

What Our Fathers Taught Us about Lutheran Schools

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I cannot remember how old I was when I first realized that not every church has an elementary school attached to it, as our Lutheran churches typically do. Riding by the church properties of other denominations, I would wonder, “Where do their kids go to school?”

Within our fellowship, when we have observed that a particular congregation has not experienced numerical growth similar to that of three or four neighboring churches, one of the explanations generally offered is, “Well, they never had a Christian Day School.”

Many of us here today have gone to school for sixteen or twenty years or more to prepare for our callings as pastors and teachers, and we have spent every day of those sixteen or twenty years in a Lutheran school classroom. For some of us, our parents, grandparents and even great-grandparents enjoyed the same educational experience. We pray that such an educational experience will continue to be available for our children and grandchildren. Indeed, the very thought that this form of education may no longer be available for our children or grandchildren fills some of us with sadness and distress.

But some of us here have come to our ministries as pastors and teachers after attending a public grade school or high school. The common Lutheran school environment that provided so many of us with a sense of certainty, safety, insularity, and even superiority has sometimes had a different effect on those who came later to our synodical schools. Some found a ready-made culture within Lutheran schools that was difficult to crack. Some found that skills so easily mastered by most Lutheran “lifers” seemed all but impossible to attain. A few brave souls might confess that after decades of service in the preaching or teaching ministry, they still do not feel entirely as if they “belong” because they have not spent their entire educational careers in Lutheran schools.

How did schools and education become so central to our church life? How did our church and school environments become the places that they are today? The assignment for this paper is “What Our Fathers Taught Us about Lutheran Schools.” Our “fathers” would include scriptural teachers of the Old and New Testament as well as Martin Luther and the Lutheran educational heritage of Europe. But this paper will focus especially particularly on what our American Lutheran fathers have said and written about Lutheran schools, particularly in the Wisconsin Synod and in our former partner synods of the Synodical Conference. Source material is abundant; it would have been inaccurate and presumptuous to have titled this paper, “Everything our Fathers Taught Us about Lutheran Schools.” Our fathers taught us in formal papers, addresses, and sermons devoted to the topic of education, but they also expressed and shaped our thinking in book reviews, comments on the news, and even off-handed remarks on other subjects.

As much as possible, I want to let our fathers speak for themselves.

Our fathers taught us the biblical command to teach the gospel to our children

One passage seldom employed in our literature on Lutheran education but with potential to be put to good use is a remark the LORD God made to Abraham prior to the destruction Sodom and Gomorrah: **“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him”** (Genesis 18:18-19).

Frequently used are the words Moses spoke to a new generation of Israelites about to enter the land of Canaan: **“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates”** (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). God wanted education in the faith to be a family thing. He did not want the education of children confined to a single Sabbath hour, nor left only for religious professionals to conduct. The good news about Jesus and the life that flows from Christian faith are more frequently caught than taught as sons and daughters follow the model of mothers and fathers.

Old Testament historical books make occasional reference to **sons of the prophets** (also called the **schools of the prophets**) but tell little about their founding or functioning. Perhaps they offered a sort of apprenticeship during distressing times in Israel’s history.¹

In the story of King Solomon’s legendary wisdom, when two mothers each claimed the living child was hers, the king used an ingenious way to determine the baby’s parentage. Writing in the Wisconsin Synod’s *Lutheran School Bulletin* in 1951, Pastor Leonard Koeninger asked, “Whose is the child?” While “the state has an interest in the child,” it is “in a large measure a selfish interest,” a concern for “the welfare and preservation of the state.” Also “the church has a vital interest in the child,” yet even that may be selfish if the child is regarded as a tool “to make the Church large in numbers, powerful in this world, glorious in the eyes of man.” In the Lutheran church “we have always believed that the child belongs to the parents, and consider our schools an institution offered to parents to assist them” in their parental duty. Above all, the child “belongs to the Lord,” because “the Lord laid down His life for all in self-sacrificing love. He sought the life of all at the expense of his own life.”²

¹ The *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M. Williamson (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 827, notes that “various passages portray Elisha as leader and teacher of a group of prophets known as ‘sons of the prophets’ (2 Kings 2:1-18; 4:1-7, 38-41; 5:22; 6:1-7; 9:1-10,” with similar groups appearing in 1 Kings 20:35-43 and Amos 7:14. This together with mention of a band of prophets in 1 Samuel 10 “suggests that they were a recurring phenomenon in the history of Israelite prophecy (cf. Isaiah 8:16),” and indicates that “prophets were not necessarily solitary figures.”

² L[eonard] H. Koeninger, “Whose is the Child?” *The Lutheran School Bulletin* 21 (May 1951): 1-2. Hereafter, *The Lutheran School Bulletin* will be abbreviated *LSB*.]

A key passage, which appears four times in the Old Testament, though never in exactly the same words, is: **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10)**. Oscar Siegler commented on the “fear of the LORD”:

There is a fear of the Lord which by no means indicates wisdom in the human heart. Such was the fear of the Lord which Adam and Eve once experienced when they had violated his holy Word and then fled in fear before the presence of God. Theirs was a fear of God which comes to all men because of sin. . . . Far from the beginning of wisdom, such fear is but a forerunner of judgment, perdition and damnation.

Altogether different is that fear of the Lord which goes hand in hand with wisdom. Rather than running from God, it is a fear that draws close to God in trust and confidence. . . . It is the fear of an Abraham who feared the Lord with such love and trust that at a word from God he was ready to sacrifice his son Isaac. . . . Rather than loving that which is evil, it is a fear that hates evil. . . .

This is a wisdom, this fear of the Lord, which only God can teach.³

And **beginning** in that passage was often understood to urge that children learn the gospel in the early years of their lives.

A prime Christian education passage is **Proverbs 22:6**, the wording of which appeared in numerous articles about Lutheran education, though not necessarily quoted chapter and verse but its wording was woven into their writing.⁴ Our fathers universally understood this passage as the NIV translates it: **Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it**—a prescription for parents to direct their children in the way God wants them to go.⁵ Our fathers undoubtedly would have been surprised to learn that this passage has been taken by some to refer to the way a child “is inclined to go” (literally, “according to the mouth of his way,”) and taken to mean “according to his age, capabilities, and/or aptitudes for learning.”⁶

³ Oscar Siegler, “The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom,” sermon delivered at the special convention of the Northern Wisconsin District, Weyauwega, Wis., October 10, 1962; <http://www.wlssays.net/files/SieglerFear.pdf>

⁴ See, for example, [Joh. P.] M[eyer], “A Word for the Parochial School,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 34 (October 1937): 288. [Hereafter, *Theologische Quartalschrift* will be abbreviated *Qu.*]

⁵ Roland Cap Ehlke, *Proverbs. The People’s Bible* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 213, expressed the traditional interpretation: “It’s most likely that ‘his way’ is the way that God wants him to go.” Andrew Steinmann, *Proverbs. Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 436, translates, “Consecrate a child according to the way he should go,” and comments, 442: “Many interpreters and most English translators take the phrase as meaning that the parents should train the child ‘in the way he should go.’ This understanding “fits with the dominant themes in Proverbs, including the need for the wise father and mother to instruct their son in the way of divine wisdom and the theme that divine wisdom is the only good ‘way, path.’”

⁶ Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 441, notes this interpretation and cites other commentators who have proposed or preferred this understanding, including Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon*, trans. M.G. Easton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 2:86-87; Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, New American Commentary 14 (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 188; Derek

Understood thus, the verse would seem to be telling parents they should not, for example, try to steer impetuous, free-spirited children into career paths such as accounting or library science. Though surprisingly popular in some circles, such an interpretation would not have been readily accepted in Lutheran circles, in which original sin is considered such a powerful force and in which direction toward the Savior's good news and a life of sanctification are not ways children by nature inclined to follow.

Proverbs 22:6 adds, **and when he is old he will not turn from it.** This portion of the verse provides a powerful argument for the education of children at an early age, and these words have undoubtedly given comfort to many parents whose children seemed intent upon abandoning the way in which they had been directed. But the nature of Proverbial promises is that they describe what usually happens but do not offer absolute guarantees of what every child will do.⁷ A recent Lutheran commentator acknowledged the use of this passage for such reassurance but was careful to avoid coming to an absolute conclusion.⁸

In the New Testament we find Jesus' words in **Matthew 28:19** to "**make disciples of all nations by baptizing . . . and teaching**" and in **John 21:15-17** to "**feed my lambs**" and to "**take care of my sheep.**" Then there is St. Paul's encouragement in **Ephesians 6: Fathers, do not discourage your children but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.** Wisconsin Synod Pastor William Beitz, soon to become better known for his critical essay, "The Just Shall Live by Faith" and his role in the Protes'tant Controversy, wrote in 1924 that "in all of Scripture on this vital subject there is none of such fundamental and all-inclusive import as that which is recorded" here.⁹ The wording of that passage found its way into synodical writing about Lutheran schools without need for citation of chapter and verse; for example, Joh. P. Meyer

Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 147; Crawford H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1899), 415; Gleason Archer, "Proverbs 22:6 and the Training of Children," in *Learning from the Sages: Selected Studies on the Book of Proverbs*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 274.

⁷ See Greg W. Parsons, "Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming the Book of Proverbs," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (April-June 1993): 159: "Because Proverbs are wise observations based on experience, they must not be understood as unconditional promises but as pragmatic principles (or procedures) to follow." The Proverbs "tell us what generally takes place without making an irreversible rule that fits all circumstances. This is a key to understanding problematic verses such as 22:6. This verse should not be considered a promise but a general 'principle of education and commitment' [C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 162]." See also Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 199.

⁸ Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 442-43, calls this verse "an observation of life, based on *what usually happens* by God's grace." He acknowledges that "many young adults explore the different possible paths in life, and only later may settle down and return to the firm faith and righteous way of life they were taught as children. Practically speaking, many young adults do not resume faithful church attendance until they marry, and especially after they have children of their own." Steinmann asks, "Does this proverb promise that every child who wanders away from faith in Christ will eventually return at some later point before he dies, and so be saved eternally?" He answers, "Many parents pray that it would be so, and God hears such prayers."

⁹ William F. Beitz, "True Education! What Is It?" *The Northwestern Lutheran* 11 (November 16, 1924): 353. [Hereafter, *The Northwestern Lutheran* will be abbreviated *TNL*.]

wrote, “We have repeatedly expressed our conviction that the parochial school offers the best opportunities for keeping our children in the faith and bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”¹⁰ George Stoeckhardt noted that “a Christian mother has, of course, the same duty toward her children,”¹¹ and Irwin Habeck lamented that “today many fathers try to evade this responsibility by saying they leave the religious training of their children up to the mothers because fathers do not have much time to spend with their children.” An “even more reprehensible evasion of duty,” Habeck continued, occurs “when parents say they will leave the religious training of their children up to the church.”¹² Beitz again: “The matter of education is primarily one of the Christian parents according to God’s own arrangement.”¹³

Further references are made to **2 Timothy 1:5—I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also**, and **2 Timothy 3:15—from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus**. And it is no accident that one of the most popular images presented in Wisconsin Synod churches, particularly those constructed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is that of Jesus taking the little children into his arms, blessing them, and saying, **“Suffer the little children to come unto me” (Mark 10:13; KJV)**.

While all of these passages have been employed in support of Lutheran schools, they speak to the role of home and family, not church and school.¹⁴ David Schmiel has remarked that “while Christian education will always be an essential task for the church, no specific methodology or format for such education dare be absolutized,” and “even a cursory study of the history of the church will reveal a variety of ways of doing Christian education.”¹⁵

¹⁰ Meyer, “A Word for the Parochial School,” 287. For other examples, see: J[ohn] Brenner, “What Should Be Our Attitude Toward Organizations within Our Church,” *Qu* 20 (October 1923): 277; W.C. Kohn, “Address Delivered at the Commencement Exercises at Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Ill.,” *Lutheran School Journal* 60 (April 1925): 123; [Hereafter, *Lutheran School Journal* will be abbreviated *LSJ*.] Kohn, “The Lutheran Church and the Christian Day-School,” *LSJ* 61 (July 1926): 260; Theo. M. Kosche, “The True Purpose of Our Schools,” *LSJ* 66 (April 1931): 343; M[ax] Lehninger, “The Sunday School,” *Qu* 35 (October 1935): 257; [Joh. P.] M[eyer], “Week-day Religious Instruction,” *Qu* 27 (April 1930): 154; Meyer, “Danger of Non-Religious Schools,” *Qu* 24 (October 1927): 330; Louis Serrahn, “Christian Child Training,” *The Minnesota District School Bulletin* 4 (March 1934): 2-5.

¹¹ G[eorge] Stoeckhardt, *Commentary on St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians*, trans. Martin S. Sommer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952), 249.

¹² Irwin J. Habeck, *Ephesians: Amazing Grace* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1985), 123.

¹³ Beitz, “True Education! What Is It?” 353.

¹⁴ See, Brenner, “What Should Be Our Attitude Toward Organizations within Our Church,” 277-78, who rhapsodizes on the blessings of the Christian home.

¹⁵ David G. Schmiel, “How Important is Christian Education?” *Issues in Christian Education* 17 (Fall 1982): 1, 6. So also John Isch, “Parents and the Lutheran Elementary School,” in *Christian Education: A Book of Readings*, ed. John Isch and David Wendler (New Ulm, Minn.: Martin Luther College, 1999), 104; H.H. Koppelman, “Our Obligation to the Christian Education of Our Children,” *Proceedings of the Central Illinois District Convention of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, June 1943*, 30; H. Gordon Coiner, “The Scriptural Basis for the Responsibility of the Christian Congregation in Christian Education,” *Lutheran Education* 89 (April 1954): 396ff.

