

# What Is the Church's Responsibility with Regard to the Secondary Education of Its Youth?

by Heinrich J. Vogel

Let it be stated from the outset that your present essayist harbors no question in his mind as to the Church's responsibility with regard to the secondary education of its youth. This is to him a foregone conclusion. You have assigned a topic to an individual who is definitely biased in his opinion on this subject, and who will attempt to defend it on the grounds of God's own requirement of Christian education in general, the needs of Christian secondary education in our own day and age, the personal needs of our boys and girls in the age of adolescence, and the wholesome and beneficial results that may be expected and are obtained.

The question before us is not one which can and should be considered in the spirit of doubt and indecision. It is not a matter that should be weighed as to its pros and cons and our determination to engage in the work of Christian secondary education should not be the mathematical result of a comparison of all the arguments for or against it. We have today a number of successful Lutheran high schools in our circles, some of which can look back on a quarter or even a half century of successful work in this field. The value, the benefit, the possibility of achieving the objectives sought, the blessed fruits of Lutheran high schools are definitely proved by the experience of those schools we already have in operation.

It is the hope of your essayist that this discussion of the question may set many more of us thinking and planning and working for an expansion of this most necessary part of our educational system.

The one question which might be debatable is whether the establishment and maintenance of Lutheran high schools is the direct responsibility of the church. The writer believes that to be the case. He is willing to defend that contention.

That the need for establishing and maintaining Lutheran high schools exists and is unquestionably justified, certainly is not doubtful to any of us. I am sure that we, both as a body as well as every one of us individually, are thoroughly convinced in our own heart and mind, that the work that is being done in our circles in the field of Christian education on the high school level is in full accord with the will of God, and that it has for that reason enjoyed God's richest blessings. Were it not so, certainly those consecrated Christians who have pioneered in this work by establishing schools such as the Lutheran High School of Milwaukee and Winnebago Lutheran Academy of Fond du Lac, would not have been willing to devote their time, energy and resources, often at the cost of great personal sacrifices, so unselfishly to the cause.

This paper is therefore not intended to decide the issue of the *raison d'être* of Lutheran high schools. It is not written with a view toward finding the solution of the problem whether or not Lutheran high schools are justified in their existence. This is assumed from the very outset to be the case. However, even today, after Lutheran high schools have proved their worth and their ability to prosper and grow in the face of sometimes apparently insurmountable obstacles, there are many in our circles who are still indifferent if not openly antagonistic to the cause of Christian secondary education for Lutheran boys and girls. As we come into contact with such people, we are often confronted with a spirit that tends to dampen our ardor and chill our enthusiasm for the work, yes that occasionally raises the question in our minds, whether the undertaking is really worth the effort required to maintain it. At such times it is certainly wholesome for us who are engaged in this work to devote a little time to a study of the real justification of Lutheran high schools, in order to gain new enthusiasm and encouragement for our work. This thought, no doubt, prompted the assignment of the essay and is the thought that encouraged the writer to accept the assignment and that guided him in working it out.

## I. The Basic Justification of Lutheran High Schools

The justification of the Lutheran high school depends basically upon the justification of Christian education in general. On this point Scripture speaks clearly and unmistakably. Both in the Old and in the New Testament we find oft repeated injunctions to parents admonishing them to educate their children not only in the

things needful for this life, but also to instill in them a love toward God and a desire to do His will. Thus we find in the sixth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, the chapter following that in which the Decalog is stated for the second time, these words of the Lord spoken by the mouth of His servant Moses:

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up (Dt 6:4-7).

That the education of the young in the Word of God is God-pleasing appears also from the words of the Psalmist Asaph: "For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make known to their children" (Ps 78:5) And in the New Testament we have the well-known admonition of St. Paul to the Ephesians: "And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). God looks favorably upon those who educate their children on the Word of God. An example of this is Abraham, of whom the Lord says: "I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Ge 18:19). There can be no doubt, therefore, that Christian education has not only God's sanction and approval, but also His express command.

