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LUTHERAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

PROVISION FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE UNITED STATES*

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For three centuries after the beginning of the Reformation, the State church in most of the countries now included in the German Empire was Lutheran, and the doctrine now known as the Lutheran faith was taught in all the schools of those countries, according to courses and methods inaugurated by Luther, Melancthon, and their coworkers. Even when, a century ago, the Lutheran and the Reformed churches were amalgamated in Prussia and other German countries, the resulting State church being known as the Evangelical or United church, the system of religious instruction in the parish schools, which were State schools, was not materially affected. In Reformed districts the specifically Reformed doctrines were emphasized in the schools, and in Lutheran parishes the Lutheran faith was taught, and the provisions for the religious training of the young were thus maintained up to the present time.† The eras of rationalism and liberalism exerted their influence pretty definitely for a while, it is true, but the subsequent reaction has given to religious education its old prominent place on the curriculum. Besides, most of the parishes outside of the largest cities had maintained the traditional instruction in religion, even when a mere moral training had been substituted officially. The Lutheran State church of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland requires religious instruction in the State schools, according to the doctrine of the Lutheran church.‡ In the Lutheran districts and parishes of Finland, the Baltic Provinces, Poland, Austria, Bohemia, and Switzerland, and in independent synods and congregations scattered throughout the world, the pedagogical precepts of the reformers as to religious instruction obtain, and the Lutheran catechism and the Bible occupy a prominent place in the life of the children.

It is only natural, therefore, that the Lutheran people from these countries and districts should endeavor to perpetuate the

*This paper was prepared at the suggestion and under the direction of Prof. F. H. Swift, of the College of Education, University of Minnesota, to whom the author freely acknowledges his indebtedness.

†See articles by O. E. Sisson in "Aims of Religious Education," p. 261-f; "Religious Education," Vol. I, p. 101-f.

‡American Lutheran Survey, Vol. I, No. 3, p. 31.

traditions of their home parishes in the new country with whose fortunes they cast their lot. And that it was not merely the force of habit which actuated the first Lutheran settlers in making thorough and adequate provision for the religious training of the young, but the deep-rooted conviction of the absolute necessity of indoctrination, is emphasized continually in the official organs of the various synods, in one of which it was recently stated: "If the Lutheran church ever permits its schools to die, its end will be at hand."* Since the Lutheran church of the United States is third in size among the Protestant bodies of the country, these words have a great significance. Rev. H. K. Carroll, statistician for the "Federal Council of Churches of Christ," at the end of 1913 fixed the number of communicant members of the Lutheran church in our country at 2,338,722, with more than 8,000 pastors.

Provision for religious education in the Evangelical Lutheran church of the United States has been made in the following institutions: the parochial school, *Christenlehre*, catechumen classes, the Sunday school, the Saturday school, the Summer school, in all of which principally elementary religious training is given; religious instruction in high schools, academies, and preparatory departments, including principally a review and slight extension of the elementary instruction; religious education in junior and in full colleges, which usually includes extended studies in Bible text and in history; and the very advanced instruction in theological seminaries.

THE PAROCHIAL SCHOOL

The principal institution upon which the Lutheran church depends for the religious education of the young is the Christian Day school, commonly known as the parochial or parish school, sometimes also called, according to the language of the congregation which conducts it, the German school, or the Swedish or the Norwegian school, as the case may be. The Lutheran parochial school in the United States is, unlike the parish schools of the European Lutheran countries, not a state school, but a school maintained by the parish, sometimes with the aid of the synod to which the congregation belongs. There may be either one school maintained by a congregation, which is very often graded in the same way as the public schools, or a large congregation may have several schools in various parts of the parish, or, if there are two or more congrega-

*Lutheran Quarterly, Vol. XXXIV, p. 201. — A Synod, in the Lutheran church, is an association of independent, autonomous congregations, represented, as a rule, by pastors and lay delegates in equal numbers, either from the individual parishes or from groups of parishes.

tions forming one parish, they may bear the expense of a single central school together.

The parochial school is in charge of the congregation or parish which maintains it. The congregation also fixes the subjects to be taught and exercises supervision, usually through a specially elected or appointed school board. The pastor is, in most cases, ex officio supervisor of religious instruction and principal of the school. In almost one-half of the Lutheran parochial schools the pastor either teaches the entire school himself or assists in the teaching in some classes.

