movements of the past fifteen years, are extremely sensitive on the subject; for it is said with increasing frequency that there is a receding tide noticeable in this special phase of Christian work. Work among young and growing people is always difficult, for the reason that life itself is ever changing in its expression and in its need. The point of contact is ever changing, and there is a continual demand for readjustment on the part of those who would do their work effectively. Because we have forgotten this vital element in young people's service we *are* confronting a receding tide of interest and enthusiasm in this most important department of Church service. We are "smitten with the plague of uniformity" in our devotional services; we are likewise smitten with uniformity in plans for betterment in every department of work. We have been swept from our moorings in a tide of mechanics; many of us have forgotten that mechanics without dynamics is friction without power.

It was in a tide of spiritual enthusiasm that the young people's distinctive movement began. There seemed to be nothing before us but a devotional meeting, which by personal participation should develop spiritual life. For a time it worked with rare charm, and the spiritual impulse given to Christendom was

wonderful. But spiritual enthusiasm was not sufficient in itself to develop genuine character. We entered upon an educational era which has continued to this hour, and which seemed to answer the lack in the earlier movement. Today there is the noise of machinery everywhere. Study-classes, text-books, with abundant technical literature—these things have almost changed the whole character of the movement, and we seem to be going in another direction altogether—but we are not sure of the direction. The change has been to the extreme of technicality, without sufficient spiritual inspiration to keep the movement within its proper limits.

This change is noticeable in some of our publications for young people. They have become merely text-books; they have little besides studies, methods, pedagogy. It is a growing form with a lessening life. That there is a place for this movement we need not discuss; the danger is that it is sweeping out the genuine life of the Spirit in many directions. At any rate, we ought to ask as to the cause of the apparent decline in the whole field of service known as the young people's movement.

There is an alarming lack of young people among what we are accustomed to call our "young people." The truth is that the "alumni" are at work; a few of the students are looking on—but the greater number are away. The juniors are among those from eight to fourteen or fifteen—rarely reaching fifteen years. Then there seems to be a gap, and the young people in our societies, the few we do get, are among the older young people, anywhere from twenty-five to thirty-five years of age. The absence of the younger people at the most critical period of their lives is a matter so serious as to cause alarm. Why do they not come to our young people's meetings? Why have we not enlisted them in active service? The consideration of a program of work should consider the material upon whom the program is to be worked. I have sometimes felt that our whole scheme of work is more for Christians of mature years and experience, than for the younger people for whom this movement has been inaugurated; indeed, without whom the movement is likely to fail utterly.

We have excellent Bible classes and mission classes, but the truth is that, generally speaking, the young people of the proper age are not interested in them, and rarely attend them.

My judgment has been for some time that our educational schemes are too difficult, and call for too much time from average young people. Consider for a moment: Many of them are in high schools, and in the first years in college. Particularly in our high schools, which seek to do college work before the college years, the young people are overwrought and strained. They are overwhelmed with the demands of an educational system that

bids fair to wreck our children. These young people should be in our young people's societies. Many of them are in our Sunday schools, where, if the teacher is half awake, there is more or less demand for study. When they come to our young people's societies they are confronted with a program of study and service enough to frighten a mature Christian, say nothing of a young disciple. I suggest that, perhaps, the absence of young people of the proper age in our young people's societies is due to a program which, added to necessary school work, is likely to swamp them; it does discourage them. The honest excuse has often been made to me, "I cannot come, my school work is so exacting; I do not wish to come if I cannot study the lessons."

Now, a man who has been advocating the cultural idea for growing folks through all these years, is the last to retire from the field and say that the educational idea is wrong. But we are in constant danger of overworking the educational feature of our Christian work among young people; not that we shall do less of it, but we must so adjust it that it may become a delight and a benefit, and not a burden and a hindrance. The spirit of natural development has been crowded by the purpose to establish a great educational system. I question whether the young people's society will ever become what our educational experts insist it shall be.

There must be simplicity, more freedom in movement, more inspiration in our varied activities. I question whether many of the subjects we put upon our young people are coming to them at the right period of their lives. We are trying to keep pace with a public school system that is already in confusion as to what constitutes an education. I have a boy of 13. In these days he is seeking averages to enter the high school without final examinations. He is also working away in music in the school. He is also working away on the play, "Rip Van Winkle." It is also the season of the Lincoln anniversary; he must write a 500 word composition on the life of the great emancipator. He will live through it, but I fear that if he lives to get a square look at a young people's society, and gets the idea that it stands for another school, he is likely to shun it as a plague.

What shall be the dominating idea in our educational scheme?

A broader Bible knowledge. With our splendid Sunday-school system, with a literature upon the subject greater perhaps than upon any other institution in our religious life; with schools of methods, with experts in pedagogy, with clinics galore, we seem to know less of child training than our fathers and grandfathers knew, and in the roar of the modern machinery we are losing the children by the thousand; and the ignorance of the Bible and its great teachings is startling.

We need a reorganization of our working programs which shall call for a more definite thorough study of the Bible among our young people. We should plan to give them the Biblical foundations of Christianity; the fundamentals of our Christian religion are not known to the masses of our people. We are lamentably weak both in our equipment and in our methods of application. While it is customary to smile at the old-time catechetical method of instruction, we must admit that it accomplished what our present methods do not accomplish—giving a scriptural reason for the hope that men profess.

