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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/urea20>

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Published online: 10 Jul 2006.

To cite this article: Leif Halfdan Awes M. A., B. D. (1916) ELEMENTARY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH , Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association, 11:4, 326-335, DOI: [10.1080/0034408160110404](https://doi.org/10.1080/0034408160110404)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0034408160110404>

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ELEMENTARY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH¹

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I. SURVEY OF ORGANIZATIONS

The doctrinal position of the Lutheran church makes it of primary importance that all religious instruction be in harmony with the doctrines of the Lutheran church as expressed in her confessions. This confessional interest is accentuated by the fact that the Lutheran church occupies a position peculiar to her alone; she demands absolute loyalty to her distinctive doctrines. This position the Lutheran church has been able to maintain, although there is a difference of emphasis among the various bodies. In order to maintain the integrity of her doctrine and practice, the Lutheran church regards as her most important mission the careful indoctrination of her children and young people. This work she endeavors to accomplish by such agencies as the Sunday school, parochial school, Daily Vacation Bible school, catechetical instruction, "christenlehre," Bible classes, Young People's organizations as the Luther League, and by establishing secondary institutions of learning.

HISTORICAL SURVEY²

(1) *Earliest Beginnings.* The Lutherans were in America as early as 1630. But it was not before the first part of the eighteenth century that any noteworthy immigration from Lutheran countries

¹This study of the religious education of the young in Lutheran churches will be published in two issues. The second, to appear in October, will deal with the aims, methods and materials used.

²This historical survey is based on the following works:
Neve, A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America, The German Literary Board, Burlington, Iowa, 1916.

Evjen, Scandinavian Immigrants in New York 1630-1674, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1916.
New Schaff-Herzog, Article, Lutherans.
Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Philadelphia, 1914.
Neve has given in the bibliography of his book the following very important source material on the Lutheran Church in America:

Hallesche Nachrichten. Halle, 1744, 1750, 1778. English edition, Philadelphia, 1894.
Muehlenberg's eigene Lebensbeschreibung, herausgegeben von W. Germann, Allentown, Pennsylvania, 1881.

Ursperger, S., Sammlung ausfuerlicher Nachrichten von den Salaburger Emmigranten. Halle, 1737-1746.

Kirchliche Mittelungen aus und ueber Nordamerika, 1843-1866 (being documentary material for the origin of Missouri and Iowa synods.)

Ochsenford, S. E., Documentary History of the General Council, Philadelphia, 1912.
Documentary History of the Ev. Luth. Ministerium of the General Council, Philadelphia, 1898.

Fritschel, Geo. J., Quellen und Dokumente zur Geschichte und Lehrstellung der Iowa Synods, Chicago, 1916.

Sachse, J. F., German Pietists of Provincial Pa. (1694-v708) 1895.

Finck, W. J., Lutheran Landmarks and Pioneers in America, Philadelphia, 1913.

began. At this early period it was chiefly Swedish and German Lutherans that immigrated.

An important step toward the organization of the scattered Lutheran congregations in America was taken by Muhlenberg, August 26, 1748, in the founding of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, the mother of the Lutheran church in this country. A second Lutheran synod was effected when the New York Ministerium was found in 1773.

The latter part of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth a noticeable change became evident in this early Lutheran church toward the Lutheran confessions and customs. She had become more or less influenced by the rationalistic movements that were at this time current both on the Continent and in America. During this period the Pennsylvania and New York Ministeriums showed an unwonted readiness to co-operate or unite with Reformed churches, while the Lutheran Catechism and hymn-books were for a time superseded by non-Lutheran publications.

(2) *The General Synod.* It was for the purpose of stemming this tide of rationalism and unionistic tendencies that the five then existing synods organized themselves in 1820 into the General Synod. It made as the basis of its organization the Lutheran Confessions, and represents the earliest effort to unite all the Lutheran bodies into one synod.

(3) *The Missouri Synod.* In 1839 there settled in St. Louis and Perry Counties, Lutheran immigrants from Saxony, Prussia, and Bavaria. They had left their country because of the prevailing rationalism and opposition to the Lutheran confessions in the home church. Under the leadership of C. F. W. Walther, this band of settlers held together and led a prosperous existence in the new country. The most important step toward their organization into a synod was taken by Walther in the founding of a semi-monthly, "*Der Lutheraner*," and a little later the theological monthly, "*Lehre und Wehre*." In 1847, and still under the leadership of Walther, these early settlers, with those who had joined them later, founded the Missouri Synod.