Our fathers taught us to appreciate the educational heritage of Martin Luther

It is tempting to “cherry-pick” the writings of Luther on many subjects, including education, and come up with enough suitable and colorful quotations to make one’s point. Theodore Hartwig has advised that it is best to become acquainted with the whole Luther before attempting to understand any individual facet of his thought.¹⁶ Simply consulting Ewald Plass’s three-volume collection of *What Luther Says* under “education” and locating and reporting the quotes, “we might think the job done and the victory won in less time than it takes for a hamburger and malt at McDonald’s.” Hartwig urges us to follow a “slower and more satisfying” approach. “We must begin with the man himself, take his pulse, and see what makes him tick. Then only are we ready to hear what he spoke about education and, on the basis of Luther’s legacy, to make some applications to our own times.”¹⁷

Luther “never wrote a formal educational treatise to lay down his principles of educational practice,” yet “by his preaching, his writing, his Catechisms, and the translated Bible he exerted a great influence on the field of education.”¹⁸ The major works Luther wrote in which he addressed educational questions were his *Address to the German Nobility*, published in 1520; the *Letter to the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Should Establish and Maintain Christian Schools*, 1524; the *Instruction for the Visitation of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony*, published with the collaboration of Melancthon in 1528, and the *Sermon on Keeping Children in School*, published in 1530. One may find additional comments on children and education scattered throughout his large body of writing.

Elmer Kiessling in 1956 offered an additional *caveat*: “Much of what [Luther] said on the subject of education applied only to conditions in the Germany of his time,” and “four hundred years and 6000 miles separate us from the world in which he achieved his great work.” He was “a very patriotic German” with a Catholic background who “still belonged to the Middle Ages.”¹⁹

F.V.N. Painter, in his 1928 book *Luther on Education*, cited eight ways Luther exerted an influence on education, including that he “laid the foundation of an educational system which begins with the popular school and ends with the university,” that he “exhibited the necessity of schools both for the Church and the State and emphasized the dignity and worth of the teacher’s vocation,” and that he energetically “impressed upon parents, ministers, and civil officers their obligation to educate the young.”²⁰ Walter Beck, in his *History of the Development of Parochial*

¹⁶ Theodore Hartwig, “Christian Education in Lutheran Legacy,” in *Christian Education: A Book of Readings*, 179-80.

¹⁷ Theodore Hartwig, “The Education of the Christian in Lutheran Legacy,” paper presented October 24, 1977, Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis., 3; <http://www.wlssays.net/files/HartwigEducation.pdf>

¹⁸ H.O.A. Keinath, “Luther’s Educational Views,” *LSJ* 63 (May 1928): 169-70.

¹⁹ Elmer C. Kiessling, “Luther and Christian Education: I. The Impact of the Reformation on the Schools of Germany,” *LSB* 27 (October 1956): 3.

²⁰ F.V.N. Painter, *Luther on Education: Including a Historical Introduction and a Translation of the Reformer’s Two Most Important Educational Treatises* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928), 167.

Schools in 1939, added that Luther's emphasis on education was "an inevitable result of the Reformation principle of salvation by grace through faith."²¹ Back to Painter: With the Reformation "the Bible is placed in the hands of the laity" and is to be looked upon "not as a volume unsafe because of its obscurities, but as a treasure invaluable because of its divine message."²² H.O. Kienath added that according to Luther "everyone is personally responsible for the salvation of his soul," and therefore each "must be placed in a position to know his Maker through the reading and the study of the Bible." This great responsibility laid upon the individual, together with the teaching of the universal priesthood of all believers "demanded universal education."²³

An obvious contribution Luther made to education was in his catechisms. We recall his comments upon returning from visiting the Saxon churches in the winter of 1528-29: "The deplorable, wretched deprivation that I recently encountered while I was a visitor has constrained and compelled me to prepare this catechism. . . . Dear God, what misery I beheld! The ordinary person, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about the Christian faith, and unfortunately many pastors are completely unskilled and incompetent teachers."²⁴ In the preface to his Large Catechism, Luther wrote: "The catechism contains what every Christian should know," and "young people should be thoroughly taught the parts of the catechism and diligently drilled in their practice."²⁵

Speaking of our Lutheran schools today, Kiessling observed: "The emphasis we place on music in our schools may be said to derive from Luther. One could quote any of his beautiful tributes to that art. He placed it next to theology." Luther "stressed the value of sports for the young," and insisted that the languages "should not be taught from grammars but by reading and speaking." Luther "wanted children to be treated humanely and intelligently. The teacher must become a child with the children. He must be a model for them, since the tender, inexperienced age of youth can easily be sullied by thoughtless words." Kiessling added this thoughtful opinion: "Sometimes one wonders whether there is any place on earth today where Luther would feel as much at home as in our Lutheran churches in this country with their Christian day schools and increasing number of Lutheran high schools."²⁶

On a different but equally thoughtful note, Siegbert Becker recalled that in the Large Catechism, Luther charged that when monks fled the world for the monastery, they violated the fifth commandment (*Large Catechism* 1, 197). By contrast, Becker said, "Luther taught Christians once more to regard the natural world as a precious gift of God." He "did not despise this material world. He would have approved wholeheartedly of the advice that C.S. Lewis gives when he says of the created world that we should offer it neither worship nor contempt."²⁷

²¹ Walter H. Beck, *A History of the Development of Parochial Schools and Synodical Education Policies and Programs* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1939), 5.

²² Painter, *Luther on Education*, 61.

²³ Keinath, "Luther's Educational Views," 170.

²⁴ Robert Kolb, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 347.

²⁵ Kolb, *The Book of Concord*, 383.

²⁶ Kiessling, "Luther and Christian Education: 4. Luther's Idea Live on in Our Schools," 4.

²⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: MacMillan, 1947), 67.

Becker wondered whether Lutheran teachers are too often “in the habit of using the word ‘world’ exclusively in the pejorative sense which hardly leaves room for a truly grateful response to God for the created things He gives us richly to enjoy.”²⁸

Hartwig maintained that we understand Luther best “when we focus on the heart and core of his life and teaching, the article of the forgiveness of sins, that man is right with God alone through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁹ But—surprising, perhaps to some educators—Hartwig also insisted that “freely and uninhibitedly” Luther “read and lived with the works produced by the art of man: music, poetry, history, literature, painting, sculpture, drama—both tragedy and comedy—without raising scruples about propriety.” Asked whether it was proper to stage plays by the Roman comic poet Terence in a Christian school, Luther answered, “Yes,” if students had reached a mature age. Such plays, Luther said, provided opportunities for young people to become acquainted with a variety of people, personalities and customs. Christians need not avoid all such plays because of the vulgar words and situations portrayed in them, because we also find such things in the Bible. Luther regarded mystery, miracle and morality plays with the same freedom. “Where others were quick to take offense at these plays, Luther was willing to allow them as instruments by which truth might be imparted.”³⁰

Hartwig’s advice to the contrary, here are a few cherry-picked greatest hits of Luther:

I would advise no one to send his child where the Holy Scriptures are not supreme. . . I greatly fear that the universities, unless they teach the Holy Scriptures diligently and impress them on the young students, are wide gates to hell.³¹

If we have to spend such large sums every year on guns, roads, bridges, dams, and countless similar items to insure the temporal peace and prosperity of a city, why should not much more be devoted to the poor neglected youth—at least enough to engage one or two competent men to teach school?³²

You may rejoice and be glad from the heart if you find that you have been chosen by God to devote your means and labor to raising a son who will be a good Christian pastor, preacher, or schoolmaster, and thereby to raise for God a special servant . . . , an

²⁸Siegbert W. Becker, “A Lutheran Educator in a Secular World,” 2-3.

²⁹Hartwig, “Christian Education in Lutheran Legacy,” 177.

³⁰Hartwig, “Christian Education in Lutheran Legacy,” 179. Hartwig cited Julius Kostlin und Gustav Kaweru, *Martin Luther, Sein Leben und Seine Schriften* (Berlin: 1903), 504. For example, in “On the Jews and Their Lies” (1543), Luther wrote: “How much more honorably do the pagan philosophers, as well as the poets, write and teach not only about God’s rule and about the life to come but also about temporal virtues. They teach that man by nature is obliged to serve his fellow man, to keep faith also with his enemies, and to be loyal and helpful especially in time of need. Thus Cicero and his kind teach. Indeed, I believe that three of Aesop’s fables, half of Cato, and several comedies of Terence contain more wisdom and more instruction about good works than can be found in the books of all the Talmudists and rabbis and more than may ever occur to the hearts of all the Jews.” AE 47:220.

³¹“To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate,” AE 44:206-207.

³²“To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools,” AE 45:350.

angel of God, a true bishop before God, a savior of many people, a king and a prince in the kingdom of God, a light of the world.³³

We shamefully despise God when we begrudge our children this glorious and divine work [of service to God and community] and stick them instead in the exclusive service of the belly and of avarice, having them learn nothing but how to make a living, like hogs wallowing forever with their noses in the dunghill. . . . Certainly we must either be crazy, or without love for our children.”³⁴

[Even] if (as we have assumed) there were no souls, and there were no need at all of schools and languages for the sake of the Scriptures and of God, this one consideration alone would be sufficient to justify the establishment everywhere of the very best schools for both boys and girls, namely, that in order to maintain its temporal estate outwardly the world must have good and capable men and women, men able to rule well over land and people, women able to manage the household and train children and servants aright.³⁵

If I could leave the preaching office and my other duties, or had to do so, there is no other office I would rather have than that of schoolmaster or teacher of boys; for I know that next to preaching, this is the best, greatest and most useful office there is.³⁶

Our fathers taught us that Lutheran schools were an essential component in our ministry

In Germany in the early 1800s, “church control of public elementary education was still taken as a given,” and German Lutherans who came to the American Midwest continued to take this as the order of things “even in a new homeland where public schools existed but where church and state could not be mixed.”³⁷ Up to 1838, most school children in St. Louis, if educated at all, attended private or parochial schools. The United States census of 1840 revealed that 80 percent of Americans had received no education beyond the primary grades, and on the edge of the frontier, in places like the state of Missouri and the territory of Wisconsin, the educational level was even lower.³⁸

In a statement both informational and triumphalist, so common in Missouri Synod literature of the early twentieth century, Walter Beck called the Synod’s grade schools “the dominant Lutheran elementary-school system of the present day” and asserted that “no synodical body within the Lutheran Church has carried on the development of schools more zealously and

³³ “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School,” AE 46:223.

³⁴ “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School,” AE 46:241.

³⁵ “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools,” AE 45:368.

³⁶ “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School,” AE 46:239.

³⁷ Wayne E. Schmidt, *The Lutheran Parochial School: Dates, Documents, Events, People* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Publications, 2001), 55.

³⁸ *Journal of the National Education Association* 27 (March 1938): 84-87; in *LSJ* 74 (February 1939): 260.

vigorously.”³⁹ At the Synod’s founding in 1847, pastors were pledged in their official calls “to show concern for the complete education of the child, to supervise the educational work in the congregation, [to] work in the interest of the school, and to be willing to teach whenever and wherever a teacher was not available or could not be supported.”⁴⁰ A half century later, Missouri’s *Synodalordnung* of 1899 stated that one of the conditions upon which a congregation could join the Synod was that it must “supply the children in the congregation with proper instruction in Christian schools.”⁴¹

Missouri’s chief founder C.F.W. Walther was an ardent supporter of Lutheran schools. He is famously quoted as having said: “May God preserve for our German Lutheran Church the gem of parochial schools! For upon it, humanly speaking, primarily depends the future of our Church in America.” He insisted that “the continued, utmost care of our parochial schools is and remains, next to the public office of preaching, the chief means of our preservation and progress.” In the same volume of *Der Lutheraner*, 1873, Walther headed an article: “Without Parochial Schools No Prosperity of the Church.”⁴² August Pieper reflected: “In every [Missouri] parish a parochial school was organized, and Walther proclaimed the motto: Next to every Lutheran church a Lutheran school!” Walther “became the founder of the Lutheran parochial school in this country,” and “we see something that was never seen in the church before—hundreds of pastors teaching school,” even “to the end of their lives” conducting congregational schools “in addition to doing their pastoral work in one or more congregations.”⁴³

Speaking at the Missouri Synod’s 25th anniversary in 1872, Vice-President Theodor Brohm called parochial schools “the nurseries of the Church, out of which the seedlings were to be transplanted into the orchards of the Church.”⁴⁴ In the Synod’s convention essay that year, Pastor J.P. Beyer stated: “No congregation should deplore the expenses connected with the establishment of parochial school,” but should be eager to improve their schools even in “areas that pertain only to temporal life.” He called Missouri’s schools “the greatest treasure we have” adding that “the greatest evil in American churches”—next to false doctrine itself—was that “they have no parochial schools.”⁴⁵

The congregations and schools of the Missouri Synod enjoyed spectacular growth during the remainder of the nineteenth century, from 52 schools in 55 congregations in 1850 to 1,226 schools in 1,636 congregations in 1897.⁴⁶ One Missouri historian reflected, “Whenever a number

³⁹ Beck, *A History of the Development of Parochial Schools*, 101.

⁴⁰ Beck, *A History of the Development of Parochial Schools*, 181.

⁴¹ Cited by W.C. Kohn, “The Influence of the Christian Day-School on Synod’s Growth,” *LSJ* 57 (July 1922): 209.

⁴² C.F.W. Walther, *Der Lutheraner* 29 (February 15, 1873): 76; cited by August C. Stellhorn, *Schools of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 76.

⁴³ August Pieper, “Jubilaeumsnachgedanke,” *Qu* 20 (January 1923): 1-18; (April 1923): 88-112; (July 1923): 161-77; (October 1923): 254-70; 21 (January 1924): 22-45; (April 1924): 104-111; trans. R.E. Wehrwein, “Anniversary Reflections,” in Curtis A. Jahn, ed., *The Wauwatosa Theology* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 3:241-42.

⁴⁴ *Fuenftzehnter Synodalbericht der Allgemeinen Synode, 1872*, 87ff; cited in Beck, *A History of the Development of Parochial Schools*, 175-77.

⁴⁵ Stellhorn, *Schools of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, 175-76.