The subjects taught in the parochial schools, outside of religion, are the following: reading and writing of the language of the congregation, German, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, Icelandic, Estonian, Lithuanian, Polish, etc.; reading and writing of English; arithmetic; grammar and composition; geography; United States history and civil government; drawing; singing; elementary science: physiology, zoölogy, botany, common facts in physics; general history; elementary algebra. Though all or many of these subjects are taught, the congregation or parish schools are, however, chiefly religious schools, and the teaching of religion, of the Lutheran faith, is the principal reason for their existence.* Competent instruction in all the branches named above is indeed aimed at and, at least in a majority of cases, also achieved, the graduates of these schools, in spite of the extra work in religion and one foreign language, ranking very high in competitive tests with the graduates of the elementary public schools, but the teaching of religion is paramount in the course of study, all the other branches being made subordinate to it.

Choosing at random courses of study from parochial schools at Cleveland, Ohio, at St. Paul, Minn., and at Denver, Colo., to find the proportion of time devoted to this branch, we find that the first period of the morning session is devoted to religious exercises and instruction. Taking into account the fact that supplementary reading in the upper classes is done from the Bible and also that about one-half of the time devoted to singing (which is, on the average, sixty minutes per week) is spent in teaching hymns and religious songs, it follows that fully one-sixth of the school time in the elementary school is spent in religious training. This average is a very conservative one, since a careful canvass of a great many rural schools would undoubtedly show that there is actually more time spent on this branch of the curriculum than upon any other. And

*See Report of Commissioner of Education for the year ended June 30, 1913, pp. 395-400.

it is hardly probable that many schools fall below this average of about five hours of religious instruction per week, since the various synods, though in most cases only advisory bodies, exercise a certain supervision also over the schools of the individual congregations. The following resolution of the Missouri Synod will bear this out:

"If there is no teacher for the parochial school, the pastor has the duty to instruct the children in the Word of God, so far as it is possible for him, since he also should feed the lambs of Christ. If there is a teacher, the pastor has the duty . . . to watch and investigate, whether the Word of God is taught pure and unadulterated in the school, also complete and with proper application to Christian discipline."*

The course of religious instruction in the elementary Lutheran day school includes the following: Bible History, the Bible, Luther's Small Catechism with exposition and proof texts, the history of the Reformation. In the lower grades, or when the children are about from six to nine years old, about thirty-five Bible stories of the Old Testament and about forty-two of the New Testament are studied. The selection embraces the historical parts of the Bible and introduces the most important personages to the children. The creation and the fall, the patriarchs, the sojourn in Egypt, Moses and the exodus, Joshua, Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, and Daniel, from the Old Testament, and the principal incidents in the life of Christ, the nativity series, the public ministry, the great passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and the story of Pentecost, from the New Testament, are included in the course. Of Luther's Small Catechism the text of the six chief parts of Christian doctrine: the Ten Commandments, the Creed (Apostolic Confession), the Lord's Prayer, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism (the institution, need, and benefit of the sacrament), the Office of the Keys and Confession (the application of the forgiveness of sins, preparatory to Holy Communion), and the Sacrament of the Altar, is memorized after a word explanation. In some cases Luther's short exposition is also committed to memory at this early age. Little prayers for morning and evening and for use before and after meals and verses of some of the principal hymns are memorized, as: "*Ein Kindelein so loeblich ist uns geboren heute,*" "*Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her,*" "*Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit,*" and others. In the fourth and fifth grades, or when the children are about nine to eleven years old, as soon as they can read both their own and the English language fluently and understandingly, the course is extended to include more Bible stories, whose lessons are emphasized and applied, while the explanation of the

*Synodal-Handbuch, Missouri-Synode, p. 34.

Small Catechism becomes a very prominent feature. In these intermediate grades, as in the primary department, the lessons are often illustrated by pictures, the Tissot pictures and the Perry collection being used to some extent, still more, perhaps, the series by Hoffman and by Schnorr von Carolsfeld. Luther's exposition of the six chief parts of Christian doctrine is committed to memory, also about 150-250 proof texts of the Catechism and a few hymns from the hymnal, such as: "*Erhalt uns Herr bei deinem Wort*," "*Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott*," "*O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden*," "*Befehl du deine Wege*," and similar ones.

