

CHURCH FEDERATION

INTER-CHURCH CONFERENCE ON FEDERATION

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 15-21

1905



EDITED BY

ELIAS B. SANFORD, D.D.

UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY
PERMIT FOR ALL

NEW YORK CHICAGO TORONTO

FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

LONDON AND EDINBURGH

Copyright, 1906, by
FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

Y. H. REVELL
Y. H. REVELL
L. H. REVELL
New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago: 80 Wabash Avenue
Toronto: 27 Richmond Street, W.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 100 Princes Street

THE MEDIATION OF YOUTH IN CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON, LL.D.

I esteem it a great privilege to stand in this place, and yet, notwithstanding the too kind terms in which Mr. Mott has introduced me, I feel that there is a touch of audacity in attempting the theme which he has announced and I have undertaken, "The Mediation of Youth in Christian Progress." I wish that I could say with historical accuracy that I am myself still a young man; but, notwithstanding the fact that I have passed the age when that definition is strictly accurate, I do not feel that I have passed the age when I may still esteem myself a young man, married to the impulses of youth, full of the knowledge of those things which come by association with youth, by association with the influences which are constantly impelling the human race to move onward, with its eye, not over its shoulder at the path which it has traversed, but forward upon the difficult roads which it must attempt and the difficult heights which it must assail. It is said that only two sorts of persons ought ever to attempt to teach: Those who are young and those who never grow old; and I hope that I shall have red corpuscles enough in my blood to remain in the second category, and that those associated with me in university authority, when they see the red corpuscles lose their ascendancy, will ask me to step out of my task.

In order to discuss the mediation of youth in Christian progress it is first necessary to determine what we mean by progress. I think that you will realize at once that it is a term very difficult to define, the contents of which differ with every differing conception of the task of the world. I think that you will agree with me that progress does not necessarily consist, or consist only, in change; that there are some changes which are destructive and not progressive, and that progress seldom consists of radical change, because society is an organism, and everything which is radical tears, and so far as it tears destroys the tissue of the organism. You know that one of the most dreadful physical diseases to which flesh is heir—I mean the disease of cancer—is supposed by some students of medicine to consist in an excessive vitality in one spot in the organism, whereby, returning to the vigor and creative power of infancy, it so outruns surrounding tissues as to create a centre

of demoralization and of death. Let that stand for us as an image of radical changes in respect of progress. It must not be more radical than the tissues can stand; it must not be faster than the ligaments of society can endure. Progress consists in those progressive changes, in those advancing stages, in those modifications which come from the pressure of circumstances, of purpose, or of desire; not of local circumstance, not of individual purpose, not of the desire of a little group of men, but from some general reckoning of the circumstance of men, from some general assessment of the purposes of mankind, from a knowledge of the general desires and needs of the human heart and human nature.

It has been said that the best leaders are those with ordinary opinions and extraordinary abilities, those who hold the opinion of the generation in which they live, but hold it with such vitality, perceive it with such executive insight, that they can walk at the front and show the paths by which the things generally purposed can be accomplished. There is in progress a necessary conservative element, and therefore it behooves us to ask whether we can entrust progress to young men. Those who do not deal with large bodies of young men suppose that young men are radicals. I have never found them so. I think the most arch conservative I ever dealt with is the American undergraduate. He does not want anything touched with change. He forms a custom in his little community in four years; the fifth year it has become immemorial, and he forbids us to touch the immemorial observances of the little community which he loves. He wishes you not to alter even the exterior appearances of things on the grounds where he has spent his life, in the buildings to which his affections have begun to cling in such a way that they can never be torn away. It seems to him desecration to touch the slightest thing that has been intimately associated with his short experience. There is no tenacity like the tenacity of the young mind, and there is no conservative like the young conservative, and I believe that the most conservative body you can find is a body of young men. The difficult, the dangerous, the desperate, radicals whom I have known have been men past middle life, men upon whose palates the taste of life has turned bitter, men for whom experience has brought disappointment, men whose ambitions have been checked and cooled; these are the desperate radicals who want to clear some new stage upon which they can assert their power; not the youngsters compounded of hope, not the youngster hopeful of everything, but the man who has lost

the impulse of hope and is standing near to the darkness of despair. He is your radical, your revolutionist, your man of reckless change.

