

THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

VOL. VII.

OCTOBER, 1927.

No. 10.

The Spiritual Care of the Young People.

A Chapter in Pastoral Theology.*

During the adolescent age young people need the special care and attention of their Christian parents, their Christian congregation, and their Christian pastor. In childhood their Christian character has been *formed*; during the adolescent period (ages fourteen to twenty) this Christian character needs to be *developed*.

* The writer of this article has been requested to write an *English Pastoral Theology*. The manuscript is now being prepared. The most excellent *Pastoraltheologie* by Dr. C. F. W. Walther, which has been used for many years in our circles, will form the basis for the new book. The material found in Walther's book will, however, not only have to be presented in good idiomatic English, but, as has been suggested, some passages, referring to conditions other than those under which we are working, must be eliminated, and certain matters, *e. g.*, mission-work, church finances, etc., not found in Walther's book at all or only briefly touched upon therein, will have to be added. The writer has decided upon the following tentative table of contents: Introductory Remarks; The Christian Congregation; The Call to the Ministry; The Personal Character of the Minister of the Gospel; The Work of Preaching; Baptism; The Christian Training of Children; Confirmation; The Spiritual Care of the Young People; Marriage; The Christian Home; The Christian Burial; The Cure of Souls (visiting, sick-visits, etc.); Psychological Conditions in Their Relation to the Spiritual Life (influence of heredity, of early training, of education, of environment, of one's reading, of poverty or wealth, of mind over body, and *vice versa*, of conditions of health, of false religious convictions); The Treatment of Certain Sins (idolatrous worship, *e. g.*, lodge-membership; unionism; sinful occupations; drunkenness; sinful amusements; covetousness [love of money]; cursing; neglect of public worship; gossiping; worldliness; birth control; inertia); The Pastoral Treatment of People under Certain Abnormal Conditions (melancholy; hysteria; worry, nervousness; insanity); Church Discipline; Mission-work; Stewardship (including church finances); Church Societies; The Synod; Resigning from the Ministry; The Minister's Library. A sample of a chapter from the new book is herewith submitted to our readers. Suggestions from our readers in reference to contents and make-up of the book are requested.

During the adolescent period certain physical changes take place in young people; they also enter into a new environment, and their minds develop along new lines. As a result of all this, new ideas crowd in upon their minds and hearts, and new and peculiar temptations beset them. Unless their new life impulses are directed into the proper channels and the young are put on their guard against temptations, physical and spiritual harm will result. More than ever do they need the influence of the Holy Spirit by means of the Word of God.

a. *The Adolescent Age.*—The peculiar age of adolescence is little understood, and its importance is little appreciated. 1 Cor. 13, 11; 14, 20; Eph. 4, 14. (Texts such as these point to the difference between a child and an adult.) At the age of puberty the child enters into a "new world." His environment is new. Until that time the child had been mostly at home and at school; after that, even though he may continue to attend a school, he goes out into the world, forms new acquaintances, gets in touch with various kinds of people, and begins to broaden his vision and acquire new ideas. His physical development takes on a new form. Sex-life begins to play an important part in his life. Dormant sexual powers begin to awaken. 1 Cor. 7, 36. The child begins to realize that he is entering upon a new sphere of existence; in fact, he begins to realize that he is ceasing to be a child and is now growing up into manhood and womanhood.

During such adolescent period the young are difficult to keep in check. They resent much advice and much supervision; they love to argue; they "know it all"; they cannot yet see things as older and more experienced people see them. And older people forget that they passed through the same experience and during their adolescent age were essentially not different from them, and thus fail to understand the minds of young people; they misjudge their actions, do not sympathetically enter into their peculiar problems, and, as a result, apply wrong methods of dealing with them.

b. *The Spiritual Care of the Young.*—Regular attendance at church services and at the Communion table and devotional reading and study of the Bible in the home: these things need emphasis at all times and with all classes of people, but especially so with the young. The home surroundings of young people are frequently not at all conducive to the strengthening of their spiritual life. The young are, as it is, surrounded by peculiar and many temptations, and their youthful minds do not always under-

stand and carefully consider how serious life really is. If during the adolescent age good habits of churchgoing and Bible-reading are not firmly established, the spiritual life of the young people will not only suffer for the time being, but they may never in later years regain what they have lost in their youth. If a pastor would build up a congregation of Christians who are very loyal to their faith, will defend it against errorists and unbelievers, and be active in promoting the interests of their home congregation, as well as of their church-body (synod) and of the kingdom of God at large, he must not only properly provide for the Christian training of the children by having the congregation maintain a Christian school, but he must also give special attention to the welfare of the confirmed children, or the young people, and be unto them, in every sense of the word, a faithful Christian pastor (shepherd of souls).

