

The Sunday School and Epworth League

Their Relation Defined—Their Co-operation Explained

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THE purpose of this article is to consider the relation of these two great departments to each other, not to define either by itself alone.

Our whole aim for our children and youth may be treated as four-fold.

1. To inform the mind, that there may be a clear, intelligent foundation for their faith.

2. To engage their affections for Him of whom they have learned.

3. To train their wills that they may not merely feel a sweet sentiment for Him, but obey Him in all practical life.

4. To enlist their activities in the extension of His Kingdom, that their love and obedience may evidence their genuineness by active service in His work.

That is, in all our work for and with our young people, we seek for them four things, viz.:

1. Intellectual acquaintance with the truth.

2. Affectionate, personal loyalty to Christ.

3. Active obedience to His supreme will.

4. Hearty co-operation in His service.

We must unite intellect, heart, volition and work for Christ and the church. Our youth must know, love, obey and labor for our Lord if our true aim is to be realized and our labors successful.

Neither Sunday School nor Epworth League alone has ever accomplished this. Both departments of the church seem to be needed to effect it. And these two great organizations are so vitally inter-related that they must be mutually co-operative if we would do best work for and by our young people.

An examination of those two prepositions, "for" and "by" will reveal our meaning. Consider:

1. The Sunday School in its relation to the young is organized and operated *for* them—the Epworth League *by* them. Herein is an important distinction. An Epworth League is emphatically a young people's society. It is not intended to do something for them as much as to have something done by them.

Many Leagues have measurably failed, others have become inoperative, not a few have died altogether because they have apparently forgotten this. Neglecting to introduce into League activities youthful members from a growing Junior section, the average age of the League has become much too old, the enthusiasm of youth has been lost, the services have dragged, until finally the League has become extinct. "Die of old age" might be the fitting epitaph of a number of societies that ought to have perpetuated themselves in virility and strength, but did not, for the simple reason that a constant accession of youthful members was apparently neither sought nor desired. Recruits from a live Junior department are indispensable to a flourishing League. It must continue to be a society whose main activities shall be operated by the youth themselves. Activity is a law of growth. "Give them something to do," has been advised unnumbered times in large and small conventions; but as yet the Sunday School has not followed practically this counsel. The Epworth League says, "Very well. We provide the means whereby all our Sunday School scholars may have opportunity of *doing*." It is absolutely a case of "do or die." We don't want our youth to *die*, so we afford fitting channels for them to *do*.

2. The Sunday School makes instruction in Bible truths its one first great purpose, and seems satisfied therewith. But knowledge is not sufficient. The League seeks to utilize the truth learned by the mind in both character and conduct, and to equip the learner with all essentials for doing what he knows.

Some reader may say: "The Sunday School ought to do this, too." And so say we. But it does not, and, there is the weak point of our religious instruction. We are satis-

fied with teaching "What?" from the Bible. And many a growing boy and girl goes out from the Sunday School with a measurably clear knowledge of Scripture, but without having made clear "How?"

The Sunday School is a "school" only in part. It has never been the "industrial school" it should be, and in the providence of God, yet shall be. The Epworth League seeks to introduce our young people into the workshop of the church, to train them in such a school of methods that they will be fairly equipped for aggressive Christian service.

The Sunday School has been called "the people's religious university." Then the League is the School of Applied Science, where our youth may learn to use the truth they know in solving the great problems of character and conduct, of duty and destiny.

3. The Sunday School, as at present conducted, has not time for anything more than teaching. Indeed, it has hardly time for more than a merely superficial instruction.

One hour a week! Think of it. And only half of that in class session. It is altogether insufficient, as we all allow. The average time of the day school is twenty-seven hours a week. And some Sunday School teachers (!) find even the Sunday afternoon half-hour too long.

Our growing youth must have a *working* knowledge of the Bible, not a merely intelligent acquaintance with facts about it, if it is to be a Book of Life to them.

The Sunday School does not give this working familiarity with the Book. By the substitution of "quarterlies" for the Word in many schools it is practically impossible for our scholars to become in any degree skilful in using the Bible. The Epworth League that is true to its purpose seeks to make the members familiar with the Book itself. True, many fail, and the weekly topic study becomes but a caricature of what it is primarily intended to be.

Sunday School and League should work together here. The League might well provide a teacher training class for the Sunday School, and supplement the instruction of Sunday with such a use of the Scriptures in the League services as will encourage individual thought and free expression on the part of the members, and so develop strong characters founded on deep convictions, the result of personal study.

4. Sunday School work, as the name implies, is always on Sundays, and the problem of our youth *between* Sundays is a most urgent one. The most pressing question of the day in the religious world is: "Who shall get control of our young people—Christ or Satan?"

This question cannot be solved on Sunday alone. Many bids are being made for our children. Every day, every evening, every night, baited traps of the world, the flesh and the devil are set for them. Meanwhile, many churches are out of business, many pastors are asleep, many parents are indifferent. But Satan is ever busy, and seeds of evil are being sown, wrong habits being formed, vicious tastes created and developed, and our young people by hundreds are slipping away from us, many of them forever.

The alert, active, progressive Epworth League should make its influence felt in true evangelism here, not competing with the world in providing attractions for the young, but by winning them from the world to the only satisfying life there is—one of true Christian enjoyment and blessing.

An unlimited field of League influence is here opened up. It must cultivate it if it would fulfil its true purpose.

5. Sunday School exercises on Sunday are necessarily wholly religious in their character, and do not fully meet the demands of the young life of our congregations.

We should seek to cultivate in them an all-round, symmetrical character, one in which the "religious" and "se-