And yet this is true only in a certain field. The youth is conservative in this respect, that he did not himself originate his own convictions. The young man takes his convictions from the world into which he is born, which is the world of older persons; he takes his convictions from the preceding generation. Your radical is your man of new and novel convictions; not your man who takes his doctrine from the generation that precedes him, but the man who seeks to originate a doctrine for his own generation. There are young men who seek such change; but you will generally find upon analyzing the convictions which they urge upon their generation that they are not new, but old. One of the difficulties about our education at the present time is that we do not thoroughly enough apprise our young men of what has been done. The educated mind is the lobe in the human brain which contains the memory, the memory of what the human race has done and thought and attempted and achieved and failed to achieve, and if this lobe of memory be not properly stimulated the race will lose its sense of identity. The psychologist tells me that I know who I am to-day because I remember who I was yesterday, and if I did not remember who I was yesterday I could not for the life of me tell you who I am to-day. And so the human race. Unless it can reckon truly with regard to its past experiences, it has lost both its identity and its direction.

For if I do not know where I came from I do not know where I am going to. My direction is determined not by the spot upon which I stand, but the direction from which I have come, and the recollections of the human race are the standards by which it steers. See the consequence when it does not. I had a friend, a very learned friend, learned in certain narrow lines, who undertook to reconcile all the arts under a common category. He worked out a beautiful and symmetrical system that was most pleasing to the abstract mind and submitted it to a colleague for his comment, who said: "My dear fellow, that is most interesting, and always has been interesting, but was exploded in the time of Aristotle." There would have been a great deal of effort saved this gentleman if he had only recollected as far back as Aristotle. The educated youngster, therefore, is the youngster who carries the precious fruit of memory. He carries a compass, besides, for he knows which is the north and which is the east and which is the west; and he is

not your natural radical; he is your natural conservative; the stock that he means to trade on in this generation is the stock which was accumulated in the last generation.

But the youngster is progressive none the less—in a sense which older men seldom sufficiently realize. The youngster does not take his convictions with any very nice discrimination; he takes them whole, in the mass, as they are administered to him, in the bulk. The difficulty with us older men is that we sickly the whole matter over with the pale cast of thought. We begin to analyze; we begin to split hairs betwixt north and northeast side; we begin to say this part of the doctrine is true, that part is false, this part of the Gospel is true, that an interpolation, and the bulk ceases to beat upon us with its whole majestic force. We feel the little discriminations that pull us this way and that, and by the time we reach sixty or thereabouts these pullings have slackened all the speed in us, and we stand still and say, Whither shall we go? Whereas the youngster does not discriminate between one part of the force and the other; he goes steadily forward before the beating wind that blows upon him out of the past. Professor Langley, of the Smithsonian Institution, not long ago tried a very interesting experiment. He was interested to know how even the weaker kinds of birds could stand still with outstretched wings in a gale, not being driven by it, but simply tipping themselves very gently and deftly, shifting themselves and standing always still, not driven. He erected in a window a little line of paper windmills such as we have all used when we were boys, and through this window blew a powerful draught of air. He found that not all of the windmills rotated in the same direction, that some were reversing, that others were standing still; and it became evident to him that the wind was not a solid movement of the air, but a movement in eddies, in currents, in counter currents, the most of the movement being forward, but not every part of it moving forward at once; and that what the bird was doing was finding the interstices in the wind and balancing himself where the gale did not beat upon him. That is what we are doing in our discriminations of doctrine. But the youngster is like a boat with a sail spread to the breeze. He may sometimes run close to the wind, but nevertheless he is governed by the bulk of the current and not seeking the interstices where it does not blow and impel him; and so, being impelled more than we are impelled, he seems to have a pace that we cannot accomplish. He is yielding himself to the net power that is in the con-

victions which he holds, and so he moves forward with a confidence that seems rash, with a confidence which seems blind to those of us who are older, more circumspect, more prudent, more thoughtful.

I sometimes think of the movement of youngsters in the field of thought like the movement of volunteers, particularly American volunteers, in military movements. The volunteer will often accomplish what the seasoned troops cannot, because the seasoned troops know where it is dangerous to go and the volunteers do not, and by their very ignorance of danger they face and accomplish impossible tasks. Not only that, but the volunteer is impatient of discipline when he is in process of movement. He wishes to act as an individual; wants his fellows at his side, but will not stop if they lag; and will often in little groups climb some height that it was supposed no troops could take—not overcoming the obstacles, not knowing that they are there, unconscious that he is climbing barriers, with his eyes so lifted that he sees no barrier and scrambles to the place of power with the sheer impulse of ignorant audacity.