⁴⁶ Beck, *A History of the Development of Parochial Schools*, 179.

of Germans or German-speaking immigrants” settled in a section of one of the larger cities, “we began a school in that neighborhood,” rented a “modest room,” gathered neighborhood children, “and urged the parents to send their little ones to us for instruction in the school.”⁴⁷ Missouri President F.C. D. Wyneken, after visiting every congregation over a three-year period in the 1850s, wrote: “I can say the same thing about my [teaching] brethren [as I did about pastors] serving the Lord by attending youth. He who realizes under what difficult conditions this thankless office, humanly speaking, is performed in our country, must praise the Lord all the more that there still are men who in love to the Lord choose and faithfully carry out this office.” In most congregations the schools were still taught by pastors; Wyneken said, “Until the Synod succeeds in effecting the establishment of larger parishes with several schools instead of having a pastor for each congregation, even the smallest, the performance of pastors’ and teachers’ offices will remain a halfway measure.”⁴⁸

Similarly in Wisconsin, Lutheran Pomeranian and Brandenburg settlers moving north and west of Milwaukee in the 1840s “had been trained in their European homeland by their pastors and teachers to consider the preaching and teaching of the Word of God an integral part of their life” and brought an expectation of the combined arrangements of church and parish school.⁴⁹ At its organizing convention in 1850, the Wisconsin Synod founders resolved that “each pastor belonging to our Synod should concern himself especially with the youth and conduct *Christian Day Schools*, Bible classes, mission hours, etc.” The minutes of Wisconsin’s 1853 convention noted that the instruction of children received special consideration. Wisconsin also enjoyed early growth in its churches and schools, though not as dramatic as that of Missouri: 51 schools in 97 congregations in 1865; 248 congregations, 176 schools and 63 called school teachers in 1890.⁵⁰

Such statistics must be read with caution, however, since “it is difficult to determine exactly what a parochial school was in the middle of the nineteenth century.” Prior to the enactment of compulsory attendance laws, “each school was something of a law unto itself and accountable only to its own constituency.” Curricula and staffing differed widely from one school to the next.⁵¹ It is unclear whether these statistics referred to week-day schools, half-day schools, or *Christenlehre*, a form of Sunday afternoon catechetical instruction.

J.P. Koehler called it “characteristic of the early development of the Synod” that new congregations were gathered not by pastors but by people in given areas who “banded together in order to procure preachers and teachers.” They contacted Pastor Johannes Muehlhaeuser, founding pastor of the Synod, pleading for a preacher “so that they wouldn’t fall prey to the Methodists or the humanists” and because “they wanted their children baptized and instructed.”

⁴⁷ Kohn, “The Influence of the Christian Day-School on Synod’s Growth,” 208.

⁴⁸ President’s Report, *Synodal-Bericht, 1857*, 318-24; cited by Stellhorn, *Schools of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, 92-94.

⁴⁹ James R. Moeller, “The Development of Wisconsin Synod Parish Education,” *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 8 (Spring 1990): 23. Moeller cites Wayne E. Schmidt, “Wisconsin Synod Lutheran Parochial Schools: An Overview of the Years 1850-1890,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1968), 353.

⁵⁰ Beck, *A History of the Development of Parochial Schools*, 196-97.

⁵¹ Schmidt, *The Lutheran Parochial School*, 57.

Muehlhaeuser and his early colleagues “did sound mission work in all directions, untiringly and faithfully,” Koehler reported, and as they “laid stress on the instruction of the youth, they became the founders of the best elementary school work in our state. For when the public system in the rural districts was still in its swaddling clothes and the smaller cities had nothing to boast about, the German (Lutheran and Reformed) congregations, both in the country and in town, had many well-conducted and attended schools.”⁵² In 1872, Wisconsin’s *Gemeindeblatt* called it a “widespread evil” that pastors “must so often devote their time to teaching school,” yet the editor also acknowledged “wherever such conditions have existed, there evidently were no competent teachers on the job.”⁵³

Our fathers believed so strongly in the importance of Lutheran schools that one reads about aggressive—even legalistic—methods designed to move churches that did not have schools to open them. Missouri’s General Board of Education sent a “Plan of Action,” to various district and synodical leaders “suggesting steps that might be taken towards establishing more schools, not as a sporadic campaign, but as an enduring policy.” This “Plan of Action” included, among other things, required leaders “to run down, and earnestly deal with opposition; “ferret out congregations where a school could and should be started, to leave nothing undone to overcome the obstacles hindering the establishment of a school in such congregations, and to START THE SCHOOL.” After several more paragraphs of directives, the Plan closed: “Please do not misunderstand us. We are not trying to tell you what to do.”⁵⁴

Other methods were also forceful. “At least once a year the pastor should deliver a well-prepared, energetic sermon on Christian education [and] the necessity and blessing of the Christian day school.” Pastors should “talk school” privately and individually, or should inaugurate “a carefully planned school campaign, extending, let us say, over a period of one year.” If the majority of a congregation’s voters decided against the school, the pastor should organize a “school society” within the congregation to “call a teacher and establish a school for all the children whose parents are willing to send them. Many schools have been started in this way,” Stellhorn said, though adding this was “not the ideal way to start a Christian Day School” but “far better to begin this good work in this way than not at all.”⁵⁵ In 1931 Herbert Sitz stated, “It will not do for us to say, ‘Let them come and find out what we are doing,’” but “it should be our endeavor to create opportunities to make everyone in the congregation acquainted with our work. A school exhibit offers such an opportunity.”⁵⁶

⁵² John Philipp Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod* (St. Cloud, Minn.: The Protestant Conference, 1970), 64.

⁵³ *Evangelische Gemeindeblatt* (May 15, 1872); cited by Moeller, “The Development of Wisconsin Synod Parish Education,” 24.

⁵⁴ August C. Stellhorn, “A Grave Situation, and How It Is Met,” *LSJ* 66 (April 1931): 341.

⁵⁵ R. Schierenbeck, “How can and should a pastor bring the matter of the Christian Day-School before his People?” *The Minnesota District Bulletin* (November 1930): 2-3. See also [John P. Meyer], “On Opening a Parochial School,” *Qu* 38 (January 1941): 69-70; “An Appraisal of Educational Principles in the Light of Scripture,” *LSB* 14 (May 1944): 4-5; Theodore Sauer, “What Can Be Done to Promote a Christian Day School in Those Congregations which Do Not Have One?” *LSB* 22 (May 1952): 6-8.

⁵⁶ Herbert A. Sitz, “A School Exhibit,” *The Minnesota District School Bulletin* 1 (n.d. [Winter 1931]): 1.

Early in their histories both synods established education journals. In Missouri, the first issue of the *Evangelisch-Lutherisches Schulblatt* (Evangelical Lutheran School Journal) appeared in 1865, sponsored by the Teachers' Conference of the Western District of the Missouri Synod. It endured as a German magazine until 1920, then became the *Lutheran School Journal*, and in 1947 was renamed *Lutheran Education*.⁵⁷ Wisconsin's Teachers' Conference launched its *Schulzeitung* (School Periodical) in 1876, later changed to the *Lutherische Schulzeitung* (*Lutheran School Periodical*), which continued until 1905.⁵⁸ The *Minnesota District Newsletter* appeared in the late 1920s, followed by the *The Lutheran School Bulletin* in 1930, changed in 1960 to *The Lutheran Educator*.

Synodical writers regularly noted that other Lutheran synods did not put parochial schools at the forefront of their ministries. Max Lehninger commented in 1938 that a half century earlier before "the synods of Iowa, Buffalo and even Ohio had a large number of parochial schools," but the newly formed American Lutheran Church had few day schools. "Most of them look upon the Christian day school as a lost cause," Lehninger remarked, "a perhaps highly desirable but utterly unattainable ideal in consideration of the lethargy of their members and the outspokenly hostile attitude of some of their leaders."⁵⁹ The November 3, 1956 *Lutheran Standard* reported that an ALC district president voiced his opinion that "the public school system gives our children and young people an opportunity to bear witness to their Christian faith," which regarded as more effective than when young people withdraw "into the cloister of the Christian day school."⁶⁰ *The Lutheran* in its May 5, 1976 issue reported that LCA education statements "have always urged support of public schools rather than the establishment of private ones operated by congregations."⁶¹

⁵⁷ Schmidt, *The Lutheran Parochial School*, 89.

⁵⁸ Schmidt, *The Lutheran Parochial School*, 122-36

⁵⁹ M[ax] Lehninger, "The Lutheran Church and Elementary Christian Training," *Qu* 35 (July 1938): 182. See also [Joh.P.] M[eyer], "Parochial Schools Too Great a Burden?" *Qu* 25 (October 1928): 293-94; "The School Question," *Qu* 31 (1934): 71-72. For an expression of regret about the disappearance of Presbyterian parochial schools in Kentucky, see [Joh. P. M]eyer], "A Presbyterian Christian Day-School," *Qu* 25 (January 1928): 294-95.

⁶⁰ Cited by Carl Lawrenz, "New Interest in Christian Day Schools," *Qu* 54 (January 1957): 60-61. Lawrenz responded: "It is not the isolation of our children that we have to fear in these days of television, radio, and the movies, but their exposure to every type of worldly thought and conduct even during their formative years when they need to be grounded in Christian truth and trained for a Christian mode of life. Even while our children are attending a Christian day school, they will have ample contacts with others to bear witness to their faith," and the "thorough instruction and training" they receive in Christian day schools "can put them in a position to bear and effective witness with their conduct and attitudes and to maintain this Christian witness in their adult life when there will be everything else but isolation for them."

⁶¹ Cited by Irwin J. Habeck, "Parochial Schools in the LCA," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 73 (July 1976): 224. [Hereafter, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* will be abbreviated *WLQ*.] For additional statements on the value of parochial schools, see Habeck, "Parochial Schools in the LCA," *WLQ* 80 (Spring 1983): 137. Martin Albrecht, "God's Gift: Our Christian Day Schools," *WLQ* 77 (October 1980): 303-304.

Our fathers taught us the great importance and supreme blessings of Christian day schools

A long succession of Synodical Conference writers praised the value of Christian day schools. Professor and soon-to-be Lutheran Radio Hour preacher Walter Maier wrote in 1922: “The spiritual value of the daily religious training, which constitutes the real reason for the continuance of our schools is, of course the priceless advantage which our schools can bestow on our children.” The chief benefit of Lutheran schools was that they furnished “helpful and inspiring instruction for the salvation of immortal souls” and helped lay “the only cornerstone for a life that is well-pleasing to God, a growing faith in the redemption of Jesus Christ.” The schools were “certainly worth saving and worth expanding.”⁶²

Louis Serrahn in Wisconsin’s 1925 *Lutheran School Bulletin* said that since Scripture refers to children as God’s gifts to us, “it follows that the Lord’s estimate of children is one which all parents and Christian teachers must share.” Children are “taught by men and women who are trained in our own Lutheran normal schools.” There “the Law is taught to bring [children] to a knowledge of their sin,” then “the Gospel is taught that they may become acquainted with the Savior from sin.”⁶³ W.C. Kohn wrote that although day schools were “a very human form of educational enterprise,” they were “not a product of human calculation.” The very reason parochial schools were in existence was “contrary to man’s reason.” Children “should be taught not only to believe in Jesus Christ as their only Savior,” but “their entire view of the world and of life should be focused on the principles of Scripture, and their judgment of current events and their conceptions of occurrences among the nations should be ripened in the mild rays of the light of God’s Word.”⁶⁴

Lutheran schools were valued also for the preparation they provided for good citizenship. They offered “a high standard of instruction that will help to lay a solid foundation for the future business and professional career of our boys and girls.”⁶⁵ It is impossible to “make children God-fearing by teaching history, or unselfish by teaching grammar, or honest by teaching arithmetic, or philanthropic by teaching geography.” A teacher cannot disregard God when teaching geography, history, reading, or the natural sciences, but “every branch of study should be permeated by the Word of God, and the love of Christ ought to pervade the entire atmosphere of the school room.”⁶⁶

A repeated concern addressed in public schools and parochial schools alike was the importance of character development. Though neither home nor school “will insure that their products will invariably be Christian in belief and conduct,” both “contribute strongly to that result.”⁶⁷ In his graduation address in 1932 at Dr. Martin Luther College, President C.L.

⁶² Walter A. Maier, cited from the *Walther League Messenger*, in “Our Schools Are Worth Saving,” *LSJ* 57 (August 1922): 247-48.

⁶³ Louis Serrahn, “Christian Child Training,” *The Minnesota District School Bulletin* 4 (March 1934): 2-5.

⁶⁴ Kohn, “Address Delivered at the Commencement Exercises at Concordia Teachers’ College,” 123.

⁶⁵ Maier, “Our Schools Are Worth Saving,” 248.

⁶⁶ Kohn, “The Lutheran Church and the Christian Day-School,” 262.

⁶⁷ A[ugust] C. Stellhorn, “Why Cannot We Do as Well as the Lutherans?” *LSJ* 66 (December 1930): 167.

Schweppe catalogued the failure of government efforts to improve citizen behavior through legislation, propaganda, and the more current, disastrous prohibition movement. But Schweppe insisted, “There is a system of schools in our country thoroughly equipped to accept the challenge of the present day—the Christian day school.” While others are looking for a “controlling principle” in education and have not found it, “we have it, and it is a perfect one.” He encouraged graduates: “You are going into these schools. The world is not hailing you as the saviors of this generation,” yet many of their students “will become better children of God, and incidentally they will so rejoice in their salvation from sin that they will be good neighbors, loyal citizens, peaceful, and law-abiding people.” Teachers “will have contributed something vital to the temporal and eternal salvation of mankind.”⁶⁸

Writers frequently voiced fears that Lutheran schools stood in danger of losing their unique character, and that their importance was often underestimated even within the church body. Joh. P. Meyer warned in 1925 that the greatest danger for schools lay “in the callous indifference of some in our own ranks.” While people say “the Christian day school is the ideal,” they too often find “it impossible to create enough interest in [their] members to maintain one.” Meyer warned that we were “becoming materialistic in our views and in our school methods,” citing demands for the unification of the school system, calls for standardization of school requirements, the seeking of accreditation, and competing to build up schools “on entirely different educational principles from ours” as harmful to Lutheran schools. “We stand in danger of throwing away the kernel in order to retain the husks.”⁶⁹

In an extended article in 1936, Kurt Oswald asked: “What is the true worth of our Christian day schools? What causes a question like this to come into prominence so frequently? Do we ever question the value of the rain which falls on our fields, or of the sunshine enveloping the universe?” He wondered whether there was “an inclination toward influencing the mind of our children more than the soul,” and charged that many parents had become “easily satisfied with the instruction of their children, providing their repertoire includes so many hymns studied” and “so many Bible Histories absorbed.” While an emphasis on memorization in religious courses was necessary and had its advantages, “many think that one or two years of intensive drill in memory work should suffice to acquaint children with the chief elements of Christian doctrine. The next step is confirmation and with that stamp of approval we think we have performed our Christian duty.” Oswald lamented the “general exodus of the pupils” following confirmation, “as though with the consummation of their instruction by the pastor the peak of their religious education so far as the classroom is concerned had been reached.” The loss of confirmands, the fact that fewer than half of Wisconsin Synod congregations had parochial schools, and the fact that only about half of the children in congregations that had schools attended them, all led him to conclude: “The influence of the Word of God as a factor in creating faith is not considered as seriously as we should expect.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ C.L. Schweppe, “The Challenge of Education,” *The Minnesota District School Bulletin* 3 (October 1932): 4.

