Luther's Views On Education

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Education in Europe before the Reformation

The Middle Ages are also for the history of education the "dark ages." This does not mean, of course, that education was completely forgotten, for as Painter says in the historical introduction to his book on Luther's educational views, "The dark ages must not be made too dark. While ignorance prevailed in large measure, it was not universal." [1] But education, as well as almost everything else was subjected to a very great extent to the interests of the Church of Rome. And so what education there

was "was stamped with a theological character that fettered it for ages." [2] Popular education as we know it today was not only not to be found but was discouraged by Rome.

All education was geared to the preparation of the clergy and therefore any kind of a liberal arts education was simply unheard of. To quote Painter once again:

> . . . the papacy is not favorable to the education of the masses. It seeks above all things absolute obedience on the part of its adherents. Intelligence among the laity is recognized as a dangerous possession; for it ministers to their independence in thinking and makes them more critical of the teaching imposed upon them by priestly authority. Any activity displayed by the Papacy in popular education is forced by the existence of Protestant schools. [3]

And so during the Middle Ages education declined under the heavy hand of Rome.

The principal means of obtaining an education in the Middle Ages was the monastic school. These generally taught the seven liberal arts as divided into the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic) and the quadrivium (music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy). But these were all studied with the interests of the church in mind as the following quote from Rabanus Maurus clearly shows:

> Arithmetic is important on account of the secrets contained in the numbers; the Scriptures also encourage its study, since they speak of numbers and measures. Geometry is necessary because in Scripture circles of all kinds occur in the building of the ark and Solomon's temple. Music and astronomy are required in connection with divine service, which cannot be celebrated with dignity and decency without music, nor on fixed and definite days without astronomy. [4]

And so only a very minimal knowledge could be obtained of the principles of these sciences.

A slightly broader curriculum was offered by the cathedral schools but in these the religious element was even more prominent as they were designed chiefly for candidates for the priesthood. [5] So also the chantry or parochial schools, though meant for the laity, were primarily catechetical and were set up to prepare the layman for church membership by acquainting him with the liturgy and doctrine of the church.

The only alternative to a religious education was the guild school. But these were simply vocational schools run by the

various merchantile guilds to prepare the children of guild members for their respective trades. And all of these schools, including the guild schools "were directly or indirectly under the domination of ecclesiastical authorities committed to the theological system of the church." [6] Even the great universities were given over to scholasticism and the picking over of the dry, bare bones of inane and tedious "theological" questions.

The development of humanism in the fifteenth century did little to change the situation though it professed to be hostile to the educational system of Rome. The Romish Church simply absorbed the movement and though some changes were made in curriculum and in methods of educating, and though there was a general revival of learning in Europe, the humanist movement was simply not enough. There was no education available for the common people, and education in general was not highly esteemed.

This all is not to say that there were not good schools available and that the layman could in no case receive an education. An example of the opposite case is the system of schools established by the Brethren of the Common Life in the Lowlands. But generally on account of the aforementioned and other factors the quality of education in Europe was so poor at the time of the Reformation that Luther himself was moved to say:

> It is perfectly true that if the universities and monasteries were to continue as they have been in the past and there were no other place available where youth could study and live, then I could wish that no boy would ever study at all, but just remain dumb. [7]

And again:

> Is it not evident that we are now able to prepare a boy in three years, so that at the age of fifteen or eighteen he will know more than all the universities and monasteries have known before? Indeed, what have men been learning till now in the universities and monasteries except to become asses, blockheads, and numbskulls? [8]

The Impact of the Reformation on Education

The Reformation marks the beginning of a new emphasis on popular education. In fact, the basic principles of the Reformation necessitate and encourage education. For example, that great Reformation principle of *Sola Scriptura* — that the Scriptures are the only rule for faith and life — involved the placing of the Bible in the hands of the laity and so also the necessity of teaching

them all to read and write. Likewise the closely related principle of the priesthood of all believers meant that each member of the church had to be thoroughly educated in order to fulfil his duties as God's representative and servant in the world and in the Church. And so it has been ever since that the churches of the Reformation, at least in the days of their strength, have put much emphasis on thorough, Scriptural education.

But this emphasis was not always carried through to reality, for as Brandt says in his introduction to Luther's address "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany," "The impact of the events of the early sixteenth century on Germany was by no means favorable to schools and education." [9] And so we find the paradoxical situation in Germany especially at the beginning of the sixteenth century that there was a serious decline in education:

> ...the growing lack of interest in the higher education (was) reflected in the general decline of the number of students attending the secondary schools and the universities during this period. During the five years, 1521-25, the number of those matriculating at Wittenberg University sank from 245 in the former year to 171 in the latter (note; this compared with 579 in 1520). This decline is, in fact apparant in all the German universities, and in some it was more marked than at Wittenberg. In the case of Leipzig, for instance, the number sank from 339 to 102, of Cologne from 251 to 120, of Freiburg from 171 to 22. In 1526 only 9 students matriculated at Rostock compared with 118 in 1521, whilst teaching at Greifswald was suspended between 1524 and 1539 for lack of students. [10]

There were many reasons for this decline:

> Its factors were economic as well as religious. Begging, for instance, had hitherto been recognized as a legitimate means of subsistence for students, even in those who belonged to well-to-do families, as well as for the monastic orders. As the reform ordinances of Wittenberg and elsewhere show, one of the effects of the evangelical movement was to discredit the practice and create a more healthy self-respect in the rising generation, as against this demeaning form of charity. The prospect of securing a living, in the form of an ecclesiastical prebend, as the result of a university education had further lost its attraction for those who had forsworn the Pope and all his works. In any case the secularization of ecclesiastical property threatened to dry up this source of income for the needy scholar. Moreover, the changing economic conditions of the age were tending to foster a more material and practical view of life. And expanding commerce was

> offering a more alluring prospect for the enterprising youth, who, as Bucer deplores, were more concerned with the quest of wealth than the things of the Spirit.[11]

Likewise the common people argued that:

> If as the reformers contended, many of the current doctrines and practices of the church were erroneous and dangerous to salvation, surely parents ought not to send their children to schools where these doctrines were inculcated.[12]

But a more serious problem arose out of a misunderstanding of the principles of the Reformation.