The Missouri Synod pledged itself, without reservation, to the Lutheran confessions as contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, and rejected all kinds of union and syncretism that had found so numerous expressions in the earlier Lutheran bodies. It sought to maintain its confessional position by having doctrinal discussions at synods, conferences, congregational meetings, by regular visitation of churches, and the like, but especially by a careful training of the young in parochial schools.

The confessional interest of the Missouri Lutheran Synod, together with the other Lutheran German-speaking bodies in this country, is very marked. Their strong confessionalism and prevailing insistence on the indoctrination of their children in parochial schools must be accounted for in no small measure by the fact that their early circumstances in the fatherland served to accentuate their religious consciousness and sharpen their confessional interest. The Scandinavian settlers, on the other hand, left the homeland more because of economic motives. It was therefore but natural that the confessional interest should not be so highly accentuated with them as was the case with their German brethren. It may be said that they established churches more as a matter of course, and as a rule contented themselves with the general education that the public school could offer. However, it was always supplemented as far as possible by home instruction and by the Sunday school.

(4) *The earliest Norwegian Movement for Church Organization.* The first church organization was made by the Norwegians in 1846. The characteristic trait of this movement was its pietistic tendencies, which had in the first quarter of the century influenced all of the religious life of Norway under the leadership of Hans Nilson Hauge and his followers.

(5) *The Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod.* In 1853 the more conservative element among the early Norwegian settlers expressed their dissatisfaction with the confessional position of the existing Norwegian church organizations by organizing the so-called "Evangelical Lutheran Synod of North America." Some of the leaders in this new movement were represented in the faculty of the theological seminary of the Missouri Synod, and for a time the ministers of the Norwegian Synod were trained in this school.

This early connection with the Missouri Synod has in part influenced the thinking and the practices of the Norwegian Synod. It is a noteworthy fact that of all the Scandinavian bodies, only the Norwegian Synod has made a serious attempt to establish parochial schools instead of the commonly established Daily Vacation Bible school of the other Scandinavian bodies.

(6) *The General Council.* The General Council is, next to the Missouri Synod, the largest Lutheran body in America. Its organization in 1867 was occasioned by the withdrawal of the Pennsylvania Ministerium from the General Synod because of dissatisfaction with its confessional position.

There have been frequent union and disunion of the various and rapidly multiplying Lutheran congregations in this country. While

all the Lutheran bodies pledge themselves to the Confession of the Lutheran church as embodied in the "Book of Concord of 1580," there is felt to be a sufficient difference of emphasis to justify the separate existence of the various general and independent Lutheran bodies. It may be noted that at the present time there is a strong movement on foot to unite in one organization three of the four leading Norwegian Lutheran bodies, viz., the Hague's Synod, the Norwegian Synod, and the United Church.¹

(7) *The statistical tables* on the present organization of the Lutheran Church in America are given in the "Lutheran Almanac and Year-Book for 1916" (The Lutheran Publication Society, Philadelphia).

THE PRESENT STATUS

I. THE PAROCHIAL SCHOOL

The term "parochial school" is somewhat misleading, as it naturally suggests that the unit of organization is the district. This is the original meaning of the term and as it is used in the Catholic Church. According to Lutheran usage the term is used with reference to schools that are established and maintained by the local congregation for the purpose of giving general as well as religious instruction.

STATISTICS OF LUTHERAN PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS²

GENERAL SYNODS	Parochial S.	Teachers	Pupils
General Synod	³		
General Council	200		
Synodical Conference.....			
Missouri Synod	2,250	2,289	96,287
Wisconsin	318	118	35,875
Minnesota	154	26	16,121
Michigan	75	9	3,021
Nebraska	30	5	1,085
INDEPENDENT SYNODS			
Ohio Synod	285	122	9,709
German Buffalo	20	7	
German Texas	12	12	
German Iowa	500	35	11,448
German Immanuel	11	11	702
Norwegian Synod	25 ⁴		

¹Cf. "Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the Evangelical Lutheran Church," Philadelphia, 1914, p. 233 ff.

²The figures here given have been secured by means of correspondence with denominational secretaries and educators. They are based on the reports that the individual congregations send in to their denominational secretaries from time to time, and although incomplete, are the latest figures to be had on the work of elementary religious education.