⁶⁹ [Joh. P.] M[eyer], “Death of the Oregon School Law,” *Qu* 22 (July 1925): 216. So also E[dward A.] Koehler, “The Progress of Our Schools,” *LSJ* 61 (September 1926): 322.

⁷⁰ Kurt Oswald, “Our Christian Day Schools—Their Worth and Their Progress,” *TNL* 23 (September 27, 1936): 306-307.

In a second installment, Oswald urged that “we must first of all become convinced of the intrinsic value of Lutheran Christian day schools ourselves.” Their “Christ-centered environment, the Christian personality of the teachers, and the motive for study which leads children to look at all knowledge as a God-given instrument for our use in the building up of His kingdom” all gave Lutheran schools their unique value. Teachers who teach their children “to be honest because their Savior wants them to be so is building and molding Christian character,” but teachers who teach children “to be honest because of what others might think, or because it is for their own good” are doing exactly the opposite, encouraging children’s ‘innate selfishness and nourishing the pharisaic Old Adam’ in them. Instruction in citizenship “that sets aside God’s grace and elevates the Golden Rule to a place of distinction instead can surely be nothing else than a detriment to Christian training.”⁷¹

Advancement in secular subjects and the promotion of good citizenship were welcome and valuable byproducts of our schools, but our fathers consistently reminded their generations of the primary value of Lutheran schools. “Let us watch that our schools are Christian schools, not only in name, but in fact,” wrote Missouri’s Koehler, “that we do not merely teach the children the tenets of the Christian religion, but also train and truly educate them in the fear of the Lord.” True Christian education “is better and more necessary than much learning.”⁷² Better, concluded Missouri’s F.R. Webber, to have “10,000 people really united in Confessionalism of doctrine, and with a good school, than a wishy-washy Lutheranism, five million strong, whose chief interest seems to be in the recreational unit.”⁷³

Our fathers warned us against the dangers of the public schools

In their efforts to promote Lutheran schools and to emphasize their great value, Missouri and Wisconsin writers aimed persistent, blistering criticisms against public schools, from the time of the synods’ foundings and well into the twentieth century.

In the Missouri Synod, church members were “upbraided for any evident predilection” they showed for public schools and “branded as sinful” if they failed to take advantage of their congregation’s parochial school. “Willful disregard for the church’s school not only led to pastoral and brotherly admonition but was also subject to vigorous church discipline.” The 1870 and 1871 conventions of Missouri’s Western District considered 21 *Theses Concerning the Proper Relation of the Evangelical Lutheran Christian to the American Public-School System*, leaving “little unsaid about anything and all that could possibly be directed against the ‘godless’ public schools, their worldly objectives, their unsound methods and lack of discipline, their sectarian or atheistic and agnostic teachers and administrators, their irreligious textbooks with their false philosophies of life and unchristian, legalistic moral precepts, their subtle satanic influences, which were undermining the *morale* and soul of the American nation.” These

⁷¹ Oswald, “Our Christian Day Schools—Their Worth and Their Progress,” (October 11, 1936): 322-25.

⁷² Koehler, “The Progress of Our Schools,” 326. For other presentations on the value of Christian day schools, see also E.E. Kowalke, “Christian Education,” *LSB* 10 (May 1940): 1-2; A.H. Koester, “What Makes a Lutheran School a Christian Day School,” *LSB* 30 (February 1960): 1-4.

⁷³ F.R. Webber; cited by Joh. P. Meyer, “A Word for the Parochial School,” *Qu* 34 (October 1937): 287-88.

conclusions were printed in full and summarized in numerous journals and periodicals.⁷⁴ At Missouri's 1872 convention, essayist J.P. Beyer said that "for us it is a settled matter that we shall not send our children to the public schools," adding that "the greatest evil in American churches, besides that of false doctrine, is the fact that they have no parochial schools [but] are sending their children to the public schools."⁷⁵

Wisconsin Professor Joh. P. Koehler charged that "the public school ideology is a religion, and cannot be otherwise, since there is no education that does not impart some kind of religion." He called the public school worldview "antichristian, even without the teaching of Evolution, through the mere fact of its making a fetish of education and its making a gospel of democracy." It was "wrong to speak of the state's 'right' of education as though it were a divine doctrine." Koehler called the requirement that Christians support the public school system "utterly undemocratic unfairness" involving "discrimination and double taxation." Disturbing was that Christians in a democratic country, "where we are all supposed to be equally responsible," have the taxes they pay "used for the destruction of everything [they hold] most sacred."⁷⁶

Warnings against public schools continued in the twentieth century. Pastor John Brenner wrote in the *Northwestern Lutheran* in 1916 that the Lutheran Church had "always held the dance to be a very dangerous form of entertainment and has advised its members against it." He deplored that public schools, "supported from the taxes we pay, introduced instruction in dancing and encouraged young people to dance at social gatherings." The remedy Brenner urged—"we know of but one"⁷⁷—was to "send your child to the parochial schools" where he or she can escape such influences.

Using 2 Corinthians 6:17 as his text—**Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, (2 Corinthians 6:17, KJV)**—and citing both Old and New Testament passages urging Christians to remain separate from the world, a *Northwestern Lutheran* writer identified only as "S." warned: "What is true of the Church at large is also true of the child of the Church, the Christian school: she may not be allowed to fall into familiar patterns with that unclean urchin of the street, that child of the world, the public school." Adult Christians possess sufficient experience and resolve against becoming "spotted by contact with this world," but children cannot fall back on those advantages. "May we therefore send them like lambs among the wolves for education? Were lambs ever known to change the nature of a pack of wolves by associating with them? Is it not more true that the very nature of wolves is provoked by the sight of lambs?" Nowhere has God assigned the education of children to the government, but education "was first given into the hands of the State for the sake of convenience—or should we say for lack of interest?" The State in public education has progressed "from being an unwilling servant" to "lord." The public school "is the world's school," he warned. "We send our lambs, washed in the blood of Christ till they are white as snow, into the mire and among the wolves of this world for their pasture? We send our young, who are inclined toward and hanker after the loco weed of this world, directly into the rankest growth of loco weed, and expect them to come out without a trace of loco disease about them?" Christian children were especially susceptible to

⁷⁴ Beck, *A History of the Development of Parochial Schools*, 177-78.

⁷⁵ Stellhorn, *Schools of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, 175-76.

⁷⁶ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 187.

⁷⁷ J[ohn] B[renner], "Waking Up?" *TNL* 3 (September 21, 1916): 137-38.

the wives of public educators because they came from homes “in which they have been shielded from the moral dirt of this world.” After learning about the “shameful things” in public schools, Christian children would soon learn to be familiar with it, to distrust their parents, “to be discontented with home.” A child “wants to do as it sees the street urchin do and go where he goes.”⁷⁸

In other warnings similar in both tone and content, Joh. P. Meyer argued that training of future ministers was “seriously handicapped if the young men that present themselves for this work lack the background of parochial school training.” He cited numerous areas where “serious harm” was done to young men’s souls through “the poisoning influence of a nominally irreligious” but often “anti-religious training”—the teaching of evolution, undue stress on the importance of financial success, the Pelagian and Masonic assumptions of man’s ability to improve his own character, among others. In many cases, the religious views of young men shaped by exposure to public schools “will have become definitely warped by their early training without the proper Christian background.” They will soon “revert to type” and “infest the ministry with ideals of external greatness and external methods.”⁷⁹ Public schools “are as a matter of course committed to the lodge religion of the ‘fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.’”⁸⁰

The *Lutheran School Bulletin* in 1944 published “An Appraisal of Education Principles in the Light of Scripture,”⁸¹ reprinted in 1972.⁸² In it was stated that every person has a “religion,” meaning “a belief of how he is going to square himself with his Creator, whose existence he cannot deny and whose day of reckoning he cannot escape.” In essence “there are only two religions: The God-given religion as revealed in Scripture and a religion devised by ‘men who hold the truth in unrighteousness’ as we find it expressed in the philosophies of the world.” The three fundamental questions of life—where have we come from? What is the nature of life? And where are we going?—and the need to discover the answer to these three questions “has been the motivating force in all educational systems.” The answers educators provide “must of necessity be either biblical or anti-biblical. There is no neutrality in teaching; there is no really secular or nonreligious education.”

In contrast to the awareness of human sinfulness and the recognition of the need for a Savior, public education tends to assume “that the child has by nature a vast complex of stored-up readiness to do good, provided the correct environment allows this readiness to function.” Human character is considered “the product of man’s own reason and strength and environment plus other material influences brought to bear upon him.” An educational system “based on a religion devised by unrighteous man will result in a generation which believes that man is master

⁷⁸ S., “Why a Christian May Not Send His Child to the Public School,” *TNL* 12 (October 4, 1925): 312-15.

⁷⁹ [Joh. P.] M[eyer], “A Plea for Christian Elementary Training,” *Qu* 34 (October 1937): 293.

⁸⁰ Meyer, “Danger of Non-Religious Schools,” 329; see also [Joh. P.] M[eyer], “Masons and the Public School,” *Qu* 38 (January 1941): 72.

⁸¹ “An Appraisal of Educational Principles in the Light of Scripture,” *LSB* 14 (May 1944): 2-5.

⁸² Board for Parish Education, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *An Appraisal of Educational Principles in the Light of Scripture* (rev. third ed., 1972), 2-3.

of his own destiny, that he is able by powers inherent in him to meet fully whatever demands his conscience, society, or a possible supreme being may make on him.”⁸³

Yet Wisconsin and Missouri writers also maintained that they were not opposed to the existence of public schools. Lutherans maintain Christian day schools “not because they oppose the public schools as a state institution” but because “they know full well that the public school system of our country is necessary” for an educated citizenry, wrote Missouri’s Kohn. “Lutherans, therefore, joyfully pay their taxes and loyally support the public system with their votes.”⁸⁴ So too Wisconsin’s Oswald said that public schools “exist for a just and salutary purpose,” to “blot out illiteracy among the general public, a condition which if it were neglected and allowed to grow would seriously hamper the machinery of government.” We “cheerfully support them with our tax money even though we do not intend to make use of them for our own children.” Oswald even argued that Lutheran schools served to aid public schools “in an indirect way.” Public education has repeatedly failed to instill good character into its students, despite using “high-sounding phrases” and various “methods and cure-alls,” yet we find “our prisons fairly bulging with youthful criminals” despite that education. “In the midst of a world of educators groping aimlessly about in the uncertain darkness of social unrest our schools stand forth as a shining example and as a beacon pointing the way to security and peace.”⁸⁵

We do not generally hear such overt attacks on public schools today. If anything, we are more likely to hear statements of concern, even sympathy for public schools, who must deal with unruly students, disinterested parents and self-interested educational unions. I recall, however, hearing a Seminary classmate in the late 1970s describing the “Christian education” sermon he had heard the previous weekend, delivered by a significant synodical figure. Two statements stood out in his memory; one: “We cannot tell children for three generations that they have descended from monkeys, and then act surprised when they start acting that way.” Two: “I am not talking about public education at its worst; I am talking about public education at its best.”

In view of the foregoing, the following advice from Theodore Hartwig sounded a decidedly different tone:

Christian freedom does not deny the Christian teacher the privilege to choose world literature, prose, poetry and drama, to teach Christian students, at first hand and from the sources, the spirit of the world in which man lives, the beautiful in contrast to the base, the noble opposed to the ugly, the true against the false. Nor does Christian freedom deny a Christian school to call on people from the outside, specialists in their profession, for gaining knowledge, stimulating the intellect, and enlarging the learning. We must guard against confusing intellectual stimulation with worship. Though learning is also a real act of worship for Christians, the getting of knowledge need not put the Christian student in confessional fellowship with the source of that knowledge.⁸⁶

⁸³ *An Appraisal of Educational Principles in the Light of Scripture*, 3-6.

⁸⁴ Kohn, “The Lutheran Church and the Christian Day-School,” 260.

⁸⁵ Oswald, “Our Christian Day Schools—Their Worth and Their Progress,” 322-23.

⁸⁶ Hartwig, “Christian Education in Lutheran Legacy,” 184.

Our fathers taught us that Sunday School was an inadequate substitute for the Christian day school

While Lutheran schools were growing in the Midwest in the late 1800s, Protestant and Evangelical churches saw the rise of Sunday Schools.⁸⁷ Robert Raikes is generally credited with having inspired the Sunday School movement in Gloucester, England, beginning in the late eighteenth century. Raikes saw children growing up on the streets either neglected by hardworking parents or abandoned to fend for themselves. Though initially opposed by some prominent churchmen, his Sunday Schools came to enjoy tremendous growth. The *London Sunday School Chronicle* in 1910 reported that in Great Britain and Ireland there were 44,399 Sunday Schools, with 720,314 officers and teachers and 7,544,171. Growth was never as great on the European continent, in part because of the stronger Lutheran and Reformed schools in existence there. Lutherans were quoted as saying: “Luther taught us how to teach the Bible in our schools; why do we need the Sunday Schools?”⁸⁸

Growth was even more dramatic in the United States, and in many ways the Sunday School was uniquely suited to the American frontier. “Here was a means to bring schooling of a sort to the many isolated settlers and their families.” With roads often little more than dirt trails from one settlement to the next, there was little opportunity for weekday school, but on Sundays, “when the settlers and their families congregated in small flocks at some centrally located point in their neighborhood for public worship, there was an opportunity to give the children besides the religious also some secular instruction as reading, writing and ciphering.”⁸⁹

With their own congregational schools and with *Christenlehre* (catechism and Bible history instruction) on Sunday afternoons, Lutheran churches were not heavily involved initially in the Sunday School movement. In the 1870s and 1880s “a Sunday School was the exception rather than the rule” in Synodical Conference churches.⁹⁰ Franz Pieper dismissed the Sunday School as a great step backward, favored by lazy and ignorant parents.⁹¹ A Pastor J. Wefel even argued that the two school systems—Lutheran parochial and Sunday School—could not coexist because, quoting “a house divided against itself will not stand.” As late as 1914 the faculty of Concordia Seminary opposed publication of Sunday School material by Concordia Publishing House, fearing the Sunday School would undermine day schools.⁹²

⁸⁷ For histories of the Sunday School movement, see Martin A. Haendschke, *The Sunday School Story: The History of the Sunday School in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (River Forest, Ill.: Lutheran Educational Association, 1963); M[ax] Lehniger, “The Sunday School,” *Qu* 35 (October 1938): 246-59; Mark G. Zarling, “Look at Sunday School through the Lord’s Eyes,” keynote address at “Sunday School for Today and Tomorrow,” Wisconsin Dells, January 23, 1999, <http://www.wlssays.net/files/ZarlingSunday.pdf>.