> When Luther preached the spiritual priesthood of all believers, some took it to mean that no formal training was necessary as a preparation for the priesthood. Others went even further, holding that God speaks directly to the human heart; there must be an inner word supplementing the written word. This inner word, this prompting of the Holy Spirit within, wholly independent of any formal education, makes it possible to understand the written word. For this reason Karlstadt and Munzer were opposed to learning of any kind, even declaring it to be sinful and devilish.[13]

And so we find the reformers speaking out very sharply against the current trend and emphasizing the need for thorough, scripturally grounded instruction for all those who professed the truth of the Reformation.

Luther's Place in the History of Education

Luther stood at the front of the battle against this anti-education attitude. He wrote and preached against those who deprecated all education, especially in his two treatises, "To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools,"[14] and "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School."[15] The former which argues for the establishment and maintenance of schools has been called, "the charter of the German gymnasia (high schools),"[16] while the latter treatise which urges the use of schools thus established "was intended to furnish preachers with arguments that could be used to persuade people to provide their sons with an education."[17] Though these are most important, his writings are filled with references to almost every aspect of education, and all together show his great and lasting interest in this important aspect of life.

But as Plass says, his concern was not pedantic but arose out

of his own thorough training:

> Luther was also well acquainted with church history and exercized his independence of judgment on many of its persons and passages. He had received a very thorough training in logic, nor had general psychology, mathematics — which he disliked — astronomy, the theory of music, philosophy, and political and domestic economy been neglected. His course of study was, in fact broader than the course required today of a well-educated man. [18]

And so he did much to revive and reorganize the educational system of Germany. Painter sums up his legacy to the cause of popular education thus:

> Luther contributed in various ways to the advancement of education, and in this respect, as in many others, he rises high above all his contemporaries. With his usual penetration, he perceived at once the obligation and necessity of maintaining schools, and with powerful words urged this duty upon parents, cities, and princes. He pointed out the glaring defects of the schools of the time, and indicated improvements in both studies and methods. For religious instruction, which he made prominent, he wrote a catechism which, after the lapse of more than three centuries, has not been superseded in the large body of Protestants bearing his name. In cooperation with Melanchthon, he drew up plans for primary and secondary schools, and from the University of Wittenberg sent forth many enlightened and successful teachers. He pointed out with great clearness the fundamental truths, upon which all state and religious education must rest. If he did not emphasize education for its own sake, it was because his practical mind was absorbed by the pressing needs of the time. Unfortunately, as often happens with great reformers, he was not fully understood by the men of his age; and this fact, in connection with the religious wars that followed after his death, prevented his ideas from being fully realized in practice. But even for the advanced pedagogy of to-day his writings contain many useful lessons. [19]

Luther's Views on Education

As is abundantly evident from his writings, Luther was interested in education, but especially as it concerned the whole cause of the Reformation and so as MacKinnon says, "The supreme end of education is for him the furtherance of the gospel as revealed in the Word, and the building up of Christian character as the indispensable and the incomparable foundation of the higher moral and spiritual life." [20] Luther himself says in this connection:

> Above and elsewhere I have written much about the schools, urging firmness and diligence in caring for them. Although they may be viewed as something external and pagan, inasmuch as they instruct boys in languages and arts, they are nevertheless extremely necessary. For if we fail to train pupils, we will not have pastors and preachers very long — as we are finding out. The school must supply the church with persons who can be made apostles, evangelists, and prophets; that is, preachers, pastors, and rulers, in addition to other people needed throughout the world, such as chancellors, councilors, secretaries, and the like men who can also lend a hand with the temporal government. [21]

The goal of education, therefore, is the well-being of the church:

> When schools flourish, things go well and the church is secure. Let us make more doctors and masters. The youth is the church's nursery and fountainhead. When we are dead, where are others (to take our place) if there are no schools. They are the preservers of the church. [22]

* * * * * *

> When schools prosper the church remains righteous and her doctrine pure.... Young pupils and students are the seed and source of the church.... For the sake of the church we must have and maintain Christian schools. They may not appear attractive, but they are useful and necessary. [23]

For Luther, then, the chief goal of education was the training of ministers and teachers and all instruction had to be directed to that end first of all:

> ...the schools must be second in importance only to the church, for in them young preachers and pastors are trained, and from them emerge those who replace the ones who die. [24]

In connection with this, the whole first part of his "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School" is devoted to an argument that only through the means of good schools and good instruction will there be preachers and ministers for the church. Without the schools, the church also suffers.

But all this does not mean that the only kind of education Luther was interested in was seminary education. In reference to Luther's Address "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools," MacKinnon says:

> Though Luther's motive in penning it was mainly the interest

of the evangelical movement, he does not overlook the material well-being of the nation or the value of education as a good in itself. He strove to advance thereby the national interest and to raise the national reputation in the face of the charge of barbarism and grossness with which the Italians besmirched it, and which, though exaggerated, he regards as sufficiently well founded. [25]

Luther himself says that the temporal well-being of the state was dependent on good education.

