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TRAINING CHURCH YOUNG PEOPLE FOR LAY SERVICE.

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Three elements enter into this paper: a consideration of training as a process toward a given end; of the church young people as a field in which and a force with which to work; and of lay service, through the church, a term covering numerous activities.

I. THE PRINCIPLE.

Ideal training secures the fullest development of all capacities for the highest ends. It is the liberation and self-harnessing of power to solve the problems of life and society through various personal and institutional agencies. It proceeds on the proved principle that an army is more efficient than a mob, more easily controlled and responsive to higher laws.

The emphasis upon training is today timely. Hit or miss methods persist in spite of our vast educational system and institutional religion. Thousands are prepared to challenge the value of orderliness and short cuts to intellectual and spiritual heights are in vogue. The emphasis on individuality has sometimes led to a sorry freedom in thought and action. Elective morality and elective religion, when they mean the withdrawal or elimination of primary principles, have not produced altogether reassuring types of character. Who can doubt there is need today that our youth have systematic training in the principles and methods of Christian living?

II. THE PEOPLE.

We are dealing with church young people in this discussion. They are of various ages. The majority of them are at some time and for a prolonged period in the Sunday School. A proportion of this same group are at some time, probably for a shorter period, in the Christian Endeavor Society or kindred organizations. Many are not very closely affiliated with any organization of the church and constitute what may be called the fringe of its life, a vast border, larger in proportion to the size of the circle of actual membership.

These young people are a stupendous and relatively undeveloped asset of the church and of society. They demand painstaking care and direction. How to get the most out of everything is the problem of life. Scientific experts declare that we are great spendthrifts of vital forces, of natural resources. Therefore we rejoiced when some scientist taught the farmer how to draw nitrogen from the air and transmit it in the form of ni-

trates through plant life into the wasted soil. It made our harvests 300% greater and added a continent to the food-producing area of the world!

The Christian church has been prodigal of its enormous resources. Today we are compelled to conserve our original stock, our initial capital. Neglect of our reserves, the increase of immigration, the growth of cities, the development of commerce, the entrance of a new social order, the swift pace of progress,—all these have taxed our capacity to keep the balance of life level with our ideals and our opportunity. Home, school and church must fully recognize and often reassert the values in childhood and youth.

There are 5,000,000 young people in the various young people's and kindred organizations of the churches today. They constitute 28% of the membership. Thousands must be enrolled every year to keep the ranks full. We cannot too often repeat that these young people are the strategic opportunity of this generation. There are about three generations on the stage at a time. One is in training and holds the future. Another is in service and makes the present. One is moving out and represents the past. Each generation in service must seek to evangelize and educate its own generation. Failure to do it endangers the present and disastrously mortgages the future.

Whatever we seek to accomplish in social betterment, civic reform, religious conquest, can be put like a germ into the expanding life of our youth. They ought to be the prime objective in our program. Taken when habit is formed and the heroic instinct objectified, the time when inspiration for leadership is summoned, young people are the King's highway to the best civilization and to ideal righteousness.

III. THE PROGRAM.

We shall reap as we sow. *Without a program we dissipate our energies.* The look into our future civilization, developed along the broad lines of present social and individualistic tendencies, is bright with promise. To prepare for the dawning day we have much to do. A distinguished college president said recently, "The incompetence of the church is more to be feared than the infidelity of the world". The church and the home are largely responsible whether in the next forty years we move forward or mark time.

What is our program for our young people,—not educational only, unless by that we mean the completest living? We have used our youth as a *mine* and tried to get something out of them. We must use them as a *key*, fitted to unlock all doors of progress. The fact is that much of the ignorance and indifference among young people today is simply a reflection of the church and the

pastor with whom they are associated. From them our youth have caught the mumps, the measles and the whooping cough of neglect.

Take these facts for example. It is only a few years ago that the editor of a leading young people's paper sent out questions to over 1,800 representative pastors inquiring about young people's work. "What plan," he asked them, "have you for directing and encouraging your society?" Out of nearly 1,700 replying, 243 had *some* plan and 1,420 had *no* plan. If this appalling and indicting proportion holds in all our young people's societies, then one-seventh have *some* sort of pastoral leadership while six-sevenths have *none*. *What can we expect in lay service from the next generation if four and a quarter millions of our church youth today are blindly beating their way in the dark to a social, educational, Christian program?* Such facts justify the primary preliminary emphasis of this paper upon the principle of training and the importance of the large group for whom a program must be outlined.

Of course it is true also that our young people must in a measure be permitted to work out their own destiny. A censored-chaperoned group of young people is apt to bear the marks of a mollycoddled life. But too often they are left to "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling" on the part of pastor and congregation. The pastor must know when to be abased and when exalted, when to direct and when to disappear.

