

Christian Endeavor in Africa and the Middle East

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Missionaries from North America and Europe brought Christian Endeavor to Africa.

In **Egypt** the first CE society was started in Cairo 1898. Dr. White and Miss Thompson of the Egyptian mission of the United Presbyterian Church of America had introduced the society and watched over its interests. Within various projects of this mission a good number of societies were started along the Nile from Alexandria up to Assiut.

A young men's CE society in Alexandria reached out to Syrians, Copts, Muslims, and Jews trying to win them for Christ. A CE society in a Cairo boarding school had been influential in deepening the spiritual life among the girls. A few young CE workers from the Bulak quarter of Cairo united in praying for special work among the Muslims. The result of seven months secret prayer was a great revival.

The first Christian Endeavor society in **West Africa** was established in Lagos, **Nigeria**, in 1897. It began with only 5 members and grew within 5 years to about 200. One important leader was Pastor Dr. Mojola Agbebi. Mission circles were formed to raise support for mission work in the interior areas of Nigeria. The CE members carried the gospel to market places, e.g. in Calabar, South Nigeria, and people from different tribes became believers. In central Nigeria one of the chiefs had become a member of Christian Endeavor and through his influence other chiefs came to Christ and built a chapel for their people. In Ekiti a Christian Endeavourer gathered nearly three hundred local folk and taught them to read.

Missionaries introduced Christian Endeavor also in the **Congo** with the intention to train missionary helpers. The CE society in Lu-ebo had about 50 members. All these people were evangelists, held prayer meetings and visited the sick. Some of them traveled weeks

and months to reach distant villages. Every meeting of the society was closed with brief reports on the work every member had done.

Around 1900 one pastor Tobbo Dido from Bonabela, **Cameroon**, corresponded regularly with the German CE Union about the independent CE work in the then German colony. There are also reports about Christian Endeavor groups in Gabon in those years.

In January 1896 missionary workers from several evangelical denominations in **Liberia** banded themselves together to promote the work of CE and to unite already existing societies into one union. Especially the Lutheran mission supported the work in those days.

At his first visit in **South Africa** in 1897 Rev. Francis E. Clark found earnest friends of Christian Endeavor in Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town. The first white society was started in the Huguenot Seminary in Wellington already 1887. A teacher had visited her brother in the United States. In his church she got to know Christian Endeavor. A few societies were formed before 15 of them formed a union in 1896. Rev. Dr. Andrew Murray was chosen president and Miss L. Sprigg, daughter of the colony's Premier Sir Gordon Sprigg, became secretary. When the Second Boer War (1899-1902) broke out the work of the CE societies was greatly interrupted. Since there were CE societies in Dutch-speaking and in English-speaking churches Endeavourers were in both the warring parties British and Boers. But God turned seeming evil into good. Endeavourers among Dutch prisoners of war who were detained on St. Helena and other places, held almost daily CE meetings in their detention camps. On return to South Africa these young men entered with enthusiasm into Christian Endeavor work, reviving societies that the war had broken up and forming new ones. About 200 volunteered for missionary work and went for theological training. Following the Dutch Union grew even faster than the (English speaking) South African Union. In fall 1905 357 societies were reported in South Africa, of which 249

belonged to the Dutch Union. However Francis E. Clark experienced on a second visit in 1904 joined meetings of Boers and Britons. He wrote that “it was the most remarkable example of the power of Christ to weld together estranged hearts in Christian love” that he had ever seen. Christian Endeavor came also up in the Zulu churches (**Natal**) through the work of American missionaries and in **Lesotho**.

In 1892 about 30 CE societies were found in **Madagascar**. The first groups started in Ambohipotry and Anbohitantely as a result of revival. 1905 they had more than 90 societies.

There are sporadic reports in CE periodicals about CE activities in various African countries in the first half of the 20th century. It seems. that CE flourished whenever a missionary or church leader promoted the movement and vanished from an area when the leaders were not interested.

In **Egypt** CE activities were reported from the Evangelical Church and the Coptic Evangelical Church until about 1985.

In **South Africa** 460 societies in the Dutch Reformed Church with about 10.000 members celebrated in 1951 their 50th anniversary and were reorganized as “Dutch Reformed Young People Society” on the same day. In 2008 a former German CE traveling secretary founded a handful of CE societies in the congregations of the City Missions of Southern Africa.

National CE Unions have been (re-)established in recent times in **Sierra Leone** (1964), **Nigeria** (1974 and 1997), **Liberia** (1986) **Malawi** (1989 and 2006), **Rwanda** (1993), **Ghana**, **Togo** and **Côte d'Ivoire** (in the late



CE Convention in Malawi

1980's). Bishop George K. Larbie from Ghana, who was later also a Vice President of the World's Christian Endeavor Union, traveled extensively throughout the last decade of the 20th century in West Africa and initiated CE Unions in **Benin, Niger, Mali, Senegal, the Gambia** and **Burkina Faso**. Due to lack of follow up some of these CE groups did not grow. In Gambia CE was reestablished in 2006 by Pap Philip Jabang, a Gambian Youth Pastor. He had been a member of a CE society, run by an Irish missionary in his village, when he was a boy. This Union is self-reliant and independent from foreign missionaries and is active with about 400 members in this tiny, predominantly Muslim West African state.

There are inquiries about CE from and contacts with interested people from other African countries as well.

Christian Endeavor in the **Middle East** is connected with missionaries of the American Board of Missions who worked in the area bringing a number of Protestant churches in existence that split off from traditional oriental churches. CE had a vital impact especially in the Armenian Evangelical Church. Many of the orphanages for the Armenian children who survived the massacres in the Ottoman Empire had CE societies. American and German missionaries, mostly Endeavourers themselves, encouraged CE societies in the local churches as well.

Persia had CE societies already in 1893 and in 1905 about 35 societies existed in the country. There are reports about CE groups in **Syria** and in **Palestine** in those days. CE societies were active in spreading the gospel, in caring for the poor and in strengthening the Christians in those days of persecution. Among the Christians in **Iraq** we hear of Christian Endeavor until about 1980.

Today the Armenian Evangelical Church in **Syria** and **Lebanon** has a number of quite active CE societies which are their youth work (see: <http://aeechurch.com>).