> Now 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 Scripture 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. [26]

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> A city's best and greatest welfare, safety, and strength consist rather in its having many able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens. [27]

And so the last part of his "Sermon on Keeping Children in School" is devoted to the temporal or worldly profit and loss which one has from the support or neglect of the schools.

But Luther realized too, that also for the well-being of the church Christian education must produce more than pastors and teachers:

> By what I have said I do not want to insist that every man must train his child for this office, for not all boys must become pastors, preachers and school-masters.... Beside them, indeed, other boys ought also to study, even though they are not so clever, and ought to learn to understand, write, and read Latin; for it is not only highly learned Doctors and Masters of Holy Scripture that we need,... in a good building we must have not only hewn facings, but also backing-stone; so we must have sacristans and other persons, who serve and help the preachers and the Word of God. [28]

He believed very strongly that the man of God ought to be throughly furnished unto all good works, and saw clearly that good and sound education was the means to reach that goal. As we have seen, he deplored the idea that parents should keep their children from school simply in order that they might earn a

living. He argued that a good education was the best way of preparing the layman as well as the clergyman for his place in the church. Education, then, is never an end in itself but always a means, as he says; "The young folks in particular cannot be trained to the kingdom of God but through the schools." [29]

But when Luther spoke of "good and sound" education, he meant instruction that is throughly grounded in the Scriptures: He says:

> 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. [30]

* * * * * *

> True it is that human wisdom and the liberal arts are noble gifts of God, good and useful for all kinds of things, wherefore one cannot do without them in this life. But they can never thoroughly tell us what sin and righteousness are in the eyes of God, how we can get rid of sins, become pious and just before God, and pass from death into life. Wisdom divine and an art supreme are required for this; and one does not find them in the books of any jurist or wordly-wise person, but in the Bible alone, which is the Holy Spirit's Book. [31]

He "believed that the truly educated man is religious and that only the religious man is truly educated." [32]

He, therefore, at length and with consummate skill argued the case for popular education. And he meant that all children ought to receive, at least up to a certain age, a thorough, biblically based instruction, and that included girls as well as boys.

> Above all the foremost reading for everybody, both in the universities and in the schools, should be Holy Scriptures — and for the younger boys, the Gospels. And would to God that every town had a girl's school as well, where the girls would be taught the gospel for an hour every day in German or in Latin.... Is it not only right that every Christian man know the entire holy gospel by the age of nine or ten? Does he not derive his name and his life from the gospel.? [33]

So, then, the heart of Christian education, the doctrine of "saintliness through obedience to God's commands" must by means of good instruction be impressed upon the youth "who are the seedbed of the church" in order that "they may learn that

they must stand firmly and remain where God speaks, and that they may accustom themselves to those obligations which are commanded by God," [34] as he says in a lecture on Genesis 22:19.

Again, this does not mean that he depreciated a liberal arts education, but it does mean that he believed that even the teaching of the liberal arts must be "Christian education." Indeed, as the following quote shows and as we shall see again later when we look at his views concerning curriculum, Luther believed that the liberal arts were a necessary and desirable part of the education of the Christian man.

> From this it follows that the fine liberal arts, invented and brought to light by learned and outstanding people — even though those people were heathen — are serviceable and useful to people for this life. Moreover, they are creations and noble, precious gifts of this Man (who is Lord over everything). He has used them and still uses them according to His good pleasure, for the praise, honor, and glory of His holy name. [35]

On account of these things he enjoins upon parents the proper instruction of children as a divine requirement:

> He has not given you children and the means to support them, only that you may do with them as you please; or train them for worldly glory. You have been earnestly commanded to raise them for God's service, or be completely rooted out, with your children and everything else; then everything that you have spent on them will be lost. The first commandment says, "I visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." [36]

And he emphasizes that this is required of *parents:*

> ...He has entrusted His Word to parents, as Moses often declares: "Tell your children these things." [37]

* * * * * *

> The third consideration is by far the most important of all, namely, the command of God, who through Moses urges and enjoins parents so often to instruct their children that Psalm 78 says: "How earnestly he commanded our fathers to teach their children and to instruct their children" (Ps. 78:5-6). This is also evident in God's fourth commandment; in which the injunction that children shall obey their parents is so stern that he would even have rebellious children sent to death (Deut. 21:18-21). Indeed, for what other purpose do we older folks exist, other than

> to care for, instruct and bring up the young? It is utterly impossible for these foolish young people to instruct and protect themselves. This is why God has entrusted them to us who are older and know from experience what is best for them. And God will hold us strictly accountable for them. [38]

Christian education is always a parental responsibility, and Luther lays great stress on this point.

Parents carry out this responsibility through the schools. And he gives several reasons for this:

> In the first place there are some who lack the goodness and decency to do it, even if they had the ability.... In the second place, the great majority of parents unfortunately are wholly unfitted for this task.... It takes extraordinary people to bring children up right and teach them well. In the third place, even if parents had the ability and desire to do it themselves, they have neither the time nor the opportunity for it, what with their other duties and the care of the household. Necessity compels us, therefore, to engage public school teachers for the children.... [39]

"Public" school education, in his opinion is to be preferred even to private tutoring as he writes in a letter to Marcus Crodel, headmaster of the Torgau Latin School, when he sent there his son John and his nephew Florian Von Bora. [40]

There must be, then, cooperation between the home and the school:

> For in the first place it is necessary that by the office of the Word of the wrath of God as well as His mercy be impressed upon the hearts. But this is not sufficient unless the teacher is then supported by the discipline in the home, and the parents impress upon their children as well as upon their servants this very thing that they hear publicly or in the church from pious teachers. [41]

Only in this way will instruction serve its purpose.