This is the power that is in youth; this is the power that makes us afraid of young men. Convince them of something and let them get the bit in their teeth, and they will bolt in spite of you. If you do not want them to bolt, do not convince them. If you want them to bolt, have convictions that are sufficiently hot to be communicated, and they will take them. They are a transmitting medium, but the only thing that can set them on fire is fire itself. This, it seems to me, is the function of youth, which I should designate as the function, not of pushing ideas—that is a function of discrimination—but the function of pushing *ideals* forward in the world; and, after all, one ideal is worth twenty ideas. I mean in propulsive force; I do not mean in intellectual training, but in propulsive force, in accomplishment, in what one may call spiritual dynamics. One ideal is worth twenty ideas. It takes a certain movement of an idea to make it an ideal. No mere idea, stripped and naked, is fit to become an ideal; you have to dress it becomingly, you have to recommend it in insinuating ways, you have to illuminate it with poetical touches, you have to give it a certain halo which does not properly belong to any human idea, and it is this transfiguration, this image of the imagination, which makes it an *ideal*. Believe me, ladies and gentlemen, we live by poetry, not by prose. We live in proportion as we have creative imaginations, not in proportion as we have discriminative minds. We

live in proportion as we see visions, not in proportion as we discriminate what can actually be perceived with the trained eye in the light of noonday. You must show the youth what he can see in that hour of dawn in which he uses his eyes, not in the hot, unshaded hour of noon in which some of us live, and not in the dying, fading, pale light of the evening coming on, but in that transforming light of the morning, when everything looks as if it were touched with the power and the beauty of poetry; and if you can communicate such ideals, why, then, these youngsters are fit stuff to seize the banners of any enterprise and carry them forward where you wish.

I have sometimes asked myself why it is that the Young Men's Christian Association can succeed in certain foreign fields where the ordinary missionary has been stopped and balked. There seems to be in certain countries—for example, in China—a limit, a social limit, in some communities, to what the missionary can accomplish. He can do his work with the poor and illiterate, but apparently he cannot touch the literate classes; and yet the Young Men's Christian Association has gone in and taken hold of the sons of the governors of provinces and is moulding them, the magnates of the next generation, to its purposes and ideals. Why? I offer my own explanation with a great deal of modesty, for I am not sure that it is the right explanation, but I think it will bear your examination. Because the Young Men's Christian Association does not undertake to teach dogma. It undertakes to teach, but not dogma; it undertakes to do that sort of teaching which is leadership in life. Now, while I believe that all truth is dogma, I do not believe that all dogma is truth. While I believe that all truth may be formulated as dogma, I also believe that the formulation of it removes it from the vital sphere, if I may so express it, into the intellectual sphere, and that if you try to indoctrinate you are not communicating power to those who are not the proper subjects of indoctrination. What is the consequence? Look at the tests of any one of your Churches. Are the members of the Churches asked to subscribe to the doctrines that the ministers of the Churches subscribe to? No. You will find that the members are brought in upon a minimum of faith, a minimum of doctrine which really belongs to all the Churches, and that the intellectual part of it, that which must lie back of the teaching and form its foundation, but need not form the subject matter of the teaching, is left to the intellectual part of the Church, the trained part of the Church,

the scholarly part of the Church, namely, the ministry of the Church. I do not believe that the ministers of the Church could teach truly unless they studied dogma discriminately, but I believe that if they transferred the teaching of the theological classroom to the Church itself, they would communicate dogma and not life, and that in so far as the Young Men's Christian Association has exceeded in success the missionaries of the Church, its success has been due to the fact that it has sought to lead men on in the general paths of enlightenment and of character without trying to impress upon them too soon, too suddenly, too didactically, too emphatically, the distinguishing dogmas of particular Churches.

