

Some Dominant Notes in Christian Endeavor

by R.P. Anderson

Christian Endeavor is a movement that aims to produce Christlike character and lives in young people through the power of the indwelling Christ.

Scripture: Proverbs 22:6, Matthew 20:26, Mark 10:45, John 13:14, 1 Corinthians 12:12

Topics: "Christian Service", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

R.P. Anderson preaches about the significant impact of Christian Endeavor, tracing its humble beginnings to a massive movement with millions of members, emphasizing its role in bridging the gap between the Sunday-school and the church, educating young people in Christian practices, and inspiring them to serve others and confess Christ. He highlights the importance of duty, training young people to understand the sacred meaning of duty through joyful service, and the note of inspiration, urging them to seek the fullness of the Spirit and develop Christlike character. Additionally, he stresses the importance of Christian union, promoting fellowship and peace among denominations, and the essential note of service, encouraging young people to utilize their energy in Christian service for the church and community.

Transcript

Duquesne Garden, Friday Night, October 15.

When that group of young people, assembled in the minister's home at Portland, Me., twenty-nine years ago, signed the first Christian Endeavor pledge, not one of them imagined that he was making church history, or inaugurating what Dr. Philip Schaff has called "the greatest religious movement of the nineteenth century."

From that one society the movement has grown until it embraces seventy-one thousand societies, with nearly four million members. It has also grown in inner strength; it has developed a deeper understanding of itself and its mission; and from being a simple prayer-meeting it has broadened in every direction the scope of its usefulness. The denominations that have opened their doors to it have found it an inspiration and a source of strength, making the service of their young people more efficient on the one hand, and enlarging their fellowship on the other.

The great Restoration movement, whose centenary we are celebrating, has much in common with Christian Endeavor. We find in each the same profound reverence for the supreme authority of the word of God; the same plea for individual responsibility, for service, for training, and for the union of all believers.

Probably this is the reason why the churches of Christ have welcomed Christian Endeavor so enthusiastically and pushed it so vigorously. Last year we passed the Congregationalists in the race for the largest number of societies, and we stand to-day second on the list, having only the Presbyterians in front of us, and them we are pressing hard.

The symbols of the Imperial House of Japan are a mirror, which means, "Know thyself;" a crystal, which says, "Be pure and shine;" and a sword, which signifies, "Be sharp and conquer." These might be the symbols of the society. They express its holy ambition for knowledge, for purity and for service.

WHAT CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR HAS DONE

AND IS DOING.

Consider for a moment what Christian Endeavor has done and is actually accomplishing to-day. It is bridging the

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gap between the Sunday-school and the church. It is taking hold of the young people at the age when they are hardest to reach, and is leading them past the dangers of adolescence. It is educating them in the practice of Christianity by giving them definite tasks to perform. It is inculcating habits of private devotion through the Quiet Hour and through the pledge to read the Bible and to pray daily. It is affording them opportunities to confess Christ in the weekly meetings. It is inspiring them with the sacredness of service, holding up before them constantly the duty and privilege of doing whatsoever Jesus would have them do. Through the study of the topics it is developing missionary enthusiasm, and the lessons in truthfulness, charitableness, honesty, and such like, are a social service that has abiding value for the nation.

The result is seen in the Sunday-schools, where a vast number of [310] Endeavourers are teachers. It is seen in our colleges, where many Endeavourers are studying for the ministry. It is seen in the pulpits, that are filled by an increasing number of young men who received their call in the Christian Endeavor society. But the results are seen also outside the Endeavor ranks. Many secretaries and workers in Y. M. C. A.'s and Y. W. C. A.'s, in temperance and mission work, have graduated from the society. Mr. M. A. Hudson, the founder of the Baraca Bible class, is an old-time Endeavorer; and the man in whose brain the idea of the Laymen's Missionary Movement originated (a movement destined, I believe, to revolutionize our methods in the direction of greater efficiency), admitted that if it had not been for the Christian Endeavor society he probably would never have been interested in religious work at all. Thus ripple upon ripple the influence of work quietly done in the society advances until it touches the eternities.

Christian Endeavor stands to-day with its face toward the future, toward the problems that are charging down upon us. The spirit of the age is changing. Therefore I wish to call attention to some dominant notes in the movement which, in the days that are beyond, must ever ring in our ears.

DUTY.

There is the note of duty. In this age of license, when the very foundations of society are being shaken, and when every man does that which is right in his own eyes, it is imperatively necessary that the young people shall be taught the sacred meaning of the word "duty." We laugh sometimes at the old Westminster catechism, but one noble service it did for the boys and girls of Scotland. It thrust the greatest of problems upon them. Think of young people being fed on questions like this: "What is the chief end of man?" And

the sonorous reply: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever." Perhaps it gave them the shivers, but it made them feel that life is a very serious thing.

Christian Endeavor does not beat young people on the head with ponderous commands. It seeks to train them to do their duty by permitting them to taste the joy of serving others. The Sunday-school is the schoolroom where instruction is imparted; the society is the laboratory where the knowledge is practiced. A book knowledge of Christianity is defective. The Christian Endeavor society tries to remedy this deficiency by guiding the young people into paths of Christian service.