Because this education is of such crucial importance, Luther describes what a good school teacher must be for his pupils in a lecture on Titus 2:4:

> "Good teachers" are those who are instructed, apt, and skillful at teaching, filled with good doctrine and exhortations. [42]

And again in a lecture on Genesis 16:4 he says:

> If, then, you are a teacher or the director of a school, what should you do? You must educate, teach, correct, and admonish the young people who have been entrusted to your faithful care. You must do so in the expectation that some will do their duty,

> others not. For whoever wants to do a kindness is bound to waste it, because there are always more who spurn sound advice than there are who follow it. The fact that our kindness has not been completely wasted should be sufficient for us; and if amoung ten lepers one returns acknowledges the kindness, this is enough (Luke 17:18). If amoung ten pupils there is one who submits to improvement and studies diligently, this is enough. For then the kindness has not been completely wasted. God's example directs us to show kindness to the grateful and the ungrateful. [43]

A good teacher, then, does a great work in the sight of God:

> In addition, if the school teacher is a godly man and teaches the boys to understand, to sing, and to practice God's Word and the true faith and holds them to Christian discipline, then, as we said earlier, the schools are truly young and eternal councils, which perhaps do more good than many other great councils. [44]

Luther, himself highly esteemed the position of a schoolteacher and speaks of it often:

> I wish nobody would be chosen preacher unless he had first kept school.... In a city as much depends on a schoolmaster as on a minister. We can get along without burgomasters, princes, and noblemen, but we can't do without schools, for they must rule the world.... If I weren't a preacher I know no position on earth I'd rather fill (than that of schoolmaster). But one must not consider how the world esteems and rewards it but how God thinks of it and how he will praise it on the day of judgment. [45]

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> I would be brief and say that a diligent and pious schoolteacher, or master, or whoever it is that faithfully trains and teaches boys, can never be sufficiently rewarded or repaid with any money, as even the heathen Aristotle says. Nevertheless, this work is as shamefully despised amoung us as though it was nothing at all. I myself, if I could leave the preaching office and other things, or had to do so, would not be so glad to have any other work as that of schoolmaster, or teacher of boys, for I know that this is the most useful, the greatest, and the best, next to the work of preaching. Indeed, I scarcely know which of these is better; for it is hard to make old dogs obedient and old rascals pious; and that is the work at which the preacher must labor, often in vain. But young trees can be better bent and trained, though some of them break in the process. Let it be one of the greatest virtues on earth faithfully to train other people's children. Very few people, almost none, in fact, do this for their own. [46]

But he also recognized the difficulty of the task; that "It takes persons of exceptional ability to teach and train children aright." [47] And this, too, accounts for his high regard for teachers.

But he says too:

> When I give my children into the care of a schoolmaster, it is not my intention that the child is to look to the schoolmaster forever; nor do I expect the teacher to make him rich but only that he will teach and bring up my son well. [48]

The teacher is always and must be always a servant:

> For what else is a teacher than a servant of his pupil? The latter is the master; the former is the servant. [49]

But Luther, in spite of his own position as a preacher, was not only interested in the principles of education, but also in its mechanics. He had much sound practical advice to give concerning methods of teaching, curriculum, finance, etc., and he did much to put his advice into practice. With Melancthon he drew up the "Saxony School Plan," which was aimed at the reform of existing schools and the establishment of new schools.

Thus he has much advice for teachers, especially of small children, on *how* to teach children. He says:

> When Christ wished to attract and instruct men, He had to become a man. If we are to attract and instruct children, we must become children with them. [50]

* * * * * *

> Since we are preaching to children, we must also prattle with them. 51

Teaching according to Luther involved three stages. First of all simple repetition is necessary: "Teach only one thing at a time and often repeat the same thing." Then:

> In the second place, when those whom you are instructing have become familiar with the words of the text, then teach them to understand the meaning of those words, so that they may become acquainted with the object and purport of the lesson.

Finally, teaching involves a "fuller and more comprehensive explanation" of the subject. 52

As is also evident from his writings, he urged the establishment of a *complete* system of education. Painter says

that "he had in mind three classes of schools." 53 He wanted a general elementary education for all children without regard for age or sex. Beyond this he urged a higher education for those who showed exceptional talents and ought in his opinion be trained for the ministry or for teaching:

> The exceptional pupils, who give promise of becoming skilled teachers, preachers, or holders of other ecclesiastical positions, should be allowed to continue in school longer, or even be dedicated to a life of study.... We must certainly have men to administer God's Word and sacraments and to be shepherds of souls. But where shall we get them if we let our schools go by the board, and fail to replace them with others that are christian? 54

This higher education culminated in the universities, which he believed ought to be completely reformed. Nevertheless, his system was not so rigidly defined as it is today. And though he believed in different levels or "grades" of instruction, these were very loosely defined and were divided more according to ability than age.

In his "Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors" he suggests three divisions, with a definite curriculum for each. We quote here at length also because of the explicit instructions given here concerning the details of what Luther considered to be a good education:

> **The First Division**
>
> The first division consists of children who are beginning to read. Here this order should be followed.
>
> They shall first learn to read the primer in which are found the alphabet, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and other prayers.
>
> When they have learned this they shall be given **Donatus** and **Cato**, to read Donatus and to expound Cato. The schoolmaster is to expound one or two verses at a time, and the children are to repeat these at a later time, so that they thereby build up a vocabulary of Latin words and get a supply of words for speaking.
>
> They shall practice this until they can read well. We would consider it not unfruitful if the weaker children who do not have especially quick minds, went through Cato and Donatus not only once but also a second time.
>
> The children are to be taught to write and be obliged to show their lessons daily to the schoolmaster.
>
> In order that they may learn a greater number of Latin words, the children may be assigned a few words for memorization each evening, as wise teachers formerly have done in the schools.