I know that there is a very controversial ground here and that I am very safe inasmuch as nobody is going to answer me; and I do not want for a moment to neglect the danger and the difficulty of points of this sort. You may easily obscure such matters. I was talking with a couple of gentlemen, just before coming into the room, about those Christians who propose salvation, not by faith in Christ so much as by character, by the direct and conscious cultivation of character; and I said that it seemed to me that salvation by character was an enterprise of despair, because—I do not know how you feel about your character but I know how I feel about mine, and I wouldn't for anything I can think of offer it as a certificate for salvation. Moreover, I believe if I set out to form my character as the chief object of my life I would become an odious prig. I am not put into this world to make a handsome creature of myself; I am put into it to follow the right leaders and to serve my fellow-men; and if I do my business my character will take care of itself. Character is a by-product, and if you set to work to make the by-product for its own sake you will spoil the main product. I would not have you think, therefore, that the Young Men's Christian Association is merely an enterprise for the formation of character. It is an enterprise for teaching, for teaching those things belonging to all Christian creeds which vitalize all Christian creeds, and which express themselves in character; and I believe that it is because of the appreciation by pagan peoples of the fact that these bodies of young men have come, not to turn them from old ways of thinking for the purpose of a singular conversion, but to turn them from old ways of thinking for a new comradeship in the handsomest enterprises of life, that it is having its notable success.

But what is the motive power in all of this? Why is the youth speedier than his elder in the enterprises which he undertakes? Why has he done all these extraordinary things since 1844? Because the key to all the endeavors of young people is ardor, devotion. I know that there is a certain amount of ardor and devotion left in everybody, but it is not always important in quantity. Men do lose their impetus, their momentum. I for my part believe that everything anybody does is done from ardor unless it be merely the compulsory earning of your daily bread. I believe that everything that a man accomplishes he accomplishes because it is palatable to him to accomplish it; and that is the other side of ardor. I hear some men say that they are not sentimental. Well, I do not believe in sentimentality, but I do believe in sentiment, and it is the only motive power that I know of. If a man tells you that he does not derive his freshness from sentiment, you may believe that he has covered over the walls of his sentiment with adamant, but if you will dig it away you will see the gleam of the water; else he would go dry at the roots. A man who has not gone dry at the roots has a fountain of sentiment where he is planted, and this fountain bubbles most luxuriantly, bubbles most steadily and freshly by the root of the young tree, by the root of the youth. Ardor is the secret of their impulse, of their momentum.

And ardor can never centre in oneself. I do not know that I can safely use a figure from mechanics, but I suppose that if a machine's power all centres on itself it will either wreck itself to pieces or stand still. At any rate, I know that is true of a man, that if he centres his powers on himself he will presently get a rotatory momentum which will make him fly to pieces; at any rate it will swing the soul out of him into space. And the only sentiment, the only ardor which ever drives the human heart at its best is the ardor of love, is the ardor of love for something outside of yourself; and the best love, as you need not be told, is the love for the best object, is the love for Christ Himself. What it seems to me that these young people's societies are doing is to make their own contacts at first hand with the person and power of Christ, and, having made that contact, to ask themselves this question, What would Christ have done in this world at this time, in our place, with our opportunities? Not what would Christ have taught, not what new parables would Christ have formed—for the old parables fit every age of the world, the old teaching is translatable into all languages and all purposes and all necessities—but

what would Christ have done in the direction of these enterprises? What would He have wished to see accomplished in the world, and what would He have set Himself to accomplish?

Though myself brought up in the straitest sect of a particular denomination, I believe that there is no more vitality in one denomination than in another if both be in direct contact with the person of Christ; and that if one be in direct contact, and the other only in indirect contact, with a padded interval of sophisticated doctrine, the first will be the stronger of the two, and that you must look to it that your doctrine is not padding but something that will transmit the currents. Some men's doctrine is so like padding that they seem to be in a padded cell, to judge by their performances. If you are in direct contact with the body and character of Christ, why then you have got that all-conquering impulse which comes from the only sort of devotion that ever lifts the world to any great enterprise, a devotion which is outside of yourself, in which you can willingly devote everything that is in yourself to something that you know will in the very act of absorbing you lift and translate you into greater and better things. So that it seems to me that the foundation of this inherited conviction of the young men of this age, which is to be translated into the momentum of power, is nothing else than the Church's one Foundation in Jesus Christ our Lord, and that in proportion as Christ is exhibited in the lives of the young men and young women of these organizations, in that proportion will they be fit for the conquest of the world; and that because they take the impulses of the Church at first hand, when they are fresh, when their momentum has not been lost, they are likely to be the standard bearers in the places which have hitherto seemed inaccessible.

THE BASES OF UNITY AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AND STEPS TOWARD ACHIEVEMENT

MR. ROBERT E. SPEER

Among the young men and young women of our generation there are, as Mr. Mott pointed out, moral and spiritual relationships already established which are near to Christian unity. The ideas of practical co-operation in work and of spiritual fellowship in worship are ideas that are entirely familiar and congenial to us.