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LUTHERAN PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS

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The Lutheran churches of America differ so widely in customs and methods that it is difficult to present a composite picture that will do justice to any of them. Speaking a dozen languages and inheriting the racial and national characteristics of many peoples, they have not the uniformity which is more easily attained by churches of British or insular origin.

There are 15,000 churches in America whose bond of union is Luther's Catechism and the Augsburg Confession. Of these, in round numbers, 5,000 use the English language, 5,000 the German, and 5,000 the Scandinavian and other languages.

The Parochial School is an inheritance of the Reformation which is relinquished only with reluctance. Nevertheless American conditions have compelled all of the English speaking churches and many of the others to surrender it, retaining its religious features in catechisation or in such week-day instruction in religion as may be given without conflicting with the work of the public school.

Catechisation is universal. Candidates for admission to full communion, including children of thirteen years and over, receive a course of instruction in the fundamentals of the Christian religion. This instruction is given by the pastor on week-days, for from six to nine months of the year.

Catechetics is, nominally at least, a part of the curriculum in all theological seminaries. In some schools it is true the method of instruction has not advanced further than a course of lectures or the use of a textbook on the subject. In others, notably in those of the "Missouri" Synod, the students learn the catechism, Bible Histories and the theory of catechisation, and, in addition to this, for two years they are given practice in actual catechisation.

English churches have practically abandoned the parochial school. Less than 1 per cent maintain parochial schools that are worthy of the name.

Among German churches the "Missouri" Synod leads in its devotion to the parochial school. In 85 per cent of their three thousand (2978) congregations such schools are maintained. There are a hundred thousand (96,287) pupils, instructed by 1097 men and 274 women in 2259 schools. 1192 pastors also teach in these parochial schools. 85 per cent of the children of school age in these churches attend the parochial school.

In New York and the East, however, it must be said that the parochial school is less popular than in the West, and it is difficult to maintain a standard that will compare with that of the public school.

The Synod maintains excellent normal schools and teachers' seminaries where hundreds of young men who will make teaching their life work are trained. These teachers also act as organists and in general constitute an important contribution to the diaconate of the church.

In the thousand (1085) churches of the Ohio Synod, 25 per cent maintain parochial schools and 14 per cent of the children of these churches attend them.

From the other German Synods no reports were obtained.

Of the 1204 churches of the Swedish Synod 410 maintain parochial schools. The percentage of attendance is not reported.

There are 3500 (3446) Norwegian churches. There is reason to believe that the percentage of schools among them is higher than that of the Swedes.

For the Danes, Finlanders, Icelanders, Esthonians, Letts, Lithuanians, Wends, Slovaks and Poles no figures are at hand.

While the chief purpose of the parochial schools is to give instruction in religion, they also acquaint the children with the language and forms of worship of their parents and thus they contribute much to the enrichment of the religious and cultural life of the country.

The virility and fertility of the churches in which parochial schools are found speaks well for the system. Those who maintain them ask no support from the state, but they are ready to make great sacrifices in the interest of a thoroughly Christian education, in the bringing up of their children in the faith and service of Jesus Christ.

When the scarcity of the supply of ministers was discussed a short time ago, Professor Pieper of St. Louis made the proud boast that if a thousand new ministers were required by the Missouri Synod they could all be supplied within a reasonable time from the ranks of the boys in the parochial school.