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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN CAMPS

THE YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE ARMY AND NAVY TRAINING CAMPS AND ARMY POSTS

FRED S. GOODMAN*

There are under American colors in this country and in Europe not far from 4,000,000 men. About half of these are in America. There are varied types of training camps, such as for example: The National Guard, the National Army, Aviation Fields, Reserve Officers' Training Camps, Medical Officers' Training Camps, Field Ambulance Training Schools, besides Recruiting and Embarkation Camps, Army Posts and others. There are approximately two hundred different Stations, Camps and Posts.

The various agencies at work in the Army Camps such as the Y. M. C. A., Knights of Columbus, Jewish Welfare Board, American Library Association, Y. W. C. A. and Salvation Army are working in co-operation under the general supervision of the Fosdick Commission, with government approval. This fact itself is big with religious meaning.

The Young Men's Christian Association is working in nearly 650 centers on this side of the ocean. Some of the Army Camps have as many as twelve different Association Buildings, each with a staff of five to seven Secretaries besides the supervising staff at headquarters. At nearly all the Camps there is an Auditorium seating about 2,500 where lectures and religious addresses are given. All of the Association Buildings are used for various forms of instruction, and entertainments, as well as for military purposes. The Association has over 4,000 Secretaries in this country and more than 3,000 overseas. Fully one-fourth are ministers and many are professors and teachers. These Secretaries represent various types of work but in America, at least 500 men bear the title of Religious Work Secretaries, and their major responsibility is religious education.

A MANY-SIDED PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES

Dominated by a religious purpose and aim the Association has a many-sided program, social, educational, recreational, economic, all promoted with and pervaded by a religious spirit. The religious motive is not disguised or the religious aim clouded by compromise or indirection. For example there is a great interest in the study of

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French. The Association has endeavored to connect this interest in French with the popular study of the Gospel of St. Mark and has had produced a vest pocket edition of the Gospel of Mark in French and English. Some of the best teachers in athletics and boxing lead Bible Classes, and the most successful athletic directors are devoted to a religious purpose. The activities which might be called distinctively religious may be classified under three groups: (1) Mass activities, such as Religious Meetings, Lectures, Mass Singing, etc.; (2) Small groups and Bible Classes; (3) Personal contacts of Secretaries with individual soldiers and of individual Christian soldiers with others. All of these have a bearing upon the religious objective. The distinctively Bible Study Program is as follows:

1. Organized Bible Classes with the aim to place one in every company, battery or squadron.
2. Many small groups with informal discussions of problems on which the Bible gives light.
3. Definite effort to discover in the ranks men qualified to lead Bible Classes and to train them for this task in Normal Classes.
4. Definite plans for the creation of an atmosphere which makes the religious life normal and natural in Army Camps.
5. Steadily promoted efforts to see that every soldier possesses and uses a Testament or Prayer Book. Prayer books are provided by their own religious leaders for young men of Jewish and Catholic faith. In some Camps the Douay Version has been made available for Roman Catholic young men.
6. The preparation and distribution of collateral religious literature. The Association has already prepared and published more than a score of books and has issued more than 5,000,000 copies of these books and booklets.

There are today 4000 Bible Classes in these Army and Navy Camps, enrolling upwards of 250,000 young men. This does not take into account those who have gone out of these camps and overseas. In some regiments as many as 25% of the men have been enrolled in Bible Classes and in groups for the discussion of religious problems. Furthermore, more than 2,000,000 Testaments have been placed by the Y. M. C. A., in addition to 300,000 Testaments and Prayer Books placed by other organizations.

THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS WORK

The interest of men in vital religion is widespread. In some Camps the attendance at religious meetings exceeds that at social or recreational functions. I have before me a report from one of the

largest Camps in the country from which I quote figures for one month. Total attendance at the nine Association Buildings, 411,455; Attendance at 65 lectures, 22,130; at 283 Educational Classes, 2,382; at Athletic functions, 15, 283; at 109 entertainments, 49,675; at Religious Meetings and Bible Classes, 61,138. 19,542 books were circulated from these Association Buildings. One discovers unique psychological phenomena in some of these Camps. There seems to be a kind of four-fold emotion welling up at one time and controlling the life of a soldier—a sense of the abnormal in his surroundings, accompanied by a homesickness, checked by patriotism and inspired by religious feeling.

It represents a wholesome effort to help religiously trained young men who are away from home for the first time and from its normal restraints to keep true to their early training.

There are many interesting facts which show how the non-church going young man may feel about religion when he becomes duly impressed with its importance. More than 260,000 young men have signed the war roll in Camp, signifying their new allegiance to Christ. I recently met a young man at Camp Dix, nearly thirty years of age, who had been brought up in a religious community, yet was a veritable heathen before going to this Camp. He had found himself religiously. He said to me, "I never saw it this way before," and showed me with deep feeling his pocket Testament.

It is arousing, stimulating, directing everywhere an altruistic spirit. This takes many forms, one of them is "Comrades in Service," an organization formed within a Company Unit, having the following purposes:

- (1) To promote the worship and service of God in the Army and Navy, particularly among the members of one's own Company.
- (2) To cultivate in oneself, and among his fellows, clean thinking, clean speech, and clean living.
- (3) To increase the interest in mental and social culture and clean sports.
- (4) To develop the religious life through Daily Prayer, Bible Study and Christian friendship.
- (5) To promote the ideals and purposes of the "Comrades in Service" as expressed above, and enlist other men to become members. More than 150,000 membership cards in this organization have been issued.

It is helping young men to find the satisfaction of habitual contact with the Scriptures. Many thousands of those who have accepted Pocket Testaments have signed their names, and endorsed the following declaration of what is known as "Comrades with the

Book:" "My name signed here expresses my sincere purpose to carry and read this book every day."

New meaning is being given to familiar forms and ceremonies. Confession and the Mass are becoming more and more significant to Catholic young men. Young men of Jewish faith are coming to see a deeper significance in their principles and forms of worship. The deeper meaning in some of the sacraments of the Protestant Church are being discovered by Christian young men. For example, at the close of a Communion Service where four hundred officers and privates of various faiths took Holy Communion under the leadership of six denominational Pastors and Chaplains, a young man came to me and said: "I am a member of the Church in Patterson, but this sacrament never meant much to me until I came to this Camp."

Hundreds of young men who are developing leadership in military lines and are receiving their stripes and bars as non-commissioned or commissioned officers, are also revealing their capacity for religious leadership. In Kelly Aviation Field, Texas, where a few months ago there was a Bible Class in every one of the 58 Squadrons, nearly every class was led by a leader chosen from the ranks.

We are witnessing in these Camps one of the most powerful demonstrations of vital Christian unity and its bearing on after-the-war problems which our day is producing. After all, the things that unite men are simple and elemental and are the same as have united men under similar emergencies all through the years. In Camp Lewis, Washington, during a recent Campaign for Bible Study a young man on being urged to join a Bible Class in a meeting held in his own Barracks, ran to his cot and pulled from under the pillow a Testament which he handed to the Secretary. It was old-fashioned and worn. On the fly-leaf in ink nearly faded out was written: "Presented to John—, November 17, 1862," and then below in fresh ink, "Given to H— K— by his Mother, November 17, 1917." In other words the same Testament which had helped the boy's grandfather had come down after fifty-five years to strengthen him in his religious life and make possible his own loyalty to the ideals of his home and ancestry. We are coming to see the meaning and force of some of the profoundly simple elemental emotions. The Young Men's Christian Association is demonstrating how genuine is the interest of the average man in religious experience. This is surely a fact of deep meaning to the friends of religious education.