The Second Division

The second division consists of those children who can read and should now learn grammar. With these we should proceed in the following manner.

All the children, large and small, should practice music daily, the first hour in the afternoon.

Then the schoolmaster shall first expound the fables of Aesop to the second division.

After vespers the **Paedagogia** of Mosselanus should be explained and, these books learned, selections should be made from the **Colloquies** of Erasmus, such as are useful and edifying for the children.

This may be repeated on the following evening.

When the children go home in the evening a sentence from a poet or other writer may be prescribed which is to be repeated the next morning....

In the morning the children shall again explain Aesop.

The preceptor shall decline a number of nouns and (conjugate) verbs, many or few, easy or hard, according to the ability of the pupils, and have them give the rule or explanation of these forms.

When the children have learned the rules of syntax they should be required in this period to identify parts of speech or to construe, as it is called, which is a very useful practice, though employed by few.

When now the children have learned Aesop in this way, they are to be given Terence to be learned by heart. For they have now matured and can carry more work. But the schoolmaster shall exercise care so that the children are not overtaxed.

After Terence the children shall be given some of the fables of Plautus,...

The hours before noon shall always and everywhere be so ordered that only grammar be taught. First, etymology. Then, syntax, Next, prosody. When this is finished, the teacher should start over again from the beginning, giving the children a good training in grammar. For if this is not done all learning is lost labor and fruitless.

The children are to recite these grammatical rules from memory, so that they are compelled and driven to learn grammar well.

Where the schoolmaster shuns this kind of work, as is often the case, he should be dismissed and another teacher found for the children, who will take on this work of holding the children to grammar. For no greater harm can be done to all the arts than where the children are not well trained in grammar.

This is to be done all through the week, and the children are not to be assigned a new book every day.

But one day, for instance Saturday or Wednesday, shall be

appointed on which the children are given Christian instruction.

For some are taught nothing out of holy Scripture. Some teach their children nothing but holy Scripture. We should yield to neither of these practices.

It is essential that the children learn the beginning of a Christian and blessed life. But there are many reasons why also other books beside Scripture should be given the children from which they may learn to speak.

This order should be followed: The schoolmaster shall have the whole division come up for recitation, asking each pupil in turn to repeat the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments.

If the group is too large one part may come up for recitation one week, another the following.

In one period the schoolmaster should explain simply and correctly the meaning of the Lord's Prayer, at another time, the Creed, at another, the Ten Commandments. He should emphasize what is necessary for living a good life, namely, the fear of God, faith, good works. He should not touch on points of dissension. He also should not accustom the children to lampoon monks or others, as many incompetent teachers do.

Furthermore the teachers should ask the pupils to memorize a number of easy Psalms that contain in themselves a summary of the Christian life and speak about the fear of God, faith, and good works,...

On these days, too, St. Matthew is to be expounded grammatically. When one has completed it, one should begin from the beginning.

Or, if the boys are a little older, one may expound the two epistles of Paul to Timothy, or the first epistle of John, or the Book of Proverbs.

The schoolmaster should not undertake to read other books than these. For it is fruitless to burden the youth with hard and deep books. It is for their own reputation that some have assayed to read Isaiah, the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, the Gospel of St. John, and the like.

The Third Division

When now the children have been well drilled in grammar the more excellent ones may be chosen for a third group.

Along with the others these shall rehearse music the hour after noon.

Then one should expound Virgil to them, and when this is finished one may read Ovid's **Metamorphoses** with them.

In the evening: Cicero's **Officia** or **Familiar Letters**.

In the morning: Virgil is to be repeated, and in grammar the pupils are to be required to explain, decline, and indicate the

various forms of discourse.

One should keep to grammar the hours before noon, so that the pupils may be well drilled in this.

When they have mastered etymology and syntax the pupils shall go on to prosody, wherein they become accustomed to composing verses. For this practice is very useful in learning to understand other writings. Also it gives the pupils a rich vocabulary and makes them apt in many ways.

When they have sufficiently studied grammar they may use these hours for dialectic and rhetoric.

Of the second and third divisions should be required each week a written exercise such as a letter or a poem.

The pupils shall also be required to speak Latin. The schoolmaster himself, as far as possible, should speak only Latin with the pupils so that they become accustomed to and are encouraged in this practice. 55

From this it is evident that the course of study was very thorough and of a broad character.

Nevertheless, Luther believed that instruction, especially for those who had no intention of making studies a lifetime work, ought not to be overly rigorous:

So you say, "But who can thus spare his children and train them all to be young gentlemen? There is work for them to do at home," etc. Answer: it is not by intention either to have such schools established as we have had heretofore, where a boy slaved away at his Donatus and Alesander for twenty or thirty years and still learned nothing. Today we are living in a different world, and things are being done differently. My idea is to have the boys attend such a school for one or two hours during the day, and spend the remainder of the time working at home, learning a trade, or doing whatever is expected of them. In this way, study and work will go hand-in-hand while the boys are young and able to do both.... In like manner, a girl can surely find time enough to attend school for an hour a day, and still take care of her duties at home. 56

For such education ought simply to be the means for their becoming throughly furnished people of God in the home, in the church, and in the state, and not an end in itself.