⁸⁸ Lehniger, “The Sunday School,” 246-48.

⁸⁹ Lehniger, “The Sunday School,” 249.

⁹⁰ Lehniger, “The Sunday School,” 255.

⁹¹ F[rantz] P[ieper], “Sonntagsschule und Gemeindeschule,” *Der Lutheraner* 55 (June 13, 1899): 107; in Stellhorn, *Schools of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, 303.

⁹² Haendshke, *The Sunday School Story*, 26, 41.

Sunday Schools were viewed as one of many “sectarian ideas” which had infiltrated Lutheran churches during the language change from German to English. Sunday School leadership was often placed “into the hands of members so young that they should be pupils instead of acting as teachers and leaders.” Lessons frequently featured “indefinite moralizing, instead of a vigorous application of the facts of sin and grace.” The “Sunday School hour” seldom involved more than 25 minutes of actual instruction and suffered irregular attendance and uninterested attendees.⁹³ It was impossible, said one critic, “for a child to imbibe [an adequate understanding of Christian knowledge] in a few lessons or even in a few weeks or months. As all other branches of science require a long time for study, thus in this branch also progress can be made only step by step.”⁹⁴

Yet following World War I, a somewhat grudging recognition arose that the Sunday School was “here to stay” and that it and the Christian day school must therefore be regarded as complementary rather than competing agencies. The Missouri Synod’s *Lutheran School Journal* of 1924 contained a lengthy summary of the minutes of the joint meeting of the Synod’s General School Board and Sunday School Board. Paul Kretzmann set the tone of the meeting, saying the Sunday School could serve the purpose of training children “in a measure” and that “some good” could be accomplished through it, even as he also acknowledged there was still “much prejudice and opposition” against it and that it contained some “dangers and problems.” Pastor Koenig, chairman of the Sunday School Board, noted frequent lack of cooperation between school and Sunday School, “an indefensible optimism on the part of some pastors and congregations” that the Sunday School was “sufficient for all practical purposes for the thorough indoctrination of the child,” but also “a prejudice against the Sunday-school” in which the introduction of the Sunday School was regarded as “the potential death of the day-school.” Yet Koenig optimistically believed that “both can work for the advancement of Christ’s kingdom.”⁹⁵

In the Wisconsin Synod, Max Lehninger in 1938 allowed that “where nothing better is obtainable” it would be not only short-sighted but a “willful neglect of a sacred duty” for a church without a Christian day school to “leave the responsibility for the Christian education of the youth entirely to the home rather than to make use of the Sunday School.”⁹⁶ Joh. P. Meyer advised that one must approach the Sunday School issue “with a cool head and an unprejudiced mind.” Even in congregations with strongly established parochial schools, “there are frequently children who for some or for no reason are not attending it, but can be gathered” in a Sunday School. It could serve as a stop-gap measure for churches “not advanced far enough in Christian knowledge” or financially unable to open a Christian day school.⁹⁷ “We must clearly recognize

⁹³ Serrahn, “Christian Child Training,” 4-5.

⁹⁴ W.C. Kohn, “Foreword: The Qualitative Aspect of the Christian Day School,” *LSJ* 57 (January 1922): 1-2.

⁹⁵ W.F. Docter, secretary, minutes: “Joint Meeting of General School Board and Sunday School Board,” *LSJ* 59 (April 1924): 136.

⁹⁶ Lehninger, “The Lutheran Church and Elementary Christian Training,” 182.

⁹⁷ Lehninger, “The Sunday School,” 256-57. Lehninger proposed one other use for the Sunday School, which may strike current readers as a highly unlike task: “It may be utilized as a means of acquainting the children to a degree with the language of the German Bible so that the steadily declining family devotions (*Hausandact*) may still be carried on and the children be able to understand a German sermon well enough to meet the necessity of the hour, in short, that a sound Christian family and church life remains

its limitations. We must not delegate to it something which it obviously cannot accomplish. It can under no circumstances become a satisfactory substitute for a regular Christian day school." It can only be "an expedient, a means devised in an emergency." Yet it would be "utter foolishness and sinful negligence" to ignore it as "an auxiliary educational agency at the disposal of the Church."⁹⁸

Our fathers taught us that the mission of Lutheran schools is to teach the gospel, not to be an agent for the improvement of morals

World War I brought far-reaching changes to German Lutheran congregations and their parochial schools. It raised questions about the loyalty of those—German Lutherans and others—who previously had urged neutrality toward the war in Europe or even expressed sympathy toward the Central Powers. Parochial schools came to be feared as "seedbeds of anti-Americanism."⁹⁹ One-fourth of the men drafted into military service for World War I were unable to read English and classified therefore as illiterate, and as late as 1924 more than 8 million people over age 10 were unable to read or write in English.¹⁰⁰ Genuine educational concerns combined with fanatical post-war patriotism led many to conclude that all children should be required to attend schools conducted in English in order to instill American ideals.¹⁰¹

Coinciding with such efforts were other movements aiming to introduce the Bible and Bible reading into public schools, for the improvement of general morality. A program proposed for North Dakota schools in the early 1920s sought to introduce the Bible into the state's public schools, arguing that "the Supreme Court of the United States has declared this 'a Christian nation,' which will not give the same consideration to Mohammedanism and Judaism that it does to Christianity."¹⁰² A similar 1925 law in South Dakota was set to require Bible reading and prayer "without sectarian comment" in all public school classrooms, but was ultimately annulled by the South Dakota State Supreme Court.¹⁰³

A remarkable feature in Oregon was that "a major force in securing the passage" of a compulsory Bible-reading bill into public schools "was the Ku Klux Klan." Governor Ben Olcott issued a warning that "dangerous forces" under the name of the Klan were "insidiously gaining a foothold" and "stirring up fanaticism, race terror, religious prejudice and all of those evil influences which lend toward factional strife and civil terror."¹⁰⁴ After the Oregon measure was defeated, Joh. P. Meyer commented that Christians had reasons to be thankful, yet he warned that "the enemies of the church will not abandon their schemes against the Christian day school;

possible." Zarling, "Look at Sunday School through the Lord's Eyes," perhaps unaware that Lehninger had made this suggestion, called this "a reason that we consider misplaced at best."

⁹⁸ Lehninger, "The Sunday School," 257-59; so also *Problems in Christian Education*, 5.

⁹⁹ Schmidt, *The Lutheran Parochial School*, 305.

¹⁰⁰ A.B. Cain, *The Oregon School Fight* (Portland: A.B. Cain, n.d.), 145.

¹⁰¹ Schmidt, *The Lutheran Parochial School*, 305.

¹⁰² "Governor of North Dakota Proclaims a Religious-Education Day," *LSJ* 59 (November 1924): 422-24.

¹⁰³ [William A.] A[rndt], "Another State Supreme Court Decision against Bible Reading in Public Schools," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 1 (March 1930): 222-223.

¹⁰⁴ Cain, *The Oregon School Fight*, 21-22.

and since the attempt at direct action failed they will result to indirect methods in the effort of strangling our schools.”¹⁰⁵

Meyer explained in 1943 that the state “is, and can be, interested in civic righteousness” and will employ “any means that promise to help attain this end,” including religion. We may expect “that in order to make public schools more effective in raising the standard of civic righteousness in our land, religious instruction of some sort will increasingly be introduced in our [public] schools.” Meyer asked, “Will [such proposals] make the system of public school training less objectionable than it was without any religious instruction?” He answered with an emphatic No. The more such “confessionally colorless” religious instructions were to be introduced into public schools, “the less satisfactory, the more positively dangerous they become for the spiritual life of the children. They may succeed in advancing civic righteousness of the country’s youth, yet not in the sense of Christian sanctification, but on the basis of man’s own ability, as an achievement of his own efforts.” Examples of this educational approach in place were already yielding “a splendid civic righteousness” but were also creating “a toughening aversion to salvation by faith alone in the vicarious redemption of Christ crucified.” Christ was being regarded “merely as a teacher of morality, and as an example for us to follow,” which was “not preparatory, but antagonistic to true Biblical teaching.”¹⁰⁶

Similarly, Carl Lawrenz warned that religious education programs in public schools would “tend to dampen interest and zeal for our Christian day schools among our Lutheran people.” Such programs held appeal “because they seem to offer a much easier solution than that of maintaining separate Christian day schools.” Our sinful nature “is on the lookout for ways that demand a minimum of effort and of sacrificing in material things, for ways which entail a minimum of cross-bearing, namely ways in which we might enjoy public favor, acclaim, and acknowledgment rather than face disparagement, opposition, and antagonism.”¹⁰⁷

Lawrenz cited favorably an editorial in the December 16, 1952 *Milwaukee Journal*, which labeled as “fuzzy thinking” a National Council of Churches proposal to facilitate Bible readings in public schools. Regardless the Bible version used, “the Bible itself is sectarian” because denominations differed over many aspects of it. Lawrenz agreed and added a concern of his own: “There will be an interpretation of the Bible for the children in the type of selections chosen,” and the selections were unlikely to place God’s fundamental message of salvation in the foreground. “Instead of learning to know the Bible as God’s message for their eternal salvation, the children may readily come to understand it as a mere code of good morals, as a manual exemplifying men’s noble thoughts and aspirations.” While it remained true that the Word of God had power to save, even when read in such a setting, this did not remove the fact that “the public school is neither called nor qualified to proclaim the Word of God. Neither does it remove responsibility for the harm done through this arrangement to many others in making the Bible a closed and misunderstood book to them.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ [Joh. P.] Meyer, “Death of the Oregon School Law,” *Qu* 22 (July 1925): 215.

¹⁰⁶ [Joh. P.] M[eyer], “Religious Instruction in Public Schools,” *Qu* 43 (October 1943): 291-92.

¹⁰⁷ Carl Lawrenz, “The Spectre of Post-War Dangers Confronting our Christian Education: The Danger of Introducing Religious Instruction into the Public Schools,” *LSB* 16 (February 1946): 1.

¹⁰⁸ Carl Lawrenz, “Bible Reading in Public Schools,” *Qu* 50 (January 1953) 62-63.

Such concerns, both that Christian day schools be enlisted for generalized teaching of morality and that generic Bible reading be introduced into public schools, provide context for the Wisconsin Synod's unpopular stand against the Boy Scouts.

Since the beginning of the Scouting movement, Wisconsin writers charged that Scouting constituted "a movement for moral uplift in which laws are everything and the Gospel of Christ is at least totally disregarded if not despised."¹⁰⁹ There is "a religious element in Boy Scoutism," but not that of the Bible; reverence is "to be inculcated, but not reverence for the Triune God"; character is "to be developed, but without the Gospel of Jesus Christ."¹¹⁰ Christian parents should not delegate their "heaven-imposed duty" for the religious instruction of their children to other agencies; first the home, then the Christian school are expected to "mold the boy and girl by a steady and unremitting guidance into believers in Christ." American boys do not need "Christian principles' sugar coated by khaki uniforms and leather stocking jargon."¹¹¹

By the 1950s, warnings against Scouting became lengthier and more urgent. Scouting was "undertaking to train boys to become good citizens by applying the principles of morality to natural man," which could only "result in self-righteousness, irreconcilable with the righteousness of faith, the motivating power of sanctification, of which the civic righteousness of the Christian is an integral part."¹¹² A lengthy collection of biblical passages and catechetical questions was presented in a 1954 *Lutheran School Bulletin* article to demonstrate that "Scoutism" should rightly be considered "one of the many predicted antichrists" which would "vex Christ's church in the last times." We "cannot assume that scoutism is of little consequence because only children are involved who will outgrow the scout influences and activities."¹¹³ Scouting as it presented itself in its official literature was "blind to man's natural depravity and his need for a complete change of heart through the Savior's pardoning grace."¹¹⁴

In two Seminary graduation sermons in the 1970s, Lawrenz carefully delineated the dangers of abandoning the teaching of the gospel in favor of mere development of outward morality. "Essentially there are only two religions, two concepts of how man may become righteous in God's sight," he explained. One is that "Christ our Savior has won a perfect righteousness for sinful man, and that God imputes this righteousness to us sinners in pure grace through faith." The other can only be "work righteousness," which is "the inherent religious thought of natural man ever since he fell into sin" and "has been and still is the heart of every religious message apart from the gospel." Even many "religious" people "are still seeking to find salvation through their own good life and character" but "are not ready to embrace [the] altogether new and unique

¹⁰⁹ [Fred] G[raeber], "Boy Scouts," *TNL* 1 (April 7, 1914): 54.

¹¹⁰ J[ohn] B[renner], "Boy Scouts and the Navy," *TNL* 16 (March 31, 1929): 100.

¹¹¹ H[ans] K. M[oussa], "Boy Scout Week," *TNL* 6 (June 15, 1919): 91.

¹¹² M[ax] Lehninger, "The Development of the Doctrinal Position of the Wisconsin Synod," *Qu* 47 (April 1950): 106.

¹¹³ W. Wichmann, "How our Children May See the Evil of the Boy Scout Movement through the Catechism Truths," *LSB* 24 (May 1954): 3-6.

