

The Sunday School Times

Your Place in the Conference Picture

The three main types of summer conferences offer a wide variety of opportunities for the Christian family

by CHARLES C. RYRIE

“VACATION with a Purpose!” “In the Heart of the Beautiful . . . !” “For the REST of your Life!” “New Enlarged Swimming Pool!” “Finest Speakers in America!” “Half-mile of Sandy Beach!” So go the blurbs, trying to lure Christians to camps and conferences. To go or not to go, that is the question!

Thousands will attend Christian camps and conferences this summer. Some will be converted; some will be edified; many will be unchanged.

What is the outlook for Christian camps and conferences in 1963? What would be gained by sending your children to a Christian camp? Should you spend your vacation at a conference? If so, what kind? And what can you expect from such an experience? These are questions which many are asking; they are legitimate questions that ought to be asked—and answered.

Generally speaking there are three types of Christian conferences. One is the Christian camp. Its program includes typical camping activities that appeal to children and young people. There is also a heavy and rightful emphasis on athletics. The spiritual emphasis is not at all neglected. But these meetings are often geared to one or two in the morning hours and one at evening. The camping movement for children and young people has had phenomenal growth in recent years and has been greatly used by God in reaching these important age groups.

A second type might be described as the old-fashioned Bible conference. It is characterized by its heavy, almost exclusive, emphasis on the spiritual program. Meetings for prayer and Bible study occupy a maxi-

mum amount of time, while other activities are kept at a minimum. Serious and concentrated Bible study is promoted, and the entire program is geared to that end.

A third type might be called the Christian vacation resort. Religious meetings are fewer in number than at a Bible conference; other activities are many and varied. People are attracted by the promise of a vacation, and the program is geared to promote leisure. Often attendance at the one or two meetings a day is optional. Usually every attempt is made to provide attractive facilities in order to draw the Christian tourist trade. This kind of conference is of relatively recent appearance on the American church scene.

Of course, not every conference will fall exactly into one of these categories. Camps are usually quite distinct, but conferences will range across the scale from the pure Bible conference to the pure resort.

Where do you and your family fit into this picture? Christian camping has had spectacular growth and wonderful results in reaching thousands of children and young people for the Lord. Camps have a built-in appeal, for most young people want to “go to camp.” The lure of a week or two at camp usually overcomes any reluctance brought on by the thought of having to “go to church” while there. Even the most ordinary programs are attractive, for again there is that built-in appeal from swimming, softball, and campfires.

The spiritual emphasis can easily be introduced. Much can be done even in a week with a good staff, whose members are vitally interested in seeing their charges won to the Lord. Encouraging also is a trend today in Christian camps to make a real effort to teach children and young people some of the deeper things of the Word. Directors are realizing that even children can comprehend more than just the stories of the Bible. Doctrine can be understood if presented rightly. Most camps, by maintaining a good balance between the secular and sacred, create a wholesome atmosphere. Children can be serious and they can learn; but they are children and must not be expected always to act like mature adults. Fun and exuberance are certainly not

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Dr. Ryrie, a ranking theologian from Dallas Theological Seminary, is a popular Bible conference speaker and author of a number of books.

Conference Picture

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incompatible with Christian growth.

Shall I send my child to a Christian camp? I cannot answer that question for you personally, but I can say that you seriously ought to consider this. But be prepared to receive back from camp a different child—even one who may have committed his or her life for missionary service. Such is frequently the outcome of a week at a Christian camp.

One final word about camps. If you occupy some position of influence in your church, you should encourage the sending of a group from your church to camp for a week. Not only will the young people be better for the experience, but your entire church will be. Indeed, some of the adults might be revived after the young people return!

What about the Bible conference and Christian resort? The considerations here are more complex.

For one thing, purebred, old-fashioned, Bible conferences are getting scarce today. I mean the kind that provide for concentrated Bible study and prayer and where people come for that purpose alone. (And it is not solely a matter of program, for the people who come must come for such a steady diet.) This decline is not altogether inexplicable. In former days Bible conferences provided for a lack in American church life. Today that lack of Bible teaching has been supplied in a large part by good teaching programs. Many no longer feel the need for a summer Bible conference, since they receive their spiritual food week by week in their home churches.

Nonetheless, there are some very excellent purebred Bible conferences which will be seeking your attendance this summer. Should you go? By all means, if you go with the right attitude and expectancy. You should not go just to hear some new voice or see if today's speaker has some new tidbit that the speaker last summer did not have. You should go because of the message, not the man. You should go as a participant, not as a spectator.

You should expect to be serious in your purpose, to be busy in attending meetings, to be concentrating on the Word, to be engaged in more prayer than usual, and to meet the Lord and be spoken to by Him. You may also expect to be rested, but not because you slept late several mornings or because you lolled around the pool or on the beach all afternoon. You will be rested (they that wait on the Lord shall exchange their weakness for His strength) because of the decided change of pace. You may expect to go home a better

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2. Completion of book by Dr. A. C. Raws on
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