But always and for every student he desired a wide range of study and thus a broad curriculum:

For my part, if I had children and could manage it, I would have them study not only languages and history, but also singing and music together with the whole of mathematics. 57

He likened "liberal arts" to the riches of the orient:

"All right," you say again, "suppose we do have schools; what is the use of teaching Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and the other liberal arts?... But I wonder why we never ask, "What is the use of silks, wine, spices, and other strange foreign wares when we ourselves have in Germany wine, grain, wool, flax, wood, and stone not only in quantity sufficient for our needs, but also of the best and choicest quality for our glory and ornament?" Languages and the arts, which can do us no harm, but are actually greater ornament, profit, glory and benefit, both for the understanding of Holy Scripture and the conduct of temporal government — these we despise. 58

In each subject he saw a particular value for the Christian man in the world. Concerning history he says:

A prominent place should be given to chronicles and histories, in whatever languages they may be obtained; for they are wonderfully useful in understanding and regulating the course of the world, and in disclosing the marvelous works of God. 59

Concerning poetry and rhetoric:

Certainly I do not intend that young people should give up poetry and rhetoric. I certainly wish that there would be a tremendous number of poets and orators, since I realize that through these studies, as through nothing else, people are wonderfully equipped for grasping the sacred truths, as well as for handling them skillfully and successfully. Of course, wisdom makes the tongues of infants eloquent; but (wisdom) does not wish the gift of languages to be despised. Therefore, I beg also you to urge your young people at my request (should this have any weight) to study poetry and rhetoric diligently. 60

With regard to the study of languages he says:

Indeed, if the languages were not of practical benefit, we ought still feel an interest in them as a wonderful gift of God, with which He has now blessed Germany almost beyond all other lands.... The languages are the scabbard in which the Word of God is sheathed; they are the casket in which this jewel is enshrined; the cask in which this wine is kept; the chamber in which this food is stored. 61

So also he advised instruction in dialectic or logic:

Dialectic instructs, and rhetoric moves; the former appeals to the understanding, the latter to the will. It does not give us the power to speak of all subjects, but is simply an instrument, by which we can speak correctly and methodically of what we already know and understand. 62

He likewise suggested the teaching of music to children of all ages:

> Music in itself has the power to encourage and to stimulate the minds. For that reason also Elisha had a minstrel (2 Kings 3,15), and Moses had trumpets made for the war (Num. 10,7). Therefore the Holy Ghost took music into His service in such a wholesome and necessary matter, in order that He, since it is difficult to think lightly of life and to long for death, might by the singing of the admonition move us the more easily and show us that we should be moved thereto the more easily. 63

But he firmly believed and said often that all the arts should be "placed in the service of Him who has given and created them." 64 His reason for this is soundly scriptural — only then can a person have true knowledge, for if he has not knowledge in the fear of God then he has knowledge without wisdom which is not knowledge:

> For knowledge is of two kinds: (1) what the words means (sic), (2) what the subject matter is. To him who has no knowledge of the subject matter the knowledge of the meaning of the word will be of no help.... By the grace of God we have this knowledge of the subject matter; they are blinded. Therefore even though they know the language, they do not know the true meaning of Scripture. To them, as Isaiah says (29:12), Scripture is a book they cannot read. 65

Mere formal knowledge is always dead and useless.

Luther considered that even gymnastics had a proper place in education, again, not for its own sake, but also in this that the man of God in the world might be thoroughly equipped for his duties:

> It was well considered and arranged by the ancients that the people should practice gymnastics, in order that they might not fall into revelling, unchastity, gluttony, intemperance, and gaming. ...(it) produces elasticity of the body and preserves the health. 66

One other essential part of good education in Luther's eyes was the setting up of good libraries:

> Finally, one more thing merits serious consideration by all those who earnestly desire to have such schools and languages established and maintained in Germany. It is this: no effort or expense should be spared to provide good libraries or book repositories, especially in the larger cities that can well afford it. 67

MacKinnon defines what Luther meant by "good libraries":

> To the same end he would establish libraries in the towns and fill them with useful books, instead of the scholastic rubbish which he regards as so much lumber. He would exclude from these collections the textbooks of canon law and the scholastic theology and philosophy, and in place of this "filth" install the Bible in the original language and in German and other translations along with the best ancient commentators, the classic authors, both pagan and christian, and approved books in law, medicine, and all the arts and sciences. He would add the best histories and chronicles in any language, particularly those related to Germany's national history, which are indispensible for a proper understanding of the past, the ways of God as revealed in the doings of men. 68

Finally good christian instruction involves discipline because even covenant children are by nature depraved. Luther says that "a boy needs a schoolmaster and a switch because he is bad." 69 Thus he says:

> Nevertheless a schoolmaster is extremely necessary for a boy, to instruct and chasten him; for otherwise, without this instruction, good training, and discipline, the boy would come to ruin. 70

Yet he did not want training to be too harsh since he knew also that "rigid severity is apt to defeat its purpose." 71 Discipline must always be tempered with love.