In the upper grades, or at the ages from eleven to fourteen, the memorizing of Luther's Small Catechism, including the Table of Duties for the various conditions and professions, is completed and the majority of the proof texts of the explanation, amounting to from 500-1,000, are also committed to memory. In Bible History a total of sixty stories from the Old Testament, including, besides those learned in the lower grades, the story of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and the Babylonian captivity, and about seventy of the New Testament, an extension of the primary course, are studied. Some of these are committed to memory, together with a great number of psalms and hymns. The instruction is supplemented with selected Bible readings, principally in the historical books. In Church History a summary of the first three centuries is commonly given, while the history of the Reformation is studied in detail, special textbooks being used for that purpose.

THE CHRISTENLEHRE

The work of the Day school is, in many cases, supplemented by the so-called "*Christenlehre*" on Sundays, usually held in connection with the morning services in the church, but in some few cases on Sunday afternoon, and conducted, as a rule, by the pastor. At this time the Small Catechism is recited and then explained by the pastor word for word, or in sections, the catechetical method of instruction being used almost exclusively. *Christenlehre* is held, not only for the school children of the parish, but principally for the confirmed young people of the congregation and for the adult members. The course really amounts to a review and extension of the Catechism course of the Day school, the pastor taking special occasion, however, to make pastoral application of the subject matter studied.*

*Synodal-Handbuch, Missouri-Synode, p. 13, No. 17.

As soon as the children of the Day school, or of the parish, have reached the age fixed by the congregation (usually between twelve and fifteen years), they enter the special Catechumen class conducted by the pastor, continuing in the meantime, however, their course in the Day school, to be prepared for confirmation and admitted to the Lord's Supper. Catechumen classes are conducted either daily for about one hour or tri-weekly for a little more than an hour. The knowledge of the principal Bible stories, of the text of the Small Catechism, and of the main proof texts is usually fixed as the prerequisite, the children not being able to meet this requirement being given a two-year course in the Catechumen class, including about 200 hours, instead of the customary 100 hours.* The course is really an intensive Catechism course, in which the knowledge gained in the Day school is extended and applied to everyday life, so that by the time the rite of confirmation is consummated the first step in the indoctrination of the children is completed. From that time on they are looked upon as adult members of the congregation.

Where the old custom of conducting *Christenlehre* for both the children and the confirmed members of the congregation has fallen into desuetude, a substitute has in many cases been found in the Bible class, which is held either on Sunday morning or on some evening during the week. The meeting place is either the church or a schoolroom, or a room which contains at least some equipment to facilitate teaching. In these classes, which are usually conducted by the pastor or a trained teacher, some special book of the Bible is taken up and read and explained cursorily, by verses or sections. Such Bible classes are often the means of awakening the interest of more mature visitors, who, upon announcing their intention of becoming members of the congregation, are then instructed in special adult confirmation classes. In this instance also knowledge of the text of the Small Catechism and acquaintance with the chief proof texts is required. Bible classes are slowly gaining in popularity and have become a fixed institution in many churches, stimulating the interest of older and younger members alike.

SUNDAY SCHOOLS

The above means of Christian training have been found the ideal provision for religious education in the Lutheran church. In many cases, however, where the congregation is too poor to equip and

*Synodal-Handbuch, Missouri-Synode, pp. 12-13.

maintain a special school room or building, and to provide for adequate teaching in all branches, and in most of the exclusively English parishes, a partial substitute for the Christian Day school has been provided in the Sunday school. In the rural districts there are comparatively few Sunday schools in Lutheran congregations, except in English parishes. In the cities, however, they are being established quite generally, partly as mission schools, partly to aid in the transition from the German, Swedish, Norwegian, or other foreign language to the English. In many cases the Sunday school is conducted in the basement of the church, or in the schoolrooms; in the majority of instances, however, in the place of worship itself. In the Lutheran Sunday schools, according to the various published courses, Bible History and Bible study take up by far the largest part of the time. The proof texts offered are usually in connection with the Bible lesson for the day. In most cases at least the text of Luther's Small Catechism is memorized, together with a certain number of hymns. The story of the Reformation is offered in outline. All the publishing houses are now offering Sunday school literature, in many cases a graded course including primary, intermediate, and senior departments, besides the Bible class. The course of the General Council* in the intermediate and senior departments includes the following: Bible Story (detached stories), Bible History (continuous narrative), Bible Geography, Bible Biography, Bible Teachings, Bible Literature, and, finally, Bible Text. In other courses more attention is paid to the Small Catechism, but this feature invariably remains secondary.