The writer does not know that an effort has been made before to distinguish between the different kinds of schools established in the Lutheran Church for the purpose of religious education of the young. But it seems to be a distinction absolutely fundamental if the data are not to be misleading as to the nature, organization, and work of the schools reported.

³Its two German-speaking districts, Wattburg and Nebraska, report parochial schools.

⁴Cf. above, Ch. I, section 5.

The state churches of Lutheran countries have the religious instruction provided for in the regular public school curricula. Religious instruction is indeed considered an essential part of any

general education. When Lutherans came to this country they naturally brought with them State-church ideals of education as well as of worship and congregational polity. But early established parochial schools gradually disappeared as the congregations turned over to the use of English, and their place was taken by the Sunday school. The parochial school has, however, maintained itself in the German-speaking bodies of the Lutheran church, and in the Missouri Synod it has had a remarkable development. The latest available statistics on parochial schools are as follows:

In that portion of the Lutheran church which maintains parochial schools, the school consists of the children of a congregation who meet with one or more teachers, in a specially erected schoolhouse, for the purpose of receiving general and religious instruction. The most inclusive definition of such a school has been given by Professor Lindemann, at one time a leading educator in the Missouri Synod. He says:

"An evangelical Lutheran congregational school is formed by voluntary agreement and resolution of a Lutheran parish, or local church organization, to gather its children of prescribed age in a locality, properly fitted up for the purpose, to the end of having them thoroughly instructed, within certain prescribed hours, by a common teacher, chiefly and primarily, in the wholesome doctrine of the Divine Word according to the Lutheran Confessions, and to advance them in true godliness; next, to give them instruction and training as far as practicable, in such knowledge and accomplishments as are necessary for all men in their civil status."¹

The Lutheran parochial school is a voluntary enterprise, being established and maintained by the local congregation.

"The Parochial school is an institution under full control of the congregation"

"This supervision extends over religious instruction and secular branches, over the latter in so far as they are means of training. As branches of learning and knowledge, secular studies are under the supervision of the congregation, and this supervision is generally exercised by a school board."²

The members of a congregation will, after having voted to establish such a school, assess themselves for up-keep expenses³ and call the necessary number of teachers. In some instances a so-called "school society"⁴ is organized by some of the wealthier members of the congregation, who alone establish and maintain the parochial school of the congregation. This is, however, an exception to the rule that the school is supported by the congregation as such.

¹Lindemann, *Schulpraxis*, p. 3, No. 2.

²Proceedings of the Eighth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri and Other States, p. 18.

³There is no record of there ever being demand for tax money, from the state, or exemption from such a tax.

⁴Lutheraner 28, p. 110.

The personnel of the parochial school consists of the pastor,¹ who is *ex-officio* the superintendent of the school, a school committee elected by the congregation, the school principal and his assistants. The teachers are for the most part male teachers. Some women teachers are being employed in the lower grade. The teachers are trained in normal schools where all the courses are planned with the one purpose of qualifying for teaching in the parochial school.²

The teachers of each synodical district attend regular monthly or quarterly conferences or institutes, and also the yearly general teachers' meeting. In the interest of its educational work the Missouri Synod publishes the so-called "Lutherische Schulblatt," a monthly edited by the faculty of Concordia Teachers' College and published at St. Louis, Missouri.

The parochial school is organized on the same basis as the public school, having for its aim to equal its eighth grade instruction, but with this difference, that it devotes the first hour of each day to religious instruction, or about one-sixth of the school period. Outside of the material used during this first hour of the school session, the parochial school is conducted in the same way and uses the same materials³ of instruction as the public school. The materials of religious instruction are church prayers, the most important Lutheran hymns, Bible stories, Bible readings, and the text of Luther's Small Catechism with proof texts and explanations.

In the first three grades, from about six to nine years, the children are taught simple Bible stories, the text of the chief parts of the Catechism with Luther's explanation, and morning and evening prayers.

The fourth and fifth grade instruction presupposes a ready use of German and English, since religious instruction is given in both languages. The children are now taught more Bible stories, which are applied to the experiences of the child. The Small Catechism is supplemented by explanations and proof-texts in question and answer form, which the children memorize, together with Lutheran hymns.

In the sixth, seventh and eighth grades the text of the Catechism is gone over again, to which is added the Table of Duties and Explanations, all in all about thirty-five questions and answers, together with about eight hundred proof-texts. The Bible stories already learned from both the Old and the New Testament are re-read, to-

¹Cf. Sells, C. A. T., The Pastor as Overseer of the School, Schulblatt, 41, p. 3.