Scripture further shows us the glorious purpose which Christian education serves in the kingdom of God. In the Psalm alluded to above Asaph proceeds to set forth the purpose of Christian education thus:

For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children; that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God (Ps 78:5-8).

Such training is to convert our children into true children of God who know the will of God and endeavor to conform to it. To accomplish this, the beginning must be made sufficiently early. Solomon says in the book of Proverbs: "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Pr 22:6). Again the New Testament echoes these thoughts. In his second epistle to Timothy St. Paul has this to say about Christian training:

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Ti 3:14-15).

Thus we see that the glorious fruits that the Christian education of the young will eventually bear is nothing less than life eternal.

But not only does Scripture enjoin us to educate our children in the fear of God and tell us why we should do so. It also points out what the contents of such education must be. Ordinarily the purpose of education is to acquire useful knowledge, wisdom that will be of benefit to the pupil later on. This axiom is doubly true of Christian education, for it aims to impart knowledge that will not only be of use to the pupil here in his earthly life, but also divine wisdom which will guide him safely into eternal life. To obtain such wisdom, true wisdom, must be the goal of all Christian education. What is true wisdom? Where may it be found? I know of no better answer than that which Job has given us in his classic dissertation on wisdom:

But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it; and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold: No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls; for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, we have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; to make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder; Then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, .and searched it out. Arid unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding (Job 28:12-28).

Again the proverbs of Solomon express this same thought in the words: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy one is understanding” (Pr 9:10).

Scripture thus far quoted has addressed the parents, whose duty it is to provide facilities for Christian education of the young. It is, however, also the duty of the young to seek such opportunities and to acquire their education at the true fountain of wisdom. The proverbs of Solomon are clear on this point: “Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.” “Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.” “Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding” (Pr 23:12, 19, 23).

It is therefore evident that the principles of Christian education are deeply rooted and firmly grounded in the Scriptures. There can be no question in a Christian’s mind concerning the validity of these fundamental facts. The establishment and maintenance of adequate facilities to carry out this program of Christian education is therefore entirely justified.

## **II. The Facilities Necessary for Christian Education**

Our problem now resolves itself into a practical one: How shall the facilities for supplying such Christian education be constituted? The Bible clearly teaches that Christian education is the responsibility of the parents. If parents had no other duties than the education of their young, and if they could devote their entire time to the discharge of this one duty, then indeed, schools as we know them today would be an unnecessary expense. Then each boy and girl would be educated in the home by his or her own parents. This ideal state of affairs, however, does not obtain. In most families today, the father must devote the greater share of his waking hours to the serious business of providing the necessities of life for his family. The mother finds most of her time occupied by her household duties such as preparing meals, maintaining cleanliness and order in the home, and so on. It is therefore under present circumstances impossible for the parents to provide even an elementary training for their children. These difficulties increase as the child grows older and begins to require some specialized training. Then the parents are not only handicapped by lack of time, but often also by lack of ability to provide the needed instruction. This problem has been solved by establishing schools. Schools have been built and maintained by three different types of agencies: the government, church bodies, and private organizations. We are concerned in this essay chiefly with the second of these.

Various churches deal with the problem of Christian education in various ways. A great many systems and plans have been attempted with varying success. Among the churches that really recognize the importance and necessity of Christian education there are perhaps only two that have done much to provide facilities for it,

viz. the Catholic and the Lutheran. These two are endeavoring to provide a complete educational system for their members from kindergarten and the elementary school through high school and college to universities and seminaries. Other church bodies take a rather indifferent attitude toward Christian education, and are often content with special colleges and seminaries to train their clergy.

A comparative study of such church bodies indicates that those which place most emphasis on a complete educational system for their youth are not only the most vigorous in growth, but also have the most loyal adherents, and have succeeded best in maintaining their individuality. This circumstance cannot be ascribed entirely to chance. There is a direct relation between the attitude of a church body toward education and its prospects for solid growth. Those churches that indoctrinate their youth systematically from earliest childhood through adolescence to manhood and womanhood are training the rising generation to succeed and replace the older and disappearing generation; whereas those that neglect this duty of the church often suffer heavy losses in membership because their youth is left largely to its own devices and naturally gravitates away from the church in which it grew up. The Lutheran high school is therefore an important part of our Lutheran educational system.