SATURDAY AND SUMMER SCHOOLS

In some cases, where a regular Day school has not yet been established, the pastor meets the older children of the parish, from the age of ten years upwards, several times a week for catechetical and Bible History instruction. In other cases he establishes a regular Saturday school, in which, for about three hours, he endeavors to make some headway in the indoctrination of his charges. In still other cases Summer schools have been established, in which the pastor and his assistant, for about six weeks and on about three or four days in the week, teach principally Bible History and Catechism. All these provisions, however, although they are usually listed under congregational schools, are considered makeshifts by

*The General Council is a union of thirteen German, English, and Swedish synods. It stands next to the Missouri Synod in point of membership.

the more conservative Lutherans, besides pedagogically unsound. They can evidently not replace the Christian Day school, in which the Bible and Luther's Catechism, the "layman's Bible," is the basis of all teaching, not only of religion, but of the other branches as well.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Besides these provisions for children of the elementary grades and for those recently confirmed, the Lutheran church is endeavoring to continue its work also among the young men and young women of its congregations. Secondary and higher education is carried on in high schools and academies, in junior colleges and in full colleges, and in every case courses in religion are included in the curriculum, which are almost invariably obligatory. In the catalogue of one of the Lutheran high schools, chosen at random, the course in religion is summarized: "First and Second Years: Christ and other Bible characters studied as character models. Third and Fourth Years: Practical Christianity, Christian graces, virtues, and characteristics." In the bulletins of some of the Lutheran colleges, both those for young men only and those that are co-educational, may be found sentences like the following: "The Bible is a required study"; "All students are required to attend one recitation each week in Biblical or religious subjects"; "The curriculum includes a four years' course in the study of the Bible under one of the college professors, as necessary to graduation in any of the various departments." In order to show more clearly just how much ground is covered, the course in religion in leading colleges of three synods is here outlined. In a German-English college the following is offered: Luther's Small Catechism explained; Bible History of the Old and New Testaments, with introduction; Luther's Catechism in English, with memorizing of principal proof texts; the Gospel according to St. Mark, in the Greek text. In a Norwegian-English college, with a normal department, the following course in religion is offered: Catechism of Luther; the Creed; Bible and concordance. Bible: Old Testament—preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Bible: New Testament—life of Christ; history of the early Church. Church History: early history of the Christian Church and the Reformation. Bible: St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy; Augsburg Confession. Greek Testament: Gospel according to St. John, exegetically. Bible: Gospel according to St. John, in English.

In the bulletin of a Swedish-English college we find the following course: Christian Evidences, divine origin of the Christian

religion according to the Gospels. Bible Study: Acts of the Apostles, in Greek, Latin, or German. Christian Doctrine: the fundamental teachings of Christianity. Christian Doctrine: the plan of redemption. Sacred History—Old Testament, New Testament. Christian Ethics: fundamental principles, individual, social ethics.

That the religious instruction in the normal and theological seminaries is a very thorough one is, of course, to be expected. In the various normal seminaries a course similar to that of the colleges is offered, with special reference to Church History and Catechetics (principles and methods of catechizing). Symbolics (study of the doctrine as contained in the confessional writings) and Hermeneutics (principles of Bible exposition) are also included in the course, as a rule. In the theological seminaries are offered courses in Exegetics (Bible exposition), including Hermeneutics, Textual Criticism (comparison of the various transmitted texts), Old and New Testament Exegesis from the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, and Biblical Geography and Archeology (Bible antiquities); in Historical Theology, including Old and New Testament History, Church History, History of Doctrines, Patristics (the writings of the Church fathers), and Symbolics; in Systematic Theology, including Apologetics (principles of defense of Christian doctrine), Dogmatics (the doctrines in their interrelation), and Ethics (universal morality); and in Practical Theology, including Catechetics, Pedagogics (principles and methods of education), Liturgics (the liturgical year and the various parts of the service), Homiletics (principles and method of preparing and delivering sermons), and Pastoral Theology (questions pertaining to the pastoral care).