²The Missouri Synod reports two such schools, one at Seward, Nebraska, with an enrollment of 150 students, and the other at River Forest, Concordia Teachers' College, with an enrollment of 225 students.

³The text books on general subjects are published partly by educators of the church, the purpose being to make all subjects taught harmonize with the general doctrinal position of the church.

gether with additional stories, about sixty from the Old and seventy from the New Testament. Important psalms and additional hymns are also memorized. Church history covering the first three centuries is touched upon, while the Reformation period is studied in detail.¹

The German Lutheran Church does not look upon this system of religious education as represented by the parochial school as a temporary device, to be supplanted by the Sunday school or any other kind of organization of religious instruction. On this point the Missouri Synod has expressed itself in unmistakable terms. (See the quotations in Prof. Richardson's article in this issue.)

"Let it be understood that we are not hostile to the public schools. We consider them a necessity. We know they have contributed to the temporal welfare of this nation. We must have them until all Christian denominations establish parochial schools, and even then we should have to provide for the children of churchless people by means of public schools."²

II. THE DAILY VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

One of the principal agencies of religious instruction in the Scandinavian Lutheran bodies, is the Daily Vacation Bible school. It supplements, wherever organized, the work of the Sunday school. The following table will show how the Daily Vacation Bible School is distributed among the Scandinavian Lutherans. The General Synod, the United Synod, South, report no such schools; the number of schools reported for the General Council are almost wholly within the Augustana Synod, which is Swedish. The German-speaking Lutherans who have recourse to the parochial school would have no need of this agency of religious instruction.

The purpose of the Vacation School is to supplement the work of the Sunday school, which is felt to be altogether inadequate as an agency for instructing the children in the principal doctrines of the Christian religion. The Vacation School serves furthermore as a means for teaching the children the mother tongue. This has been regarded as a very important, although not the primary function of the Vacation School. A knowledge of the mother-tongue has indeed been a condition for being able to take part in the religious life of the congregation, since up to the last years the Norwegian, Swedish or Danish languages have been used almost exclusively in their religious and social life.

¹Cf. *Religious Education*, February 1916, p. 8.

²*Proceedings of the Eighth Convention*, pp. 18-19.

DAILY VACATION BIBLE SCHOOLS¹

SYNODS	No. D. V. B. S. ^a	School- days	Teachers ^b	Pupils
General	500 ³		680 ⁴	26,067
Missouri Synods ⁵				
Norweg. Eilson	6		6	
Hague's Synod	222		222	7,252
Norw. Synod ⁶			527 ³	
United Norw. Church		46,050	1040 ¹⁰	46,650
Danish Luth. Church				
Norw. Luth. Free Church ⁷		1,740		2,088
Norw. Ch. of the Luth. Breth. ⁹				

¹These statistics are also based on reports which the local congregations will send to their denominational secretaries. They have been secured by means of correspondence with church secretaries or from general church reports. They are less complete than the figures given on parochial schools. For details, see specific references.

²The figures giving the number of teachers are misleading since the teacher, who usually will teach more than one school, is counted once for each school.

³These schools are of the Swedish Augustana Synod. Cf. above.

⁴The figures include teachers of both parochial and Daily Vacation Bible schools.

⁵The Missouri Synod reports a few Saturday schools in a few out-of-the-way congregations which are too poor to establish parochial schools. At such places the pastor will meet with the children on Saturdays for religious instruction.

⁶Although there are a few parochial schools in the Norwegian Synod (Cf. above statistics on Parochial Schools) the principal agency besides the Sunday school is the D. V. B. S.

⁷These statistics for the Lutheran Free Church are based on report sent to its secretary from not 50 per cent of the congregations.

⁸There is a movement in the larger cities to substitute for the D. V. B. S. the so-called Saturday school, in which the children meet for religious instruction on Saturday afternoons in the winter months, instead of during part of the summer vacation.

⁹Norwegian Church of the Lutheran Brethren also has Daily Vacation Bible Schools, but the writer has not been able to secure any report with reference to its work.

¹⁰Beretning om Det seksogtyvende aarsmode for Den forenede norsk lutherske kirke i Amerika, 1915, p. 339.

The teachers employed in the Vacation School may be both men and women, who are secured from the denominational academies, colleges or seminaries. Such a teacher will be paid by the congregation in which he may be working a monthly salary varying from thirty dollars to about fifty dollars, usually, besides being furnished, as a rule, free board and lodging. All expenses of the Vacation School are defrayed by voluntary subscription.