¹¹⁴ Carl Lawrenz, "Natural Law, Natural Knowledge of God, Civic Righteousness, and Their Application to the Boy Scout Question," *WLQ* 69 (April 1972): 69.

gospel message of free grace.” They may probably “laud the noble life and person of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels and seek to use it as an inspiring example and ideal.”¹¹⁵

In his second message, in 1978, Lawrenz called the pursuit of a “self-righteous piety of outward deeds” the “only kind of piety for which man in his fallen state has any understanding.” Such piety is found in Islam, Buddhism, Mormonism, Free Masonry, the Scouts, and “in all man-made religions.” Without the gospel people can only think of their relation to God in terms of law, vainly hoping to earn God’s favor. “Our flesh constantly tempts us to think of piety in terms of certain outward acts, outward praying, outward churchgoing, outward giving, outward uprightness and sobriety.” Such piety “enables our flesh to be puffed about doing these things and to look down upon others who are not performing them in quite the same concerted measure.”¹¹⁶

Today, google “Virtue of the month,” and you will find numerous curricula emphasizing patience, honesty, courage, and a half dozen others. If such virtues are presented as the fruit of faith in Jesus, such curricula could be beneficial. But when such “virtue” courses lump together not only Christian teaching about humility, but also shows that Judaism, Muslims, Confucius and Bill Bennett’s *Book of Virtues* also praised and exemplified humility, what other conclusion could children come to but that all the religions are pretty much the same, that they are all equally useful vehicles for inculcating morality?

Our fathers taught us that Lutheran school teachers were called public ministers of the Word

In its early decades the Wisconsin Synod had at least some school teachers working alongside their pastors in parochial schools, but because the Synod was founded as a *ministerium* of pastors, the role of teachers within the Synod was not immediately made clear. Wisconsin’s 1865 convention rejected a proposal to accept teachers into synodical membership, recommending instead that they meet in their own educational conferences. In 1868 male teachers were invited to attend the convention session along with pastors and delegates and to participate in discussions, and in 1872 they were granted “the same rights and duties as the pastors, except the right to vote.”¹¹⁷ That year nineteen teachers formed the *Allgemeine Lehrerconferenz* [General Teachers’ Conference] and “attended for two or three half day sessions on their own, held during the time the synod convention deliberated.”¹¹⁸ In 1878 teachers were given “a more definite status in the body and a more extensive supervision of its elementary educational interests.”¹¹⁹

By contrast, the Missouri Synod had required its teachers to attend synodical and local conventions for decades. Yet according to the so-called “Missouri view,” the teacher’s call was considered an auxiliary office to that of the pastor. Missouri’s *Lutheran School Journal* in a

¹¹⁵ Carl Lawrenz, “The Gospel is New and Unique, Luke 5:36-38,” *WLQ* 71 (July 1974): 165.

¹¹⁶ Carl Lawrenz, “The Unique Piety which Jesus Calls Forth with His Gospel,” *WLQ* 75 (July 1978): 165-66.

¹¹⁷ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 164-55.

¹¹⁸ Moeller, “The Development of Wisconsin Synod Parish Education,” 25.

¹¹⁹ Beck, *A History of the Development of Parochial Schools*, 198-200.

three-part series in 1921 reviewed the Synod's understanding of the teacher's call. The pastor was entrusted with "the administration of the Office of the Keys, which implies and embraces all spiritual powers," while teachers were among those offices created by the church and therefore "subordinate to the pastoral office." A writer in Missouri's earlier *Schulblatt* had said in 1899 that since the teacher "does not teach the Word in the divine services of the congregation" but only to children attending school, the teacher's office "is only a part of the ministry" and therefore only "certain functions of the ministerial office" were conferred on him. Every individual congregation "has the express command to establish the ministerial office in its midst," but the teaching office "is not an office which the Church is enjoined to establish, and to which the Church to the end of time is ordinarily obligated," but is "merely an ecclesiastical office branched off from the ministry by the Christian congregation in order that the lambs in its midst may receive a thorough education."¹²⁰

Still, other Missouri writings called "the regular Lutheran day school teacher" a "part of the office of the holy ministry" because the teacher labored in Word and doctrine." Next to the pastor, the teacher's office was most important, and teachers were to be called "for life" by their congregations.¹²¹

Although this "Missouri view" of the teaching office has generally been maintained throughout the Synod's history, for a time it faced challenges.¹²² Between 1932 and 1940 "confusion within the Missouri Synod over the place of the teacher intensified dramatically."¹²³ In order for teachers to receive an exemption from military service during World War II, Synod President John Behnken issued a letter designating the teacher as a "regular minister of religion."¹²⁴ A 1948 statement of Missouri's Board of Education called "the office of the teacher, like that of pastor," a "branch of the general ministry, which Christ instituted when He gave His Church the Office of the Keys." According to this statement, the teacher's office "does not issue from the pastorate but from the general ministry" and is "not an auxiliary office in the sense of being subordinate to the pastorate, but is an office which exists in its own right."¹²⁵ Arnold Mueller, in *The Ministry of the Lutheran Teacher*, concluded that the term *Predigtamt* (the office of the ministry) stood for all who teach the Word and that the office of parochial school teacher stood parallel to that of the pastor.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ L.G. Zobel, "Theses on the Call of the Lutheran Day-School Teacher," *LSJ* 56 (April 1921): 102-108; (May 1921): 136-41; (June 1921): 170-74.

¹²¹ *Problems of the Lutheran School*, 12-13.

¹²² See Daniel S. Johnson, "The Ministry and the Schoolmaster: The Relation and Distinction between the Offices of Pastor and Teacher in the Missouri Synod," *Logia* 6 (Trinity 1997): esp. 15-17.

¹²³ John C. Wolhrabe, Jr., *Ministry in Missouri Until 1962. An Historical Analysis of the Doctrine of the Ministry in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (Th. D. Diss., 1987, privately published by the author), 39-40.

¹²⁴ An Open Letter to all Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod teachers from President John W. Behnken, October 11, 1940 (Board for Parish Education Files, St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute), Box 54.

¹²⁵ "The Status of the Lutheran Male Teacher," November 1948 (Board for Parish Education Files, St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute), Box 52.

¹²⁶ Arnold C. Mueller, *The Ministry of the Lutheran Teacher* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 80. Cameron MacKenzie, "Helping Offices in the Church," has acknowledged for most of its history, the Missouri Synod "has been able to live with an ambiguous understanding of the school teacher's office, even after the introduction of female teachers at the end of the nineteenth century," yet

Wisconsin Synod's Edward Fredrich wrote that he was "interested in and heartened by" this understanding of the teacher's call in Mueller's book because Mueller was voicing what had come to be known as the "Wisconsin" view of the teacher's office.¹²⁷ In the 1870s discussions regarding "the divineness of the teacher's call" revealed "a difference as to whether the Christian school derives directly from divine ordnance or from the course of development in human education." Some cited Christ's sayings, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," and, "Feed my lambs," which they understood "to indicate a difference between the pastor and teacher, and the latter's dependence on the former, in that the Apostles' mission was the pastor's calling, and the teacher's office received its divineness only through the benefit of clergy." But in the 1890s J.P. Koehler asked, "Why detour through the office of the pastor in order to establish the divine character of the teacher's call?" The teacher was also called to "to labor in word and doctrine" in a public manner and an official capacity in the congregation.¹²⁸ I.P. Frey in *The Lutheran School Bulletin* in 1946 was critical of some church members who considered calling a parochial school teacher "no different than entering into a contract with a public school teacher" and, at some later date, "terminating that contract." Such a practice was "completely out of order in the Church, which is dealing with holy and sacred things. The Lord Jesus is a partner in the call," and He "is really doing the calling through the congregation."¹²⁹

In 1965, Prof. Erwin Scharf noted that the Synod now had "professors, assistant pastors, vicars, ordained professors, unordained professors, instructors, tutors, missionaries, executive secretaries, male teachers, lady teachers, teachers on a great variety of grade levels, from the upper grades to nursery school, full-time teachers, substitute-teachers," and more. "Who of these people has a call?" he asked, and he answered, "They all do." Any group of Christians that has "expressed the desire to have a chosen person to serve them in the public use of the Keys in one capacity or another" has extended a call, and "acceptance of that wish, fulfillment of it, completes the essence of the call." Regardless whether the call is extended formally, through diplomas of vocation, or whether a person is inducted, commissioned or simply introduced, "as long as members of the church, in whatever way they have gathered to express themselves, have asked the services of these people in connection with either receiving or extending the Means of Grace, they all have divine calls."¹³⁰

These discussions regarding the teacher's call generally assumed a *male* teacher. Women teachers were all but unknown in Lutheran circles in the late 1800s; the term *Lehrerin* (woman teacher) did not appear in synodical records until 1880. But by 1893, 22 women teachers were listed in the *Gemeindeblatt*, with that number steadily increasing. In 1896 Dr. Martin Luther College made what Morton Schroeder calls "an amazing and far-sighted" decision, a "stroke of

maintains that Missouri's founders considered the pastorate "a divine institution, established by God in His Church" but the teacher "a helping office, a creation of the Synod." In *The Offices of the Holy Ministry*, (papers presented at the Congress on the Lutheran Confessions, Itasca, Ill., April 10-13, 1996, ed. John R. Fehrman and Daniel Preus (Crestwood, Mo.: Luther Academy, 1996), 69.

¹²⁷ Edward C. Fredrich, "Looking at the Religious World: Doctrine of the Ministry," *TNL* 51 (June 28, 1964): 208.

¹²⁸ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 230-31. For a fuller discussion of the history of the teacher's call in the two synods, see Armin W. Schuetze, "The WELS and the LCMS—Where Are We Now?" *WLQ* 85 (Fall 1988): 273-81.

¹²⁹ Im. P. Frey, "The Proper Attitude toward the Call," *LSB* 16 (May 1946): 2.

¹³⁰ Erwin Scharf, "The Call to the Public Use of the Keys," *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1965*, 57-58.

minor genius” clearly “ahead of its time,” by permitting women to matriculate as students. This decision put the Wisconsin Synod more than four decades ahead of the Missouri Synod, which did not grant women permission to enroll at Concordia Teacher’s College in River Forest until 1938, and then only if female students comprised less than 30% of their class.”¹³¹ Yet Missouri’s *Lutheran School Journal* noted in 1931 that more than 500 women teachers were “employed” in Synod schools but only ten percent of them had received training in synodical schools.¹³² Women teachers in the Missouri Synod were “usually employed under annual contract,” and “never called, that is, employed by virtue of a permanent call, in the Lutheran sense of the term.”¹³³

Scharf insisted that within the various calls to service in the church, “nowhere is there any rank established,” but “all are on the same level, each doing the work for which he or she was called.” If pastors appeared to have greater authority over teachers and others in the church’s ministry, that was “an authority for order and out of love.” He saw the possibility for much positive, practical application: “If workers in the church could but fully capture that truth concerning the lack of rank among them, we believe many a one in their circle would be more and more effective in his work. What a lot of obvious envy would no longer find its place among us!”¹³⁴ Robert Voss in a similar essay in 1967 urged that “there ought to be pastor-teacher harmony” in the church “out of respect for the call. God not only has established the offices of pastors and teachers, but God specifically calls both.” Teachers no less than pastors are called by God. “The pastor is responsible for the whole flock, including also the teachers and children. The areas of responsibility for the teacher are more limited, with defined responsibilities.” But “both are worthy of double honor,” and “both are to be esteemed highly for their work’s sake.” The fact that pastors are granted a wider responsibility “is not to imply that the pastor is the pope in the congregation, or the lord and master with the teacher as his servant.”¹³⁵ A comment attributed to August Pieper but possibly original with Luther has it, “There is no pastor so small that there does not beat in him the heart of a little Pope.”

¹³¹ Morton A. Schroeder, *A Time to Remember: An Informal History of Dr. Martin Luther College* (New Ulm, Minn.: Dr. Martin Luther College, 1984), 39-40. This is not to say that the Synod easily welcomed the idea of women teachers. In that same year, 1896, the Wisconsin’s Teachers’ Conference heard an essay entitled, “The Woman Teacher in our Congregational Schools,” in which the essayist charged that congregations were appointing female teachers simply because their salaries were lower. The essayist disagreed with the practice of placing young children into classrooms taught by female teachers: “That is a big mistake. Every educator knows that the instruction of little ones—which must lay the foundation of for the whole school—presents the greatest problem and requires the services of a trained schoolteacher.” Following his presentation, the conference “disapproved of women teachers altogether and urged all congregations to appoint only men—the very best ones—for the lower grades.” Later that year, a writer in Wisconsin’s *School Journal* stated flatly, “Anyway, teaching is not a woman’s job.”

¹³² L.G. Bickel, “Women Teachers,” *LSJ* 66 (May 1931): 408.

¹³³ *Problems of the Lutheran School*, 7.

¹³⁴ Scharf, “The Call to the Public Use of the Keys,” 58-59.

¹³⁵ Robert J. Voss, “Pastor-Teacher Harmony,” *WLQ* 65 (January 1968): 9-10; see also Edmund Reim, “The Proper Relationship Between Pastor and Teacher,” *LSB* 6 (February 1936): 1-2.

Members of both synods could agree with Missouri President Behnken, who said that pastors and teachers must “both remember that they are called workers, called to the highest service this side of heaven.”¹³⁶

Our fathers taught us to pay our own way in support of Lutheran schools

J.P. Beyer at Missouri’s 1872 convention urged congregations to realize that “a school is the concern of the whole congregation, not only of those who have children of school age. Also those who have no children, or whose children have been already confirmed, should gladly help along.”¹³⁷ Pastor John Brenner wrote in a letter in 1917: “This fact is recognized among us, at least to a certain extent. Our congregations ask those also who have no children to contribute toward the support of the parochial school, and our synods establish and maintain colleges and seminaries for the common good.” Lutheran education on all levels was not to be considered “entirely the private affair of their parents.”¹³⁸ Many parents say they “would like a Christian day-school for their children, but claim they cannot afford the cost.” Louis Serrahn countered: “First things first! It seems we can afford all kinds of frills in the state schools, as witness the bands, athletics, guidance programs, sewing, cooking, wood-working, etc. Why can we not afford schools that give our children the one thing needful!”¹³⁹

Hand in hand with the expectation that congregations were to share the cost of parochial school education was that churches and church bodies should refuse government aid for their schools. Wisconsin President Johannes Bading warned in 1889 that a great danger threatening the freedom of Christians lay in state legislative bodies who had “taken schools under their wings” but in such a way as “to press all life and breath out of parochial schools, if they succeed in entwining their purposes and thoughts around our necks in the form of laws.” The 1889 convention went on record as being “opposed to any and every grant of public school funds to private schools,” calling it instead a “privilege” that they could establish, support, and regulate their own schools “without external interference, according to our conviction and according to sound principles of pedagogy.”¹⁴⁰ Especially during and after World War I, Wisconsin writers insisted that it was well worth the effort for our churches and schools to pay their own way to avoid government entanglement or control.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ John W. Behnken, *This I Recall* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 29.