The personnel of the teaching force in the Lutheran elementary schools is principally male, although about 500 women teachers are now employed, mainly for the lower grades. In the academies and high schools there are women teachers for music, drawing, household economics, and a few other branches. For the training of these teachers for parochial school work there were at the close of the year 1913, seven normal schools and seminaries, with about fifty teachers and approximately 850 students. There is, at the present time, no provision for graduate work for teachers, the appellation "Teachers' College" evidently being merely a translation of the German word *Lehrerseminar*. In addition to the trained men of these institutions, a great many graduates of the colleges and high schools enter the teaching profession. The professors in the institutions of higher learning have either specialized for many years in

the subject which they are teaching, or they have taken graduate work at one or the other of the foremost universities of the country. Invariably, the teachers of religious subjects are theologians.

So far as the statistics of the parochial schools in the Lutheran Church are concerned, the first attempt to render an adequate report was made in the "Handbuch des Deutschtums im Auslande," in which the German parochial schools of our country have been tabulated on pp. 205-220. The most complete record of Lutheran parochial schools of all languages published up to the present time is included in the Report of the Commissioner of Education for the year ended June 30, 1913, in the section on "Progress and Condition of Lutheran Parochial Schools during the Current Year," by Prof. W. H. T. Dau, pp. 395-407, from which we reproduce here a part of the final table, with the very latest statistics:

Synods	No. of Schools	Teachers*	Pupils
United Synod of the South			
General synod	30	2	500
General council	597	735	24421
Norwegian synod	200		
Icelandic synod			
Ohio synod	265	116	9354
Buffalo synod	20	7	
Norwegian Eleison synod.....	6	4	
Hauge Norwegian synod.....	181		6000
German Texas synod.....	12	12	250
German Iowa synod.....	731	36	11910
Danish Lutheran Church.....	84	96	2498
German Immanuel synod.....	7	7	160
Finnish Suomi synod.....	47	52	2537
United Norwegian Church.....	1000	987	50584
United Danish Church.....	111		5000
Norwegian Lutheran Free Church.....	118	210	9575
Missouri synod	2259	1371	96287
Wisconsin synod	290	118	32825
Minnesota synod	155	26	15940
District synod of Michigan.....	75	7	2933
District synod of Nebraska.....	25	4	995
Lutheran Slovak synod.....	25		1530

The grand total for the Lutheran Church in the United States is at present approximately 5,900 parochial day schools, with 3,800 teachers and 275,000 pupils, in a total communicant membership of about 2,400,000. "Out of 100 Lutheran children, 22 attend a parochial school. . . . The average for the Synodical Conference is 32.79, for the General Council, 12.2, and for the independent synods 25.04 per cent."

So far as Sunday schools are concerned, the following statistics for 1913 are available:

*A great many pastors, in addition to their other duties, are teaching school, as noted above; in the Missouri Synod alone almost 1200.

The General Council, with the following synods in the United States—Ministerium of Pennsylvania, Ministerium of New York, Pittsburgh Synod, District Synod of Ohio, Augustana Synod, Chicago Synod, English Synod of the Northwest, Pacific Synod, and the Synod of New York and New England, reported, in a communicant membership of 485,722, a total of 2,021 Sunday schools, with 258,147 pupils. The Missouri Synod, in a communicant membership of 949,771, reported about 1,000 Sunday schools, with 75,106 pupils. Most of the teachers in the Sunday schools, with the exception of the pastors and the parochial school teachers, have little or no special training for the work. This lack of preparation, which is especially noticeable in catechetical work, is at least partly overcome by the establishment of Sunday School Teachers' Institutes and Associations, conducted by competent men. At the meetings, not only matters of general interest in the schools are discussed, but the greater part of the time is devoted to a thorough explanation and analysis of the next lessons, with application of the prominent features of the stories to the children of the various departments. The aids for the lessons printed by the several publishing houses are also of some benefit to the earnest teacher.

Of catechumens, the Missouri Synod reported a total of 23,720 who were received into communicant membership during the year 1913. These figures do not include all the members of the catechumen classes, since a large number of the children attend for two years before being confirmed.

According to the last statistics published, the higher institutions of learning within the Lutheran Church of the United States were the following:

Twenty-five theological seminaries, with a total of 90 professors and 1,200 students; 45 colleges, with about 300 teachers and 7,000 students (these numbers have been increased considerably in the last few years); 40 academies and high schools, with 180 teachers and about 4,500 students; 12 ladies' seminaries, with 140 teachers and 1,200 students.