Because he understood so clearly what good education is and its tremendous importance, Luther fought with all his strength the tendency among "the carnal minded masses" to leave the schools "to go to wrack and ruin" 72 through neglect. He used many and often harsh words to try to impress on his fellow countrymen and christians the need to send their children to school:

> Thus, even in temporal government, you can serve your Lord or your city better by training children than by building him castles and cities and gathering the treasures of the whole world; for what good does all that do, if there are no learned, wise, godly people? I shall say nothing of the temporal benefit and eternal reward that accrue to you before God and the world if you have thus raised your child better than was in your shameful, hoggish counsel and intention. 73

* * * * * *

Oh, we handle these poor young people who are committed to us

for training and instruction in the wrong way! We shall have to render a solemn account of our neglect to set the Word of God before them.... We do not see this pitiful evil, how today the young people of Christendom languish and perish miserably in our midst for want of the gospel, in which we ought to be giving them constant instruction and training. 74

And because of the current decline in education and unwillingness of the common people to educate their children, Luther said that it is

...the duty of the government to compel its subjects to keep their children in school, especially those children who were mentioned above.... If it can compel its subjects who are fitted for the work to carry pike and musket, man the walls and do other kinds of work when war is necessary; how much more can it and ought it compel its subjects to keep their children in school, because here there is a worse war on, a war with the very devil, who goes about to suck out secretly strength of cities and princedoms, and empty them of able persons, until he has bored out the pith, and left an empty shell of useless folk, with whom he can play and juggle as he will. That is, indeed, starving out a city or a land; it destroys itself without battle, before one is aware of it. 75

Government ought also, then, finance education:

My dear sirs, 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? 76

He lays down the details for this in his treatise, "The Ordinance of a Common Chest." 77

Where there is such good, scripturally-oriented education, the blessing of God rests:

There is further a divine blessing attached to this sphere of activity; for God is pleased with the many excellent and useful works that belong to the secular condition, and that constitute a divine service. 78

Not only the spiritual blessing of seeing Church, home and state prosper, but

...the fine pleasure that a man gets from having studied, even though he never has an office of any kind; how at home by himself he can read all kinds of things, how he can talk and associate with the learned; travel and do business in foreign lands; for perhaps

there are very few people who are moved by this pleasure. 79

A Brief Critique of Luther's Views

One can find very little to criticize in the expressions of Luther's ideas concerning either the principles or the mechanics of education. What Luther lays down as the principles of Christian education for his day are still the same for Christian education today. This can be seen in general from a comparison of the two following statements.

> Above all things, the principal and most general subject of study, both in the higher and lower schools, would be the Holy Scriptures. 80

* * * * * *

> Christian instruction means...essentially one thing. This one thing is instruction that is based entirely upon the truth of the Word of God. 81

The former is Luther's own fundamental premise, the latter is found in "Principles of Education of Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School."

Many have criticized Luther's "over-emphasis" on the religious aspect of education, especially the training of ministers and teachers as the primary goal of education. And, indeed, Luther lays much emphasis on this point. We do not however find in this a misplaced zeal, nor do we criticize it. And there are several points that ought to be made in this connection.

In the first place one must remember the times in which Luther lived. The Reformation was just beginning. Many thousands had joined this new and yet unorganized movement, and as a result there was a tremendous need for able and good leaders, especially preachers and teachers. This, to a great extent, determined Luther's emphasis.

In the second place one must not forget that this stress on the training of ministers and teachers and leaders is tempered by Luther's great zeal for the whole cause of popular education and by his emphasis on the training of the Christian man, whether he be a preacher or not. Luther never forgot this aspect of Christian education and did not want it to be forgotten by others.

Finally, this emphasis on the training of ministers and teachers stands in its own right. It is interesting that in the

history of the Church of the Reformation it is always the theological schools which are first established while popular Christian education follows. The reason is obvious: one must have pastors and teachers and leaders to begin schools and to teach the people to use the schools. So too Luther saw the need of such leaders simply in order to keep the evangelical movement as a whole and the cause for education in particular alive.

And even as his emphasis on "Christian Education" can be appreciated, so can his emphasis on education as a parental responsibility. This is also our emphasis. But it is also here that one must find fault with Luther's principle of government financed and government enforced education. But also this must be seen in the light of several historical facts.

In the first place the government of which Luther speaks is the small government of the different electorates and principalities of mediaeval Germany. Many of these, and these are the ones to whom Luther addresses himself, were sympathetic to the cause of the Reformation and thus to the cause of christian pedagogy. We have no such government.

In the second place Luther advises government interference because of the ignorance and laxness of the common people in Germany concerning education and the subsequent decline of the schools. He wanted the Princes and Electors to take a hand simply because the common people would not do it themselves. But this also shows once again how important he considered popular education to be.

Finally, these same historical circumstances determined Luther's particular views concerning such matters as curriculum, methods of teaching, etc., where we today do and ought to do things differently because as is so often said, "times change." Nevertheless there is much sound practical advice to be found in Luther's writings as we have seen and much that can be learned from him.

The Importance of Luther

Painter sums up some of Luther's contributions to education thus:

> 1. In his writings, as in the principles of Protestantism, he laid the foundation of an educational system, which begins with the popular school and ends up with the university.
>
> 2. He set up as the noble idea of education **a Christian man,** fitted through instruction and discipline to discharge the duties of

every relation of life.

3. He exhibited the necessity of schools both for the Church and the State, and emphasized the dignity and worth of the teacher's vocation.

4. With resistless energy he impressed upon parents, ministers, and civil officers their obligation to educate the young.

5. He brought about a re-organization of schools, introducing graded instruction, an improved course of study, and rational methods.

6. In his appreciation of nature and of child-life, he laid the foundation for educational science.

7. He made great improvements in method; he sought to adapt instruction to the capacity of children, to make learning pleasant, to awaken the mind through skillful questioning, to study things as well as words, and to temper discipline with love.

8. With a wise understanding of the relation of virtue and intelligence to the general good, he advocated compulsory education on the part of the State. 82

And we agree with Painter who says that Luther "accomplished scarcely less for education than for religion." 83

He stands at the vanguard of the movement for Christian day-school education, which means too that he must also be judged from that perspective. His contribution, then, is that, even as for the revival of religion, he laid the foundations. He did that by showing the weaknesses of education as it had existed under the dominion of Rome in the first place, and secondly by laying down the principles of a new foundation for a God-glorifying, soundly Reformed system of schools where the man of God might indeed be thoroughly equipped unto all good works.