Young people should be warned not to attend the services of the sects and the religious meetings of non-Christian bodies. Rom. 16, 17. 18. The great spiritual indifferentism of our day makes it more imperative than ever that the line of demarcation between orthodoxy and heterodoxy be carefully observed. Because of the close contact of our young people with others, both in a business and in a social way, our young people are often easily persuaded to go with their friends and acquaintances to their churches and religious meetings (Y. M. C. A., Y. W. C. A.!). Even with reference to their social activities young people need to be especially warned against an intimate fellowship with errorists and unbelievers; such are not good company for them. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." 1 Cor. 15, 33. These also are true proverbial sayings: "Tell me with whom thou goest, and I will tell thee who thou art"; "Birds of a feather flock together"; "*Gleich und gleich gesellt sich gern.*" Especially must young people be warned against sinful amusements (dancing, indiscriminately attending the movies, parties of an objectionable nature, Prov. 7, 13), reading bad literature, and joining worldly societies (e. g., musical clubs). Many a promising young man and young woman has been lost to the Church!

c. *Christenlehren, Kirchenexamina.*—A most excellent way of caring for the spiritual welfare of the children after their confirmation is by means of the so-called *Christenlehren*, or *Kirchenexamina* (catechizing). In former years this was a good practise in our churches. On Sunday morning before the close of the service, or on Sunday afternoon, the pastor would take a portion

of the Catechism and, by means of the question method, inculcate it anew upon the hearts of the young, as well as increase their Scriptural knowledge and understanding. For the older people of the church such catechizations also served a similar purpose; many a forgotten truth was revived in their hearts and minds, and many a Scriptural truth they learned to understand and appreciate better. (Louis Harms, usually known as Pastor Harms, b. 1808, catechized his entire audience on a Sunday afternoon, walking up and down the church aisle. His entire congregation was transformed into a vast Bible class.) Much of the thorough indoctrination of our people was received by them in these *Christenlehren*. For such catechizing the pastor must, of course, most carefully and conscientiously prepare himself. Unless he thoroughly understands his subject and can most fascinatingly present it, the so-called *Christenlehren* will not serve their purpose, but will rather awaken disgust against the doctrines of the Church in the hearts of the young. But how could a pastor, conscious of the fact that the Lord has entrusted him with the care of blood-bought souls, become guilty of such negligence! — Outward changed conditions in the course of years (the more strenuous life and the restlessness of our age, the unpopularity of the Sunday afternoon service, the double services on Sunday morning, German and English) are no doubt the reason why the so-called *Christenlehren* are no longer held in many of our churches.

d. *The Bible Class*. — Since the *Kirchenexamina* are no longer generally held, it becomes necessary to find, in addition to the regular church service, other ways of increasing the Scriptural knowledge of the young. We Lutherans, above all others, ought well to know our Bible. 1 Tim. 3, 15, 16; Col. 3, 16. It is not to our credit when it is said that members of sectarian churches are better Bible students than we are. Without a thorough Bible knowledge, orthodoxy cannot continue to assert itself. A pastor should, therefore, not neglect to establish so-called Bible classes. Such a class may be taught in connection with the Sunday-school, or still better it is to have such classes meet on an evening during the week, when more time and attention can be given them. Not only the young people, but also older members of the church ought to be encouraged to attend them. The Bible work in such classes can be done along various lines: Entire books of the Bible may be studied (one of the gospels; Paul's epistles to the Romans, Ephesians, Corinthians; Genesis; Isaiah; Psalms); or a careful