¹³⁷ Stellhorn, *Schools of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, 176.

¹³⁸ John Brenner to Rev. Paul Schaller, Mankato, Minnesota, January 30, 1917; John W.O. Brenner papers, file 83, WELS archives, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary library, Mequon, Wis.

¹³⁹ Louis Serrahn, “Christian Child Training,” *The Minnesota District School Bulletin* 4 (March 1934): 2-5.

¹⁴⁰ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1889*, 9-14, 59-63; cited by Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 87-88.

¹⁴¹ See [John] Jenny, “Would Eliminate Parochial Schools,” *TNL* 5 (April 21, 1918): 61-63; [John] B[renner], “The Voice of True Americanism,” *TNL* 6 (April 20, 1919): 58; Brenner, “What Should Be Our Attitude Toward Organizations within Our Church,” 287-88.

How strongly the Wisconsin Synod came to feel about these issues is apparent in a pair of articles on the subject in *The Lutheran School Bulletin* in 1945 and 1946. In the first article, Paul Gieschen warned against accepting any plan to grant released time from public schools to allow children to attend their own churches for religious instruction. “The issue,” he wrote, is that “a special grant and privilege” was being sought from the government, and states would soon be offering to provide free bus transportation for children attending parochial schools. Gieschen considered such measures, though well-intentioned, “a union of church and state,” as well as “very cunning,” “fantastic,” “specious,” and as involving a “fallacy of reasoning.” What would be next? Asking the state to provide parochial schools with free textbooks and school equipment, to pay their teachers’ salaries, to erect their school buildings? The danger lay in “effacing entirely the thin line of demarcation between the sphere of the state and that of the church.” Church and state had useful, God-given, but entirely separate domains; by passage of such proposals, the state threatened to go “beyond its sphere to invade the realm of the other.” Gieschen warned: “Withstand the beginning!” “Beware the dog! May God in His mercy keep us from courting disaster!”¹⁴²

In the second essay, E.E. Kowalke saw such laws as attempts of the government “to impose religious practices upon the people,” but also as attempts by “church people” to “give their peculiar religious beliefs and practices the force of law or use the powers and funds of the civil government for the benefit of their sect.” Especially guilty were “those of the Calvinist persuasion, who are responsible for the laws requiring or permitting Bible reading in public schools, Sunday laws, anti-evolution laws, [and] laws regarding prayer in public schools.” Too often, church people were “casting greedy eyes on the public treasury, looking to it for support of some part of their religious program, with the excuse that they are directly contributing to the public welfare and should therefore be entitled to support from public funds.” The temptation “to get something for what looks like nothing is hard to resist. But if the government supplies free textbooks, why not also pay the teachers’ salaries?” Kowalke warned that “by that time the camel is in the tent, head, body and tail, and will assuredly walk off with it. What the government pays for, it will also control.” Since “we believe in complete separation of Church and State,” we should “be satisfied with nothing less than complete separation.”¹⁴³

Carl Lawrenz wrote in 1953 that such efforts to relegate any part of “our God-entrusted task of teaching children His saving and sanctifying” to public schools or government agencies

¹⁴² Paul Gieschen, “The Danger of Seeking Government Concessions,” *LSB* 16 (December 1945): 2-3.

¹⁴³ E.E. Kowalke, “The Separation of Church and State,” *LSB* 17 (December 1946): 4-6. See also Lawrenz, “The Spectre of Post-War Dangers Confronting our Christian Education,” 1-2.

An interesting wrinkle on this issue was that the Roman Catholic Church favored such governmental support for their schools. Walter Wagner drew a comparison between the Sadducees of Jesus’ day and the Catholic Church, both of whom were attempting “to curry the favor and support of the family of the king and other political leaders,” in the hope of gaining an advantage for their group. “Do we need to look far for evidence of similar practices on the part of the Church of Rome today?” Wegner asked. In Rome’s effort to obtain government support for its parochial school system, “again we see that the leaven of the Sadducees is at work. Whenever the Church seeks the assistance of the State in carrying out its mission on earth, it is relying on the arm of flesh, which is undeniably a trait of materialistic Sadduceeism. Our practice of insisting on maintaining the complete separation of Church and State finds its justification also in these words of our Lord: ‘Beware of the leaven of the Sadducees!’” Walter E. Wagner, “The Leaven of the Sadducees,” *Qu* 49 (October 1952): 244.

“would be a sad evidence of sloth and unfaithfulness.” Joyful faith in our Savior will “incite us to bring sacrifices in providing the agencies by which we will be able to bring His word to the children in fullest measure and in the most effect manner.”¹⁴⁴ Oscar Naumann insisted in 1963 that “recognizing our God-given responsibility and gladly assuming it, we neither want nor request the assistance of the State in carrying out our educational endeavors.”¹⁴⁵

But change was in the air. In a review of Allan Jahsmann’s 1960 book, *What’s Lutheran in Education*, Lawrenz apparently approved Jahsmann’s viewpoint that “direct participation of the State in education is recognized as something accidental rather than essential,” since the State’s primary educational responsibility lay in “protecting the rights of the constituency in the matter of education.” Lawrenz also noted without criticism that Jahsmann advocated “distinction and cooperation rather than strict separation of Church and State.”¹⁴⁶ A writer in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod warned that “private independent church-school education” was “doomed to extinction” within a generation, and that “unless we do something concrete, and soon, too, about finding a way to preserve our private schools, the relentless march toward their ultimate elimination will soon bring to pass that we no longer have any private schools to worry about.”¹⁴⁷

The Wisconsin Synod’s 1967 convention granted the possibility of accepting the very sort of aid against which earlier synodical writers had passionately warned. Instead of viewing church and state as absolutely separate realms, the Synod’s 1967 report recognized limited areas in which church and state had overlapping concerns. “In its efforts to improve education and to provide social services, protection, and educational opportunities for all of its citizens,” the report explained, “the government may deem it advisable to offer aids to church schools also.” The church “must be careful that it does not confuse Scriptural principles with interpretations of government constitutions.” Accepting and making use of government aid for parochial schools “may in itself not be unscriptural,” but the church must still consider the effect of such aid on its schools, such as compromising the school’s Christian identity, creating dependency on government aid, undermining Christian stewardship, or bringing with it “undesirable government control.”¹⁴⁸

An accompanying study, “Governmental Aid to Education,” noted that government aid was now being offered “to educational endeavors on every level,” forcing the question: “Should we avail ourselves of the governmental aid that is offered through legislation which is now in effect?” Within its legitimate function of maintaining civic righteousness, the government was

¹⁴⁴ Lawrenz, “Bible Reading in Public Schools,” 62.

¹⁴⁵ Oscar J. Naumann, “Statement Concerning Federal Aid to Church Related Schools,” *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1963, 33-35.

¹⁴⁶ Carl Lawrenz, review of *What’s Lutheran in Education*, by Allan Hart Jahsmann, *WLQ* 58 (January 1961): 79-80. Lawrenz acknowledged Jahsmann’s view that the first amendment aimed solely at preferential treatment of a particular church, but Lawrenz favored the “rather convincing argument” that the first amendment opposed the “establishment” of all religion, not merely establishment or favoritism toward one religion at the expense of others. He cited Milton R. Konvitz, *Separation of Church and State: The First Freedom (Law and Contemporary Problems* 14 (1949): 44-60.

¹⁴⁷ “At the Crossroads in Private Education,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 5 (December 1964): 6-7. See further M.H. Otto, “Aid to Private Education,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 6 (March 1966): 36-41.

¹⁴⁸ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1967, 159-60.

not interested in the spiritual values promoted in schools, but it did have an interest in maintaining peace, outward decency, and good order. Church and state became improperly mixed only “when either state or church presumes to perform the functions which God has assigned to the other” or when either church or state attempts to do its properly assigned work using the means of the other. But “there is not necessarily a mixture of church and state when both participate in one and the same endeavor but each participates in this endeavor only in the sphere of its own function and restricts itself to its own means.” When Christian day school teachers “teach subject matter which also belongs in the realm of the state and apply approved teaching methods which have been devised by human reason, the state is pleased to have them perform a function and to use means which the state would otherwise carry out and utilize.” At the same time, Christian day school teachers “perform the functions and use the means of the church as they utilize this teaching situation and its entire program to train Christian children with the Gospel and the whole counsel of God in Christian faith and life.”¹⁴⁹

At least one memorial to the 1967 convention voiced historical arguments against receiving such aid and pleaded with pastors, teachers, congregations, and synodical officials to -examine their practices and to act with caution. And in a statement which seemed to anticipate current educational realities, the memorial called it a “specious” argument to distinguish “between aid given to the school and aid given to the individual child, especially because the aid would be given to the school as a whole.”¹⁵⁰

These changes were put to the test in the so-called “Brookfield Case” in the early 1970s, in which nine members of a Milwaukee-area congregation strongly objected to Wisconsin Lutheran High School’s acceptance of a \$4,000 grant for library and instructional materials.¹⁵¹

Addressing the increasingly difficult challenge of school funding, LeDell Plath wrote: “WELS congregations traditionally have funded their elementary schools through the offerings of the members of the congregation. We must not conclude from tradition that charging tuition of parents who are members is forbidden by Scripture.” But if charging tuition harms the sanctification and the stewardship of congregational members, a tuition policy is “not beneficial.” Accepting government subsidy is likewise “not forbidden in Scripture,” but “our people are ‘mastered’ by government help if they depend on that help to pay for the Christian education costs which the congregation should be assuming.” Such dependency “blunts our desire to use our God-given gifts and resources for the work the Lord has given us. We become reluctant to contribute freely and liberally to the Lord’s work.”¹⁵² John Freese wrote in 1997 that “with government support comes increased reliance upon and demand for even more support.”

¹⁴⁹ The Advisory Committee on Education, “Governmental Aid to Education,” *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1967*, 166-72. See also Carl Lawrenz, “The Expediency of Federal Aid for Church-Related Schools,” *WLQ* 65 (April 1968): 155-56; Martin Albrecht, “Government Aid to Schools,” *WLQ* 66 (April 1969): 134-36.

¹⁵⁰ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1967*, 179-82.

¹⁵¹ Dennis J. Valleau, “The Brookfield Controversy,” (senior church history paper, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, April 18, 1976), 1-2. The paper presents an overview of the events. See also Jane Kerner, “The WELS and Government Aid,” *Christian News* 6 (November 11, 1973): 11.

¹⁵² LeDell Plath, “Funding Lutheran Elementary Schools,”

<http://www.wlssays.net/files/PlathSchools.pdf>.

With such support “the government can, and does, frequently attach ‘politically correct’ mandates to its programs,” for “what the government ‘gives,’ it can most assuredly take.” Recalling a familiar Bible history story, Freese urged readers “never to lose sight” of the attitude of Abram, refusing the gifts of the king of Sodom so that he would “never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’”¹⁵³

Such concerns had been voiced a half century earlier, but now they were no longer punctuated with vivid warnings to “Beware the dog!” or visions of the camel being “in the tent.” Freese only urged his readers repeatedly to “think about it,” and asked, “Where do you individually stand in regard to this debate?”¹⁵⁴

Our fathers taught us that Lutheran schools can reach and teach non-Lutherans with the gospel

Mission work in the early decades of our history was often initiated when a missionary entered a new town or village and asked, “Are there any Germans here?” The letters of pioneer missionary Gottlieb Fachtmann reported, “No German preacher has been there yet,” and, “There are about 150 Lutheran families living there.” Fachtmann wrote that his heart was “truly filled” over “the situation of our German fellow countrymen” in Wisconsin. “Should we let our fellow Germans be so nourished by Methodists that they fall away?”¹⁵⁵ Wisconsin President Johannes Bading in his 1883 convention remarked on “the pressing opportunity the Lord has given” the Synod, that “every year thousands upon thousands of our people and brothers in faith spread out over the parts of this land in a mighty stream. Bading called this “a holy and important mission and work to fulfill among these people,” which the Synod would not be able to complete in their lifetime.¹⁵⁶

The steady flow of German immigrants to the Midwest inevitably meant that Lutheran churches and parochial schools would use and even promote the German language. The “desire for things German” was so strong that in the proposed draft of Missouri’s 1847 constitution, candidates for the teaching ministry were to be examined not only for their language ability in German but also their knowledge of their “mother country”—though this requirement was not included in the constitution’s final draft.¹⁵⁷ In addition, Lutheran historian Henry Jacobs has noted that, in general, German immigrants arriving after 1865 came with a greater sense of pride in their background. Their national spirit was stronger than had been that of previous

¹⁵³ John R. Freese, “Not Even a Thread or the Thong of a Sandal: Government Aid to our Lutheran Schools,” *The Lutheran Educator* (October 1997), esp. 8-9.

¹⁵⁴ Freese, “Not Even a Thread or the Thong of a Sandal,” 11.

¹⁵⁵ Gottlieb Fachtmann to Johannes Muehlhaeuser, October 2, 1857; Arnold O. Lehmann, trans., “The First Mission Reports by a Wisconsin Synod Pastor,” *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 11 (April 1993): 36-38.

¹⁵⁶ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1883*, 13-14; cited by Eric Hartzell, “Mission Zeal of the infant Wisconsin Synod, 1850-1893,” *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 9 (1991): 25.