Many have called Calvin "the father of popular education" but as Schaff says, he must share the honor with Luther. 84 Calvin and others of the later Reformers built a new building, but Luther laid the foundation.

"A schoolmaster is extremely necessary for a boy, to instruct and chasten him; for otherwise, without this instruction, good training, and discipline, the boy would come to ruin."

— Martin Luther

Footnotes

1 F.V.N. Painter, **Luther on Education**, (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1889) p. 75.

2 Painter, p. 75.

3 Painter, pp. 49, 50.
4 Quoted in Painter, pp. 77, 78.

5 Painter, pp. 77ff.

6 Walter I. Brandt, Introduction to Luther's treatise, "To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools, (**Works**, vol. 45, pp. 339-378, trans., A. Steinhaeuser) p. 341.

7 Luther, "To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany", p. 352.

8 Luther, "To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany", pp. 351, 352.

9 Page 342.
10 James MacKinnon, **Luther and the Reformation**, (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929) vol. III, p. 214.

11 MacKinnon, p. 214.

12 Introduction, "To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany", p. 342.

13 Introduction, "To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany", pp. 342, 343.

14 **Works**, vol. 45, pp. 339-378.

15 **Works**, vol. 46, pp. 207-258.

16 MacKinnon, p. 222.

17 Introduction, "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School", p. 133.

18 Ewald M. Plass, **This is Luther** (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1948), pp. 296, 297.

19 Painter, pp. 128, 129.

20 MacKinnon, p. 224.

21 "On the Councils and the Church," trans., Charles M. Jacobs, vol. 41, p. 176.

22 "Table Talk," #5557, ed. and trans., Theodore Tappert, vol. 54, p. 452.

23 Quoted in Painter, pp. 132, 133; no reference.

24 "On the Councils and the Church," p. 176.

25 MacKinnon, pp. 223, 224.

26 "To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany," p. 368.

27 "To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany," p. 356.

28 "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School," p. 153.

29 Sermon on Matt. 25:31-42, quoted in **Luther on Education in the Christian Home and School**, ed., P.E. Kretzmann (Burlington, Iowa: Lutheran Literary Board, 1940) p. 91.

30 "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate, trans., Charles M. Jacobs, vol. 44, p. 207.

31 Quoted in Ewald M. Plass, **What Luther Says** (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1959) vol. I, p. 449.

32 Plass, **This is Luther**, p. 305.

33 "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation," pp. 205, 206.

34 "Lectures on Genesis," trans., George V. Schick, vol. 4, p. 182.

35 Quoted in Plass, **What Luther Says**, vol. I, p. 450.

36 "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School," p. 145.

37 "Lectures on Genesis" (chap. 7:1), vol. 2, p. 45.

38 "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany," p. 353.

39 "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany," p. 355.

40 "Letters," trans., Gottfried G. Krodel, vol. 50, p. 232.

41 "Commentary on Joel 1:2, 3," in Kretzmann, p. 29.

42 "Lectures on Titus, Philemon, Hebrews," trans., Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 29, p. 54.

43 "Lectures on Genesis," vol. 3, pp. 50, 51.

44 "On the Councils and the Church," p. 176.

45 "Table Talks," #5247, pp. 403, 404.

46 "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School," pp. 173, 174.

47 Quoted in Plass, **What Luther Says**, vol. III, p. 1338.

48 "Sermons on the Gospel of John," (6:32), trans., M. Bertram, vol. 22, p. 35.

49 "Lectures on Genesis," (41:40), vol. 7, p. 185.

50 Quoted in Plass, **What Luther Says,** vol. I, p. 447.

51 Quoted in Plass, **What Luther Says**, vol. I, p. 447.

52 Quoted in Painter, pp. 150-152.

53 Painter, p. 138.

54 "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany," p. 371.

55 Trans., Conrad Bergendoff, vol. 40, pp. 315-320.

56 "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany," p. 370.

57 "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany," p. 369.

58 "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany," pp. 357-358.

59 "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany," quoted in Kretzmann, p. 76.

60 "Letter to Eobanus Hessus" (1523), vol. 49, p. 34.

61 "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany," quoted in Kretzmann, pp. 74, 75.

62 Quoted in Painter, pp. 159ff.

63 "Exposition of Psalm 3:6," quoted in Kretzmann, p. 84.

64 "First Preface to Waither's Hymn Book of 1525," quoted in Kretzmann, p. 85.

65 "Lectures on Genesis," (16:12), vol. 3, p. 69.

66 Quoted in Painter, p. 166.

67 "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany," p. 373.

68 MacKinnon, pp. 221, 222.

69 "Lectures on Genesis," vol. I, p. 109.

70 "Lectures on Galations" (chap. 3:24), trans., Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 26, p. 346.

71 Painter, p. 122.

72 "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany," p. 348.

73 Luther's preface to **Oeconomia Christiana** by Justus Menius, in the Introduction to "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School," p. 133.

74 "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation," p. 206.

75 "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School," pp. 177, 178.

76 "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany," p. 350.

77 Trans., Albert Steinhaeuser, vol. 45, pp. 188, 189.

78 "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School," quoted in Kretzmann, p. 95.

79 "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School," p. 165.

80 Quoted in Plass, **What Luther Says**, p. 449.

81 H. Hanko, p. 1.

82 Painter, pp. 167, 168.

83 Page 166.
84 Philip Schaff, **History of the Christian Church**, (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1910), vol. VIII, p. 354.

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