Christian Endeavor tries to remove the old, rasping harshness from this note of duty. Let me illustrate. A British writer says: "There is liberty without law; there is law without liberty; and there is the law of liberty." The first is a vagrant dog of the streets, the second an untrained pup on a leash, the third my devoted Scotch collie. He lived by the law of liberty. Duty and joy were one in his life. His duty was his highest joy.

That is the aim of Christian Endeavor training. At first the pledge may seem like a leash that curtails one's freedom. As a matter of fact, it enlarges it. It marks out our duty in order that we may come to love it by the practice of it.

Duty is an iron word. The ring of steel is in it. It means what it meant to the British when Nelson flung out his signal: "England expects that every man will do his duty." Like that young woman whose home life was discordant and unhappy. She was dissatisfied and her discontent was manifest in her face and manner. Then a great change came over her. A friend met her on the street and noted her altered appearance, the light step, the smiling lip, and the sunlight in her eye. "How are things at home?" he asked. "Oh, just the same," was the smiling reply, "but I'm different." Or, take that missionary in China during the time of the Boxer troubles. He had seen his boy murdered before his eyes. He was a big, strong fellow, who had been an athlete at college. He stood facing the howling mob. He raised his gun to his shoulder. Then he dropped it. "I could shoot you," he said, "but I will not. I am a Christian. I will do as Jesus would do."

INSPIRATION.

Another note that must be struck is the note of inspiration. I have been [311] shocked and horrified to observe the loose hold that many young people have on life. Their minds are full of fog. They feel that nothing matters.

Friends, the Christian Endeavor society may be used to show them the greatness of life, and inspire them to live it nobly. The source of that inspiration will always be the word of God. I believe in putting the Bible into the mind and letting it accomplish its own cleansing work. For more than sound doctrine did the fathers cry, "To the law and to the testimony."

We take the young people to the head waters of power by teaching them to pray and to seek the fullness of the Spirit. I was privileged to introduce the society into Norway and Denmark while working under the Foreign

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Christian Missionary Society, and in those countries we called it the society for the imitation of Christ. But imitation of Christ is not enough. Suppose you try to imitate the work of a great artist. You get his canvas and his pencil and his brushes and his colors, and you sit down to your task. His picture is before you, clad in beauty, but you fail to reproduce it. Your work is a hideous daub. You imitate. But imitation is almost

always failure. But suppose that the spirit of the artist could enter into you and inspire you; suppose that he could give you his own sure eye for color and form, and his own deft hand for execution, then your imitation would be a success, because it would spring from inspiration.

That is exactly what Christ does, and what the Christian Endeavor pledge insists upon in its very first words. The first aim of the society is to produce Christlike character and lives, and to do it by the power of the indwelling Christ. Dominated by the Christ spirit, the young people will go forth into the duties of life, whatever they may be, radiant with faith and hope and love, and aglow with invincible enthusiasm. The Christian Endeavor society may become the power-house of the church.

CHRISTIAN UNION.

A third note that we must strike clearly is the note of an enlarging fellowship and Christian union. Christian Endeavor brotherliness has already undermined the old-time exclusivism and hatred. In 1780, in Massachusetts, the Congregational Church was supreme. If a person did not wish to contribute to its support, a certificate was granted to him which read: "This is to certify that so and so has renounced the Christian religion and joined the Episcopal Church." Since then the power has gone largely out of the battle of the sects. The people want unity. Christian Endeavor work in local, city and county unions has demonstrated the possibility of unity, fellowship and peace. Christian Endeavor has in a measure bridged the gap between the denominations. In the days of the Campbells scenes like that witnessed at the great International Christian Endeavor conventions were impossible. There men of all shades of opinion meet upon the same platform as brothers. This result has been attained by Christian Endeavor putting the emphasis upon life and not upon creed. The Christ ideal is pushing out the creed ideal as the life forces of spring push off the dead leaves of the season that is gone.

Christian Endeavor is one of the great, subtle, silent forces that is producing a tremendous change in religious life. Father Bray was an old Irish priest whose knowledge was rather limited. One day he was asked: "What is the difference between cherubim and seraphim?" "Hush," he replied, "there was once a difference, but it's all settled now."

The winds of God are blowing toward union. The prayer of Jesus, that they all may be one, will yet be fulfilled. I have often wondered if the matter of denominational names may not be settled by the adoption of some such happy expression as Christian Endeavor. At any rate, we want the name of Christ. A little tot was found by a policeman wandering on the street. She was taken to the police station, and the kind-hearted men tried to find her name. [312] "What name does your papa call your mamma?" she was asked. "He doesn't call her names at all; he loves her," was the reply. Christian Endeavor appeals to me as a Christian because it is Christian Endeavor.

SERVICE.

A fourth note which must at all times be struck is the note of service. At a trades union meeting held at Norwalk, Conn., some time ago, it was proposed to ask Dr. Charles S. Macfarland to conduct a certain service. Some one asked, "Do you think he will do it?" And another, who knew the man, replied, "He will do anything you ask him." That is true of multitudes of societies, and it should be true of every one. The young people are ready, they are eager, to do whatever the pastor asks them.