No special building is provided for the Vacation School. Wherever practicable the public school-house is used, and if more convenient, the children will meet in the church. Some churches will be provided with special school desks for this purpose.

The Vacation School is held during the same period as the Public School. It is conducted as a rule by one teacher, except in some of the larger congregations that employ two or more. The curriculum is not graded, and yet there is a general gradation of the work that constitutes the program of the school term. A Vacation School schedule may be roughly outlined as follows: In case of the younger children most of the time is devoted to reading and writing of the mother-tongue. From about the age of 9 to 11, when the children are expected to have become fairly proficient in the use of the mother-

tongue, the text of Luther's Small Catechism is memorized, while practice in reading and writing is continued. They will also be familiarized with about fifty Bible stories from the Old Testament with about the same number from the New Testament. The children in the upper classes, from about eleven to fourteen, will in addition to reviewing the text of the Catechism and the Bible stories, commit to memory about four hundred questions and answers with appropriate proof-texts. Portions are read from the Bible, especially from the Gospels. They commit to memory important hymns from the Lutheran hymnary. The children will also continue to practice reading and writing the mother-tongue, and in some instances a little grammar is taught.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain these Vacation Schools, as the congregations are introducing the English language. Thus as the English language becomes the medium for expressing the religious life of a congregation, the necessity of learning the mother-tongue in order to participate in the common religious experience falls away, and with it a powerful motive for maintaining the Vacation School. Another important factor grows out of the rapidly improving methods of religious instruction in the Sunday school. The Sunday school is coming to be looked to as the solution of the difficult problem of adequate religious instruction among the Scandinavian Lutherans. The Sunday school has indeed come to be looked upon by the majority of the Lutherans as the most important agency of the church for religious instruction. The General Synod and the United Synod, South, rely wholly upon the Sunday school for religious instruction. It has been introduced into practically every congregation of the General Council and the Scandinavian Lutheran bodies. Also the German-speaking bodies, that have the parochial schools, have to a large extent introduced the Sunday school as one of the most important agencies of the church.

III. THE CATECHETICAL CLASS

Practically every Lutheran pastor has his catechetical class. It is that group of boys and girls of a congregation, varying from twelve to fifteen, who have reached the stage when they are mature enough to enjoy the privileges and assume the responsibilities of full membership. The pastor meets weekly with his class for about six months out of one or two years. Where the children attend parochial school the class will meet daily for an hour or twice a week for two hours. In the catechetical class the pastor will aim to bring to fruition what has been the controlling purpose of all previous

instruction, whether it has been in the parochial school, the Sunday school, or the Daily Vacation Bible school; viz., to prepare the child for intelligent church membership. He will give systematic instruction in the fundamental doctrines of the Lutheran church. The meaning of the Sacraments, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper is especially dwelt upon, and the sacred obligations of church membership. The class will review again the text of the Catechism with explanations and proof-texts and the Bible stories, all of which the pastor will carefully explain on which he will question the individual members of the class. He will also require the memorization of some of the most important hymns and Bible stories.

After the pastor has concluded his course of catechetical instruction the class is put through an examination in the leading doctrines of the church and its way of salvation, which is concluded by the Confirmation ceremony.

The fundamental principles that underlie Lutheran catechetical instruction are: (1) that the religious life is governed by gradual development rather than by any cataclysmic conversion experiences; (2) that the true religious life must be rooted in an intellectual acquisition of religious knowledge; (3) and finally, when the religious life is so developed and grounded it will express itself in a growing reverence for and need of the Word of God and the means of grace.

IV. THE "CHRISTENLEHRE"

Among the German-speaking Lutherans it used to be a common practice to follow up the work of the pastor's catechetical class by the so-called "Christenlehre." It would be held either in connection with the Sunday morning service or on Sunday afternoon for the benefit of the confirmed young people of the congregation, from about fifteen to twenty. The pastor as a rule was the leader for the "Christenlehre," and would explain and ask questions on a portion from the Catechism.

Where the Sunday school has been introduced, this custom has fallen largely into disuse. In parochial school congregations its place has been taken by the Bible class, which meets once or twice during the week for the purpose of reading and having explained chapters from the Bible. "In place of the 'Christenlehre' in most of our English Lutheran congregations, the Sunday school has been introduced."