Almost without exception our text books are too technical, too difficult, assuming knowledge on the part of the young people which they do not possess; a call for work beyond the power of our already overdriven young people. There is yet to be prepared a series of text-books for young people that will be a genuine help. If systems to fortify error can be made so fascinating that any one can grapple them, it seems to me we ought to be able to get help in the promulgation of the truth as it is in Jesus, that will be equally fascinating and more profitable.

Let me also urge the "small group" method, suggested by Dr. Randall. While our great schools will dispute it, I venture it with all the force of intense conviction—the larger the class the less genuine education. A division into groups, in work among young people is the best way to secure individual work on the part of young people. The large class gives the teacher a chance to talk; the small class gives the student the opportunity to learn.

Let me also suggest shorter courses of study. Ten weeks on a given theme are sufficient. I confess that this is a change of my own views upon the matter. An experience of fifteen years continuous special teaching in young people's societies has convinced me that two courses of ten weeks each are better than one course of twenty weeks.

A program for young people today ought to include some special work which has not yet been mentioned, and which calls for wisdom of a rare sort on the part of the preacher. We must in some way *guide our young people through the psychological movements of the present day*. The world is full of new teachers. Whichever way we turn we are confronted with metaphysical interpretations of things. Our young people are related to it. Scarcely an issue of a daily paper, or weekly, or monthly magazine, but what these things are largely discussed. Psychology is on the main track, but its destination no one can foresee. It is sweeping our young people into the whirl. The preacher must grapple with the movement. It is a symptom. It is a revolt from the galvanic life of "activity" to another life—just what, we cannot tell, but, in my judgment, it can be directed to the deepening

of the life of the spirit, a larger and deeper interpretation of life itself. Just as it is likely to destroy the materialism of a scientific age, so is it likely to rebuke the ecclesiastical machinery that has been called spiritual life. Every *ism* is a rebuke to a weakness in the existing order; it may be that the modern metaphysical movement is a revolt against the materialistic tendency in our religious life. If this be true, we ought to plan to get the good there is in it, and guide our people from the dangers that certainly are all through it.

After all, we are seeking the development of individual life, and not the upbuilding of an institution. We are in danger of *confounding activities with life*. The constant cry from the field has always been, "Tell us how to do things." Lead a meeting; conduct a social; raise money, etc. It is like the clamor of a preacher for sermon outlines—always a sign of lack of life, of death working in the members. Yet the school of methods has its large place, and is justly popular. But let us consider it for a brief moment. Here is this matter of *service*. It is difficult to define service. Evermore are we pleading with young people to work; and one is sometimes sadly straitened in getting work for them to do. No greater fallacy has ever afflicted the pastor than the suggestion that it is his business to find work for his people to do; that he shows his genius in having the whole institution busy—doing something, anything, without regard as to whether it is vital or necessary. Our mistake has been to magnify activities as the expression of genuine life. Too many of our young people are all bustle one season, and utterly lacking in life the next season, the reason being appointment or non-appointment to a department of activity. Activities are not life; when the spiritual pabulum is *doing something*, it is an evidence of shallowness fairly distressing.

All the work of a young people's society should be charged with a missionary spirit. In this I do not necessarily mean what we ordinarily understand by that phrase. It is more than ethnology, it is more than geography, it is more than sentimentalism created by far distances; it is more than meetings, than studies, than text-books, than maps, statistics. It is all these and more: It is the Christ-spirit of self-forgetfulness, of self-giving. Too much of our work is directly planned for our own enjoyment, and not for the good we can do. The saving of men, near and far, the saving of the whole man, soul and body, must be the dominating principle, the great soul ideal, in all our movements. We need a new note in our young people's service, in all our activities, and our plans. It is the note of a Christ-surrender that makes all of life a service in the kingdom of God. It is this emphasis on a genuine spiritual "otherism," that will give us a

new lease of life, and give us abundant reason for being organized as we are.

After all, what is a program for a young people's society? Is it not a program for the whole church to enter upon and seek to realize? If we emphasize the spiritual life; if we seek the restoration of the freedom of the spirit, a normal Christian life, without the insistent demands of so much technicality that frequently throttles the very life it is intended to develop; I say, it seems to me we shall charge the whole church with an ideal of Christian service and living as to gather the whole institution under one great banner, charged with one great spirit.

COURSES OF STUDY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

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The duty of speaking on this theme involves for me peculiar difficulty and peculiar embarrassment. The difficulty lies in the necessity, as I regard it, of naming, or rather suggesting, an ideal course of study for church young people, the embarrassment in the obligation of criticizing existing courses and showing how near to (and how far from) that ideal they come.

Of a few things I feel measurably sure, and one of these is that the large majority of our young people do not now receive anything like an adequate religious training in the home, the school, the church, including the Sunday school, or by their miscellaneous reading. What the young person does receive may do him positive harm, for the reason that it is apt to be desultory, fragmentary, out of proportion, uninteresting, and, in the main, serving but to emphasize the contrast with so-called secular teaching, which is more or less critical, logical, progressive, interesting, practical. Will not this fact partly explain the drift of our young people away from the church and Sunday school, or, if that is too strong a term, their indifference? The instruction which they receive, particularly in the Sunday school, tends to make them sceptical of all religious claims and ideals.

Now, if we could have for our youth an adequate course of study and reading prepared, both with respect to matter and form, by experts in their respective lines, and following in general the plan of similar text-books in use in the public schools, and if these books could be taught by persons measurably proficient, the present situation would be not only greatly changed, something like a revolution would be wrought. Let it not be thought that I am advocating a course of study that is either