This consideration leads us to one of the chief reasons why Lutheran high schools are justified in their existence. To be most effective, a system of education must be complete. An educational system that trains a child only up to a certain point and then permits him to shift for himself, at the same time exposing him to dangerous influences from without, is inadequate. This is comparable to teaching a novice to fly an airplane by teaching him the rudiments on the ground and then forcing him to make a solo flight without previous instruction in the air. A very apt pupil may succeed in learning to fly thus, but a majority of those trained in this way would crash in their first attempted flight. Just as foolish is a system of Christian education which trains the child thoroughly in its youth but terminates this beneficial influence upon completion of the eighth grade at the age of about fourteen years, just at the time when the child is about to come into contact with all sorts of influences with which it is utterly unfamiliar and with which it must cope alone. To be complete, a system of education must include the high school. Our government has learned that lesson and has put it into practice generally. In practically all parts of our country school attendance is required until the age of sixteen to eighteen years. The Catholic church is fully aware of this truth also. This is evident from the rapid expansion of its high school system in the last few decades. It is a pity that our Lutheran church has been so slow in recognizing the importance and necessity of Lutheran high schools for its youth. We are content in most cases to guide our children until the need for guidance becomes most acute, and then we let them down, as it were, and turn them loose to fight the battles of life unaided. We train them carefully in the grades, but then we let them acquire their secondary education under the influence of teachers who are indifferent, if not openly antagonistic, to the Gospel which has dominated their early training. This sudden change often chills the ardor that they have at confirmation and at the time of their graduation from the eighth grade to the point where their zeal for Christ is entirely quenched.

### **III. The Need for Lutheran High School Training**

But Lutheran high schools are justified in their existence not only because without them our system of Christian education would be incomplete. Our Lutheran youth has a definite need of thorough training during the dangerous period of adolescence. In the adolescent child a very important change is taking place. Up to the period of adolescence a child is naturally inquisitive, is eager to acquire information, often merely for the sake of satisfying its hunger for knowledge. It is therefore eager and ready to accept anything and everything without questioning its correctness or the genuineness of the source. For this reason it is easy to make a thorough Christian of the child during this period.

But then comes the period of adolescence. Now the child begins to notice things it never saw before. It discovers that there are often two conflicting explanations for phenomena. Naturally the question now arises: "Which is correct?" The child now begins to think for itself. He forms opinions. He questions and doubts everything with which he is not familiar. He begins to inquire into the why and the wherefore of things. At this

period he is searching for a criterion according to which he can judge the phenomena he observes. How important it is that he find the right criterion! Surely these are dangerous years for the child.

These are also the years during which the child develops morally and becomes a character. Up to this time the child has been very pliable. What the parents or the teachers designated as wrong was wrong to the child. What they set up as right was right to the child. He accepted the authority of his elders in these matters just as in the field of knowledge. But during adolescence every child goes through a stage in his development in which he begins to question even the distinction between right and wrong. Wrong appears right, and right wrong, and not only is there confusion on these questions, but the child goes further and begins to ask: "Why is this right and that wrong?"

During these dangerous years of a child's development it is essential that it be kept under the wholesome influence of the Gospel. And how can this be done better than by placing the child in a high school whose faculty consists of consecrated Christians fully aware of their grave responsibility, whose curriculum is dominated and permeated by the one thing needful, and whose aim is to keep boys and girls from failing to see the light in the maze of error with which they are confronted? The question is often asked whether this cannot be done in other ways. Such agencies as advanced Sunday school classes, church services, young people's societies, Bible classes, etc. are often substituted. But the effectiveness of these agencies is curtailed by the fact that they have an opportunity to influence the child for from one to three hours weekly, whereas it is exposed to other dangerous influences from ten to thirty times that amount of time each week in a public high school. Then too, these agencies by their very nature can deal with the child's problems only in a general way. There is no interrelation between the child's work at school and the agencies of the church. Thus the child will find it difficult and often impossible to apply what it learns in Sunday school or at church to the material it encounters in its literature, history, or science class at high school. Surely this consideration alone is sufficient to justify the establishment and maintenance of Lutheran high schools wherever possible.