I do not believe that we realize our opportunity or the vastness of the power of that procession of youth that is trooping past our doors. On the day when the nonconformists of England marched from the Victoria

Embankment to Hyde Park, London, to protest against the iniquitous Education Act, says R. J. Campbell, a conservative of the old school sat in his club to see the fun. By and by he saw a black mass of people swirling round the corner, and they came on relentless, like some great power forcing its way onward. On, on they came, thousands upon thousands, until it seemed as if nothing could stand against them. The old man that was watching them said: "I had a feeling that I have never had in my life before. I felt all in a tremble, as if this mighty host could drive everything before them." And they can, friends, they can. If we could gather the young people of the world together and demonstrate their numbers and their enthusiasm, and the exuberance of their strength, you would join us as never before, in the prayer; "God help us to use this power and these lives for the service of Christ and the church." No wonder President Taft was touched as he saw that multitude of children doing their exercises before him in a Western city. No wonder the tears came to his eyes. They were the hope of the nation. But Christian Endeavor workers stand in the midst of a still greater host from all countries and climes. They have the vision and the hope of making this vast throng servants of Christ.

We hold the young with nerveless grip and then wonder why they slip away from the church. A girl was out boating one summer day. In her hand she held a string of pearls, which she carelessly dipped in the water. She did not know that the string was broken, but when she took her hand out of the water, all the pearls were gone. They had dropped away one by one. The Christian Endeavor society gives the church a firmer hold on the young people because it gives them something to do, it utilizes their energy, and instructs them in Christian service.

The tasks are trivial, it is said; they are not worth while. Friends, nothing can be trivial in the eyes of Him who rewards a cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple. The multiplication table is trivial, perhaps, to the mathematician, but it is necessary for the child to master it. The simple things that some of the Christian Endeavor committees do have a prophetic value. They speak of greater achievements. They are seeds that yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness in the days that lie before.

THE FUTURE.

I believe that every church should have a Christian Endeavor society, not only for the good that the church may do to the young, but also for the good that the young may do to the church.

The average man is in danger of growing away from his youth and becoming unsympathetic toward the troubles, the thoughts and the ambitions of young people. We do not sufficiently realize how the young heart warms toward interest and recognition. There is a story told of Henry Ward Beecher. One cold winter night, as he left the house, he found a little newsboy all huddled up to keep himself warm. Beecher went over to him, put his hand on his head, bought a paper, and said, "Isn't it a cold night for a boy like you? Aren't you awful cold?" "I was, sir, until you spoke to me, but now I'm warm," was the reply. The human heart responds every time to the touch [313] of love. If we had more sympathy, there would be no boy problem.

The Christian Endeavor society is the straight road to the heart of the young people. Through it the pastor may become acquainted with them; in its socials he may participate in their joys; in its prayer-meetings he may learn their spiritual condition from their testimonies. We must cease to look upon the society as a group within the church, a group acting more or less independently. The Christian Endeavor society is the church. It must be planned for and pastored as well as any other department. And experience shows that where this is done wisely, the society is capable of very great achievements. It is so plastic that it may be

turned to whatever purpose the pastor wills. The young people may be used in distinctly religious work. They will gladly assist in missions. Or they may be used in civic work, in temperance crusades, and such like. In many instances the pastor, if he wishes to get into touch with masses of men, as in the trades unions, may reach the wage earners through his Christian Endeavor society. In many cities English classes may be organized to teach the stranger within our gates, the homesick, lonely immigrant. The possibilities of Christian Endeavor are unlimited. All that the society has ever done it can do and will continue to do, while it will push forward into new fields of usefulness.

THE NEW CENTURY.

As we enter upon this new century of our work, let us give Christian Endeavor a large place in our churches. To neglect the young people is a suicidal policy. During the war a statesman, who was opposing the sending of young boys to the front, said: "Gentlemen, we must not grind the seed corn." If the church of the future is to be filled with the children of to-day, it must be by means of our work among the young. Eunice and Lois must go before Paul.

No effort is in vain. Even if men wander, they will come back. The prodigal son could never forget his father. What distinguished him from the citizens of that far country was the fact that he knew his father and his home. Children never forget the lessons that they learn, even if they wander far. In the Welsh revival, a big, burly fellow, who had been a prize-fighter, came forward in a storm of penitence. He had been brought up in the mining valleys of Glamorganshire. He wanted to pray, but he could not find a word to say. At last he blurted out: "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child." What mother lips had taught him that prayer? I plead for a larger faith in our work for young people. I plead for sowing the seed and leaving the harvest to God. I plead for Christian Endeavor because of the things for which it stands. It stands for pure home life, honest business life, loyal church life, patriotic national life, joyous social life, and brotherhood with all mankind.

This be our aim in the campaign of the coming years. While Christian Endeavor is trying to gain during the next two years one million new members, I hope to see the Disciples of Christ forge ahead and head the list. We have the biggest society in the world now--that at Bolenge, Africa. If pastors and people work together, we shall be biggest and best in Christian Endeavor when we meet at Atlantic City. [314]

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