selection of Scripture-passages may be made, on the basis of which the chief doctrines are taught and warning is given against special sins, etc.; or certain matters which are agitating the minds of the people may be treated in the light of the Scriptures (lodge, sinful amusements, stewardship, offenses, etc.); or certain topics may be assigned (faith, good works, miracles, the Judgment, etc.) and treated on the basis of Bible-passages which apply; or certain difficult passages or doctrines may be discussed; or a course may be given in accordance with published outlines (although we believe that it is far better to use the Bible directly, in order that people may better learn to use the Bible itself). Whatever method is used, the Christian pastor must most carefully and conscientiously prepare himself in order that the work done with the class may be both interesting and profitable. It is self-evident that such class should be opened and closed with prayer; a hymn or two may also be sung. Since variety is the spice of life (*varietas delectat*), it will be well not to follow one scheme or one line of thought too long, and both the lecture method and the question method should be used. In fact, the more the members of the class can be persuaded to take an active part, the better and more easily their interest can be aroused and retained. Certain assignments (*e. g.*, looking up texts which treat of the nature of faith) may be given to the class, or to groups, or to individuals, which should then, in turn, make their report. The members of the class should be taught to use a concordance and commentaries.

e. *The Young People's Society.* — The young people's society has always presented a problem. Its problem has been to furnish a good program, which, although not losing sight of the real purpose of the young people's society, will hold the interest of the young people and prove to be profitable to them as well. The real purpose of the young people's society cannot be simply to provide amusement and pastime. That is not the Church's business, nor can it be made the real business of any society in the Church. The young people must have their amusements. They must laugh and have a good time; this should not be denied them. Nor should they be made to believe that the Christian religion is a rather morose and gloomy sort of thing and incompatible with a jolly disposition (Pietists!). Eccl. 11, 9; Phil. 4, 4. There is no good reason why also the young people's society should not provide wholesome amusement and innocent and even useful entertainment and pastime for its members. This itself, however, presents a prob-

lem all its own. It is, perhaps, more difficult to interest a large group of young people than any other group. Their minds are not only not settled, but their thoughts and inclinations run along divergent lines. What interests one does not interest another; some are musically inclined and can sit for an hour and listen to classical music, while others tire of it as soon as the performer begins to play; some are interested in recitations and essays, while others, whose education has been neglected along these lines, will suffer these things only for a time; the young men have their own particular likes and dislikes, and so have the young women. Even as to games and amusements, it is hard to satisfy all; some prefer games and amusements which tax the mind, while others prefer those which are of a lighter vein. The question of age also presents its own difficulties; the young ones and the older ones will not well mix. The pastor must also carefully supervise this part of his young people's program and especially see to it that all objectionable features (objectionable games, plays, etc.) are kept out.

But, after all, the real purpose of the young people's society must be the increased emphasis which it places *upon the religious life of the young and the interest which they ought to take in the work of the Church*. The chief work of the society, therefore, must be along religious lines, *e. g.*, Bible study (including an acquaintance with the Bible as a book, its origin, make-up, translations, etc.), important events in the history of the Church (the early history of the Church, the persecutions, some of the controversies, the rise of the papacy, the history of the Reformation, the rise of the sects, Modernism), the liturgy of the Church (how few know something about it!), the Church's hymnology, the history of the Lutheran Church in America, the Synod (its history, purpose, and work), mission-studies, the biographies of noted men of the Church, etc. All this and similar matter will offer abundant material for many years. Each subject ought to be briefly and interestingly treated. It is never well to dwell too long even on one series. A half hour devoted to such matters at each meeting will suffice. Young people should not be made to tire of it, but rather a desire for more should be created in them. It goes without saying that the pastor must do the planning for this work and, to a large extent, if not altogether, do the work himself, unless he be fortunate enough to have teachers or eminently qualified laymen who can relieve him of some of the work. In any case the pastor should attend the meetings of his young people's society and not turn them over to some one else. At such meetings he has an

opportunity to meet his young people, converse with them, learn to know them better, and establish a closer friendship between them and himself. Also the officers of the church and other members of the church ought to be encouraged to attend the young people's meetings occasionally in order that the young people may better realize that the church as such, and not only the pastor, has a lively interest in their welfare.

If the confidence of the young people of the church can be gotten and their interest for the church is aroused and increased, the young people will prove to be a mighty factor in the spiritual life and work of the congregation and a wholesome influence in their community, in fact, wherever they may be. A Christian pastor and a Christian congregation should not neglect to look after the young people of the church. They are its future members.

J. H. C. F.