¹⁵⁷ Schmidt, *The Lutheran Parochial School*, 62. See also Schmidt, *The Lutheran Parochial School*, 133-36.

generations. They were clearly aware of “the glories of their fatherland, to which more recent years had made them heirs.”¹⁵⁸

This combination of German language, customs, and pride of heritage combined with confessional distinctiveness and separation to form a unique church and school culture, fostered and maintained especially in Lutheran schools. Our fathers expressed disdain for the “English” schools nearby. In Wisconsin, the proposed Bennett law of 1889 called for the requirement that students attend school at least 12 weeks each year and that no school would be regarded as a legitimate school “unless there shall be taught therein, as part of the elementary education of children, reading, writing, arithmetic and United States history in the English language.”¹⁵⁹ Later historians have suggested that the “German language was often too closely connected with the essence of religion by those who attacked the Bennett Law.” Because people learned about God and worshiped Him in German, they feared that “if their children were not instructed in German they would likely lose their faith.”¹⁶⁰ Another has conceded that while the Wisconsin Synod had legitimate concerns regarding government supervision of their schools and the possible compromise of their religious freedom, it is more difficult to defend the accusation that those who wanted more English and less German in the instructional day were “robbing the religious liberty” of the people.¹⁶¹

World War I hastened what would otherwise have been a gradual but inevitable transition to full use of English in church and school. Missouri and Wisconsin Synod writers, for the record at least, maintained that the change to English would be beneficial, not destructive. “Lutherans do not maintain Christian day schools because they intend to propagate any foreign ideals,” nor do they “maintain Christian day schools because they wish to preserve any particular language or customs. Our language is the language of our country.”¹⁶²

But synodical leaders also recognized they could no longer count on this German “glue” to hold the Synod together. “Formerly,” wrote Max Lehninger in 1946, “the very fact that our fathers were foreign-tongued people acted as an effective barrier to shield their sons and daughters and to keep them safely within the fold.” He described Wisconsin Synod congregations as “islands whose inhabitants were closely knit together by a religion, a language, and customs common to all of them.”¹⁶³ In time the language barrier disappeared, but the homogeneity and separateness remained, and the parochial school must be regarded as a chief agent in maintaining this distinctive culture. “My memory,” wrote Missouri Synod educator Les Bayer, “is that all the pupils were Lutheran at St. Paul’s Lutheran School in Janesville, Wisconsin, where I attended in the 1930s. It was a school operated by Lutherans for Lutherans

¹⁵⁸ H.E. Jacobs, *A History of the Lutheran Church in the United States*, 352f.; cited by Beck, *A History of the Development of Parochial Schools*, 162.

¹⁵⁹ In the Bennett Law, Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 85-89.

¹⁶⁰ Cited by Beck, *A History of the Development of Parochial Schools*, 239.

¹⁶¹ Joel B. Schroeder, “Wisconsin Synod: Right or Wrong in Handling the Bennett Law?” (Senior church history paper, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, February 27, 1976); 14-15; <http://www.wlsessays.net/files/SchroederBennett.pdf> .

¹⁶² Kohn, “The Lutheran Church and the Christian Day-School,” 260 see also J.T. Mueller, “Our Schools in the Period of Transition,” *LSJ* 56 (November 1921): 321-30.

¹⁶³ M[ax] Lehninger, “Adult Instruction,” *Qu* 43 (January 1946): 66.

with the clear purpose of teaching their own.”¹⁶⁴ James Nuechterlein has captured the sense of closeness, common culture, and separateness he felt growing up in a Missouri Synod church and school in the Saginaw valley. Tongue-in-cheek, he observed, “It was one of the great curiosities of my childhood that so few people outside of my family and congregation understood the centrality of the fate of the Lutheran—Church Missouri Synod to world-historical development.”¹⁶⁵

This commonality and separateness was inculcated through a vast collection of shared activities, events, experiences, and expectations: Bible history two mornings each week, catechism class with the pastor on Tuesdays and Thursdays, hymnology—how forgotten a concept is that!—on Fridays. Catechism phrases such as “priest, prophet, king” and “devil, world, flesh” rolled easily off the tongue. Many of my students today have also attended Christian day schools; the associations stretch easily across generations. Years ago, in an Old Testament history class I taught, I heard two students quietly humming “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” just before the start of a test—perfectly understandable behavior, for as long as teachers give tests, there will be prayer in classrooms! But I soon learned that their humming was not a prayer for help but a signal and a memory cue. “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” was # 457 in the old *Lutheran Hymnal*, but 457 B.C. was the year Ezra brought a wave of Jewish re-settlers to Palestine. These students had chosen hymn numbers as memory devices for the dates they were expecting would be on the test!

Such an occurrence, immediately recognizable by almost anyone who attended a Lutheran parochial school prior to the publication of *Christian Worship* (which has a different number for “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”), is incomprehensible and even off-putting to those who have not had the parochial school experience. We may argue that this distinctiveness and separateness have come about as unintended consequences of our deep concern for Lutheran doctrine and our strong devotion to ethnic heritage—except sometimes, it seems, these consequences were actually unintended. Maybe we *wanted* to be safely separated from the world in a church and school filled only with other people just like us.

Yet our fathers insisted—at times, it seems, in contradiction to their actions—that they saw Lutheran schools as a vehicle to teach and reach others. The Missouri Synod’s first constitution required pastors to report each year on the number of “children of the members as well as those of the non-members” in their schools,¹⁶⁶ a requirement that “demonstrates that the framers of the constitution anticipated that parochial schools of the Synod would very likely reach beyond the confines of the sponsoring parish.”¹⁶⁷ These early records reveal that the number of children listed as “strangers” or “outsiders” often exceeded the number of children whose parents belonged to a Lutheran congregation. One Chicago congregation, for example, reported in 1865 that only 32 of 264 children enrolled in its school were children of congregational members. Another in 1868 reported that 300 of its 400 children in its school were “outsiders,” and still

¹⁶⁴ Les Bayer, “The Non-Lutheran in a Lutheran School,” Lutheran Education Association Monograph Series 12 (Fall 1986): 2.

¹⁶⁵ James Nuechterlein, “Heaven is My Home: Memoirs of a Lutheran Boyhood,” *First Things* 6 (October 1990): 29-31.

¹⁶⁶ “Our First Synodical Constitution,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 16 (April 1943): 3.

¹⁶⁷ Schmidt, *The Lutheran Parochial School*, 58.

another in 1875 listed 285 “outsiders” among its 437 pupils. “The assumption that parents of these children were motivated primarily by religious considerations in sending their children to Lutheran schools would be grossly misleading.” These records testify that “many thousands of children and religiously drifting and indifferent German parents were gained through Lutheran schools for permanent membership in Lutheran churches.”¹⁶⁸

One also reads of early calls for doing more congregational and educational work in English. At Missouri’s 1872 convention, it was noted that the Synod “will have to be concerned as soon as possible with a greater emphasis on English, not only in its parochial schools, but also in its higher institutions, in order to enable its members to carry out in larger measure their heavenly calling of being a light in the Lord, and as Christian citizens to assist in furthering the welfare of the whole country.”¹⁶⁹

L.H. Rullmann made a poignant call in 1924 for Lutheran schools to do mission work among African Americans.¹⁷⁰ That same year the Missouri Synod’s General School Board asked, “How far shall we go in admitting such children from other denominations whose parents positively state that they are not [intending] to attend our services, but are to be confirmed in their own churches?” The Board went on record that parochial schools were, “first of all, for our children, for the children of our members,” yet they said, “Our schools have also served the cause of missions.” Children of unchurched parents and of parents of different denominations were frequently admitted to Missouri Synod schools, and many children “and sometimes also the parents” were won for the church. Board members agreed that their parochial schools should welcome “such children from other denominations whose parents state that they are to remain members of their Church,” because “sometimes such parents realize that their churches are not doing what they should do, and they think that we should do what their own Church neglects to do.” Board members acknowledged that some parents bring their children only because they were dissatisfied with teachers and conditions in the public schools and appreciated the safety, discipline and good order they found in Lutheran schools. Yet instead of summarily turning them away, “such parents must be told that the religious training is the chief thing in our schools.” Pastors and teachers were responsible for explaining doctrinal differences to parents, to “show them that they cannot with a good conscience send their children to our school as long as they do not agree with us in doctrine.” Still, they said, “we do not urge such children to come, nor do we ask the parents to send them. If, therefore, parents bring their children to us, we may accept them with a good conscience.” The Board, “after lengthy discussion” adopted a principle that “we will

¹⁶⁸ Albert G. Merkins, “Early Lutheran Settlers and Schools in Northern Illinois,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 21 (January 1949): 185.

¹⁶⁹ *Synodal-Bericht, 1872*, 46; cited by Stellhorn, *Schools of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, 175.

¹⁷⁰ L.H. Rullmann, “How Can the Interest in Mission-Work Be Aroused and Maintained in the Pupils of Our Schools?” *LSJ* 59 (April 1924); 125. Rullmann’s plea, impassioned though it was, makes for uncomfortable reading today by our expectations and sensitivities. Consistent with the attitudes of his era, Rullmann believed that “colored people,” those “poor children of Ham,” were “burdened with the curse of Noah” and relegated to being “servants of man.” Yet we must read Rullmann’s call in the spirit in which he intended it. He deplored that “the whole world looks down upon” the black population and treated African Americans “as though God has not endowed them with a living soul.” But their souls “were purchased with the blood of the Son of God. It’s God’s will that they shall gain eternal life just as well as whites,” and “it is also God’s will that we be instrumental” in bringing them the good news.

accept such children as are brought to us as long as our own children do not suffer in consequence of it.”¹⁷¹

Kent Hunter wrote in 1979 that at least “in theory, one goal of the Lutheran school has always been that of outreach,” but in practice, “the dominant role of the Lutheran school was to train *Lutheran* children in the way of the Lord.” For a wide variety of reasons, Hunter observed, “many parents are looking for options to public education and are willing to pay for them.” Usually these parents are not Lutherans and sometimes not even Christians. If they have church ties at all, they are often “irregular at best,” and “for many, a vital living relationship with Jesus is non-existent.” Their motives may be good, or they may be inconsistent with the goals of the school, secular, or materialistic. Yet since schools have always been “a strong part of [the] Lutheran heritage, we are miles ahead of many other church denominations in Christian education.” Hunter concluded: “Like tentacles reaching into the community, the Lutheran school and its teachers, pastors, principals, aides, bus drivers, kitchen personnel, janitors and secretaries touch the hearts and lives of hundreds of lost people. God is presenting a great opportunity. Do we see it? Can we grasp the opportunity? Are we ready?”¹⁷²

David Valleskey acknowledged in 1987 that “dissatisfaction with the public school system, in the inner city and the suburbs, produces less than spiritual reasons for the unchurched to want to enroll their children in the Lutheran elementary school. But then, how can we expect the unbeliever to be spiritually motivated?”¹⁷³ Valleskey also acknowledged difficulties with assimilation of non-Lutheran children and their parents into the structure and culture of our parochial schools. If non-members or new members find it “difficult to ‘break in’ to the congregation, if the congregation’s ‘power structure’ is firmly in the hands of a few long-time members, if there are very limited opportunities to serve with one’s gifts in the congregation, if the members don’t make a real effort to let the new families know that they are really welcomed and loved as brothers and sisters in Christ, then it should not come as a surprise that new families, including school families, gradually begin to drift away.”¹⁷⁴

Past perfect, future tense?

This paper has been all history, but we are here not to look backwards but to look ahead. I’m no prophet. But consider the unexpected opportunities the Lord of the Church had in store for our Lutheran church at surprising turns in our history.

¹⁷¹ Docter, “Joint Meeting of General School Board and Sunday School Board,” 136-41.

¹⁷² Kent R. Hunter, “The Lutheran School: Opportunity for Mission!” Information published jointly by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s Board for Evangelism Services and Board for Parish Services, St. Louis, 1979), 3-4.

¹⁷³ David J. Valleskey, “An Evangelism Perspective of the Lutheran Elementary School,” presented to the Lutheran Elementary School and Evangelism Symposium, Yahara Center, Madison, Wis., April 24-25, 1987), 5-6.

¹⁷⁴ Valleskey, “An Evangelism Perspective of the Lutheran Elementary School,” 14.

In 1861 the Missouri Synod was regularly accusing the Wisconsin Synod of being a “thoroughly unionistic” church body.¹⁷⁵ Who would have predicted that Wisconsin was on the verge of entering into an organic union with Missouri to form a long, satisfying relationship of church life and service?

In 1911, fewer than 3 percent of congregations in the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods had any worship services or other activities in English.¹⁷⁶ Who could have predicted that these synods would make a transition to the use of English and become thoroughly acculturated in American church life?

In 1961, many observers both inside and outside the Wisconsin Synod questioned whether Wisconsin could survive a break in fellowship with big sister Missouri and be able to go it alone.¹⁷⁷ Who would have predicted the rise in enrollment at all our synodical schools during the next twenty years, the record numbers of graduates entering our schools and churches, new mission openings across the United States and throughout the world, and advances in publicity, evangelism and scholarship?

In 2011, we cannot know what the future holds, but we know the One who holds the future. God who has been our help in ages past will still be our hope in years to come.

¹⁷⁵ A Missouri Synod writer in 1861 charged that “the preachers of the Wisconsin Synod like to gather to themselves a crowd of all kinds of people,” but “are not very scrupulous in the choice of means to augment their numbers.” Charges of “unionistic synod” and “exclusive Lutheranism” flew back and forth between the two synods. Johannes Diendoerfer, “Die Wirksamkeit der evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Iowa in Staate Wisconsin,” *Kirchliches Mittheilungenaus und ueber Nord-Amerika* 19 (October 1861): 72-73; cited in Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 28, 272.

¹⁷⁶ In 1911, 95 percent of communicants in the United Lutheran Synod of the South and 80 percent of General Synod churches used English exclusively in their worship, but only 13 percent of churches in the Ohio Synod, 3 percent in the Synodical Conference, and 1 percent or less in Norwegian bodies used English. “Church News and Comment,” *The Lutheran Witness* 30 (September 28, 1911): 157.

¹⁷⁷ Mark E. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods: Events That Led to the Split between Missouri and Wisconsin* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 342: “There were ‘prophets of doom’ who predicted separation from the LCMS would spell the demise of the Wisconsin Synod.” Some voiced fears that “the WELS is too small to go it alone.” And they waited for Wisconsin “in Linus-like fashion” to take its “doctrinal security blanket of anti-Scouting/chaplaincy/ ecumenism/ theological conservatism and sit in the corner sulking.”