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What is lay service? Few take the trouble to analyze the phrase and define its content. They are quite as naïve as that minister who is said to have gone into a Cleveland book store and asked for a volume on "Lay Effort". The clerk sold him a volume on "Poultry Raising"! Young people may be expected to know less about lay service than the ministry. If the ministry knows or cares nothing, heaven hear the woe-cry of our day!

Observation will convince one that in general *the definition of lay service has been too narrow*. The door to many activities in church life has only recently been opened. The dominant social note of the times is in part responsible. We are in the midst of a great awakening to the truth that "we are members one of another" and that "no man liveth to himself alone". The bog of conventionalism has made us measure Christian service by the fidelity with which men gave themselves to the dilettante and perhaps deadening duty of hearing us ministers preach once a week! The only ideal before our boys was to act as an usher or serve as a trustee. A census from one hundred and fifty churches, large and small, in cities and towns, shows scarcely one man in twenty attached to any organization or office in the church which

had anything to do with any missionary activity. Yet missions are a mighty force, a vast social enterprise, as Dr. Dennis has shown, a civilizing factor, a man's job. "The boy is father to the man." The boy who is father to the man of little service was never trained in lay effort. It is useless to urge men to work and give them neither channel nor choice of activity. In Connecticut fifteen per cent of the men of the state are in Protestant churches. Half of them at least share little in the work. The business which allows half its capital to lie idle will die. Surely new openings for the investment of life are not wanting today. It is the task of every leader, wherever he stands, in school or church, in city or country, in club or home, to share the big, broad work for the world's uplift.

It is clear that in youth is the time to promote a program for varied activities which should measure and make certain manhood's service for God and humanity. The young people in our churches constitute a force sufficient to change the characteristics of our times if they are adequately trained and organized. What shall we give them to do?

* * *

The church is an agent of religion. The sphere of religion is as broad as life. The business of the church is therefore comprehensive and far-reaching. All humanitarian, philanthropic, social, educational, or human betterment projects are in the sphere of its work. In these it must engage indirectly and may engage directly. It will be quite as helpful to get the work done, to create the atmosphere favorable for it, to teach its underlying laws, as to maintain all the agencies which lay service requires. In other words the church may be institutional or inspirational. It may carry on a school and gymnasium or it may create a Young Men's Christian Association in the community by its spirit. It may train its youth to know and share in lay service outside or inside the church.

Lay service therefore includes many things. *In the mind of the pastor there must be a comprehensive co-ordination of all the agencies and activities of the church and a sense of their relative values.* The agencies will include all of the organizations. The activities we will later enumerate. Co-ordination is essential in order to recognize the capacity of various ages and to secure a plan which has unity and progression.

In the Sunday school there will be teaching of social responsibility. In the teachers' meeting the pastor and others will call attention to the varied tasks in which a Christian life may manifest itself. These will also come up in the teachers' training class maintained in our larger schools. Civic spirit will be developed, to be shown in ideals of the city beautiful, the city elim-

inating the slum and the saloon, the city well-governed, the city caring for its children.

The principles of life taught in the Sunday school will make law-abiding citizens, employers with generous ideals, employees who help solve the perplexing problems of the labor world, and leaders for all causes whose purpose is uplift. Sunday-school classes will attack the problem of poverty and render aid under competent supervision. Many such classes and other groups will be studying the books on the city, on immigration, on the saloon, poverty, crime and charity. These mission-study groups will also study national and world problems, realizing that Christ's Kingdom proposes a new, vast, world-civilization. The skill of the future scientist, the coming business man, and of the average toiler, will be enlisted in these stupendous tasks and they will engage in the broad ministry of Him who "went about doing good". The particular Sunday school is yet to be found, where its resources for lay service have been fully improved and harnessed, but the day of a new era has dawned and the outlook makes one's heart bound with hope.

What is done in the Sunday school can be supplemented and extended in the *Young People's Society*. It is useless to quibble over the question whether our methods here have trained an artificial and narrow type of life. The critic can find illustrations for all his charges, yet not do much constructive work. We need a lay service that is grounded in religion and a service which is not so grounded is apt to be temporary and superficial. It will lack motive and insight and the true standard of values. The religious life involves a two-fold expression, in word and deed, and both have their limitations. Our business here is to affirm the duty of pastoral leadership in elementary lay service and his direction in revealing the principles underlying it. Young people are peculiarly responsive to a specific task and there is no town or city where it may not be pointed out to them, beside the world projects in which they may be enlisted.

Lay workers may be farther trained in the *prayer meeting and pulpit*. A series of topics or sermons on the field of Christian service today may enlist a Graham Taylor or a Jane Addams, a Riis or a Grenfell, a Livingstone, or a Hamlin, or men and women like the martyrs in Shansi. We shall get what we go after, more or less, and if there is a noble, Christian objective in pastor and people, the youth of the parish will feel it and gradually see it and finally serve it. Then we shall have a generation of those who write "*Ich Dien*" on their shields, after the fashion of a prince of the royal blood, who had learned of Him "who came not to be ministered unto but to minister".

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