We must not think that educators in our public school system are entirely unaware of this need for spiritual guidance of adolescent youth. They are awakening more and more to the fact that a child consists of more than merely body and mind, as witness the following quotation from a current educational leaflet: "The church and the home have turned over so many of their functions to the school that the teacher must be concerned with the student's heart, soul, and body, as well as with his mind."<sup>1</sup> Our state schools utterly lack all equipment with which to influence the heart and soul of a child for good. They are groping about for a means to achieve this end, and the more serious minded among them are engaged in an earnest search for it. In some instances they have advocated the reading of the Scriptures in their literature courses, recognizing them as the true source of all morality. Recently an item appeared in one of our news-weeklies offering a new suggestion for the solution of this problem. It reads:

A suggestion has just been made that the public schools of New York City release their children one period a week for outside religious instruction. The idea was advocated by the Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick, celebrated pastor of Riverside church. Speaking at the annual gathering of the Protestant Teachers Association, he declared that a complete education should take in religion, and suggested that young students be given time to attend religious centers for spiritual training. He said increasing crime among the young indicated a need for more religion.<sup>2</sup>

Thus far these attempts to supply religious training of some kind or other in our public school system have failed. Famous educators deplore the fact that our vast educational system lacks the means to influence the heart and soul of a child for good and to build character. The truth is that our public school system will always be forced to operate under this handicap because our Federal Constitution guarantees the separation of church and state in our country.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Language Teacher's Note Book*, March, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> *Pathfinder*, February 27, 1937, p. 20.

Since our public schools cannot and dare not impart spiritual food to our sons and daughters, we must, in order to discharge our duty to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, erect and maintain our own Lutheran schools. And if this is true of elementary schools, it is doubly true of secondary schools because during this period of a child's development constant spiritual guidance is most essential to the child's welfare.

#### **IV. The Practical Difficulties Involved**

There are many in our circles who can be brought to see these points, but who shrink from putting them into actual practice because of the practical difficulties encountered. They point to the existing educational system in our country, the most elaborate and the costliest in the world, supported entirely at the expense of the taxpayer. They maintain that to establish and operate another system at the expense of a small group of our citizens is an unbearable burden. It is indeed true that this constitutes an added expense. Yet a serious consideration of all the factors involved will, I believe, lead to the conclusion that the saving of a single soul by means of the Lutheran high school is far more valuable than the entire expense incurred by that school during its entire existence. Immortal souls cannot and dare not be weighed in the balance against gold and silver. Other difficulties, such as the payment of tuition fees, the purchase of educational materials and textbooks, the erection of buildings, the selection and acquisition of sites, the accumulation of equipment, the engagement of a staff of competent instructors, all fall into the same category. In fact, the only real argument against Lutheran high schools that I have heard is traceable to this one obstacle—financial difficulty.

We need make no effort to deny the existence of this difficulty. It is very real, as some of us can testify from personal experience. It is also true that it serves as a hindrance to effective work. But in no wise can it be admitted to be a valid reason for curtailing or discontinuing the work of higher Christian education in our circles. No, I believe, it is rather to be considered a blessing in disguise. Those things that cost most dearly, that demand the greatest sacrifices on our part, are often the most sincerely appreciated, and most worth while.

The question is sometimes asked whether the fruits of the work that is being done at our Lutheran high schools are commensurate with the effort expended. Of this we cannot be the judges. Spiritual fruits cannot be measured with material scales. For those of us who are engaged in the work it is sufficient to know that "It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing" (Gal 4:18a). Let us heed St. Paul's admonition to the Corinthians: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Co 15:58). We have God's own assurance in His Word that He will crown our efforts with success, for St. Paul writes to the Galatians: "Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal 6:9).

May our consideration of this subject today serve as an encouragement to every one of us in our work of educating Lutheran boys and girls so that we may "Do all things without murmurings and disputings; That we may be blameless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom we shine as lights in the world" (Php 2:14-15).