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The Influence of Pragmatism on Contemporary American Education, with Especial Reference to the Sunday School Materials of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod

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THE INFLUENCE OF PRAGMATISM ON CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, WITH ESPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE
SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH -
MISSOURI SYNOD

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
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requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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June 1953

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The problem presented in this thesis first suggested itself when the author read John Dewey's Democracy and Education. The impression of this book on the author was that John Dewey's philosophy was an offspring of Darwin's theory of evolution. The question of how much Dewey's philosophy had entered the thinking of religious educators in America bothered the author until he decided to investigate the problem. Of necessity the problem was limited in its final aspects to the Sunday School materials of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. The thesis presents a brief historical sketch of the development of pragmatism, a statement of the philosophy, an analysis of its influence on contemporary American religious education, and an investigation of the Sunday School materials of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod to determine the extent of its influence on those materials, if any.

The source material for chapter two presents the views of contemporary religious educators apart from those in the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod.

The materials investigated in chapters three and four of the thesis are either listed in the General Catalog of Concordia Publishing House, the official

publishing house of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, or in circulars and brochures distributed by the Board for Parish Education of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. The authors and editors of such materials are all members of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod; many of them are directly connected with parish education in that church body.

The investigation was carried on altogether by means of bibliography, critical study of the books listed therein, and an analysis of the Sunday School literature of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod.

Historical Sketch of Pragmatism

Although pragmatists themselves claim that they do not profess a philosophy or a philosophical system, but merely a method, their readers generally consider pragmatism to be a philosophy in its own right. It is in this light that the author attempted to study pragmatism and to ascertain the extent of its influence, if any, upon the Sunday School materials of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod.

Every philosophy, in its development, owes a certain amount of its character to the past and affects its successors. Butler found,¹ in comparing pragmatism with other

¹Donald J. Butler, Four Philosophies and Their Practice in Education and Religion (New York: Harper and Bros., 1951), p. 405. Butler quotes Dewey's Democracy and Education.

philosophies, that certain germs of the pragmatic view were discernible in authors as ancient as Heraclitus and the Sophists. He again picked up the thread of pragmatism in Bacon and Comte. He claimed that Bacon's inductive method and science as a social pursuit were anticipatory of pragmatism. John Dewey himself was quoted as admitting the prophetic quality of Bacon for the pragmatic concept of knowledge. Because of Comte's positivistic treatment of metaphysics and his intense interest in social relations, Butler classified also him as a forerunner of pragmatism.² This is in no way to be construed to mean that Bacon and Comte were pragmatists, but merely that they held some of the tenets which were later to be laid down as part of the philosophy of pragmatism.

Pragmatism owed its greatest debt to Darwin, for it was Darwin's Origin of Species and The Descent of Man which explicitly stated the developmental quality of nature which the pragmatists applied to man in his social relationships and his quest for knowledge. Meiklejohn made the statement: "Pragmatism is Darwinism applied to human intelligence."³ Nicholas St. John Green, who was called the

²Ibid., p. 405.

³Alex. Meiklejohn, Education Between Two Worlds (New York: Harper and Bros., 1942), p. 124.

"grandfather of pragmatism" by Pierce,⁴ was influenced in his interpretation of the law by Darwin's theories of evolution and development, according to Wiener.⁵ Chauncey Wright became a convert to Darwinism almost immediately upon reading the Origin of Species in 1860.⁶ William James readily admitted his debt to Darwin and Darwinism modes of thought.⁷ Although many evidences could be cited for Dewey's reliance upon Darwin, his own reference to the fact is sufficient.⁸

The above paragraph showed the reliance of the founders of pragmatism upon Darwin. The actual formulation of the philosophy occurred as an outgrowth of the discussions of the Metaphysical Club, a small group of men who came together as the spirit moved them and as opportunity appeared. This club began during the college days of many of its members. It included such men as Chauncey Wright, C. S. Pierce, Wm. James, and O. W. Holmes. All these men were influential in the formulation of pragmatism. Chauncey Wright was sig-

⁴Gail Kennedy, "The Pragmatic Naturalism of Chauncey Wright," Studies in the History of Ideas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), III, 500.

⁵Phillip Wiener, Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 95.

⁶G. Kennedy, op. cit., p. 483.

⁷P. Wiener, op. cit., pp. 125 ff.

⁸D. Butler, op. cit., p. 435, Butler quotes Dewey.

nificant mainly in the transition from traditional empiricism to the more radical empiricism of his successors. C. S. Pierce enunciated the principles of pragmatism to James sometime after 1867.⁹ It was James, then, who popularized the idea, especially in his lectures entitled, Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking, delivered in the winter of 1906-07 at Columbia University.¹⁰ John Dewey, the latest of the great pragmatists, developed these concepts into a full-fledged philosophy.

Definition and Characteristics of Pragmatism

Pragmatism is a wholly naturalistic philosophy. It is violently opposed to all forms of dogmatic, a priori, or fixed beliefs. Truth becomes only temporarily stationary until later developments indicate a more practical truth. Truth is judged to be true by its ability to work in a given situation. While pragmatism espouses the free will of man, it hesitates to ascribe to him the position of a cause in the world, although he is considered capable of a kind of interaction with the world which changes the direction of events at certain crucial points. Pragmatism always looks to consequences rather than to antecedent phenomena, to possibilities of action rather than to precedents, to the future

⁹p. Wiener, op. cit.; p. 75.

¹⁰William James, Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking; Popular Lectures on Philosophy (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925, 1907) p. vii.

rather than to the past. Its persistent question is: "What practical difference will it make if this or that plan or idea is used?"

In his major work on pragmatism, James twice made the point that pragmatism was a method of inquiry and conduct.¹¹ This method was characterized by several aspects. The first was the motion theory which pragmatism stated.

Everything is in motion in one direction or another. Society itself is in motion. There is motion or flow between society and the individual. Individuals experience motion or flow from themselves to other individuals and vice versa. Ideas are in a constant state of flux. Butler described this rather concisely:

Pragmatic method is nothing more than a conscious formulation of what goes on all the time in our experience, and has gone on in human experience for centuries. Five things are evident in the pragmatic method: 1) There is always movement in some direction; 2) the direction of movement changes when an obstacle is met (these movements are the most vital); 3) to determine the new direction of movement, the individual or group observes all the facts (but this is not just an orgy of fact-gathering); 4) meaningful patterns appear in the data, suggesting one or more possible hypotheses to be tested; 5) the hypotheses are tested and either accepted or rejected on the basis of their workability.¹²

This motion, however, does not guarantee progress, nor can this motion be halted for any one's personal benefit. Butler indicated this:

¹¹James, op. cit., pp. 51. 65.

¹²Butler, op. cit., p. 428.

We must courageously face life when it is unpleasant as well as when it is pleasant; it will not do to stop the clock in an attempt to prolong some subjective state just because it is enjoyable.¹³

Little documentation is necessary for the fact that pragmatism was against a priori assumptions. James' own words revealed pragmatism's aversion to such beliefs.

A pragmatist turns away from . . . bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, from pretended absolutes and origins . . . Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events . . . We have to live today by what truth we can get, ¹⁴today, and be ready tomorrow to call it falsehood.

Pragmatism was often suspected of being overly zealous in the accumulation of facts. This charge was denied by the pragmatists. Their claim was that facts are merely the tools through which one must operate in order to arrive at conclusions. As more facts are acquired, one may be compelled to alter his conclusions.

As might be deduced from pragmatism's distaste for a priori assumptions, the manner of collecting the facts was through sense perceptions. James cited an example of this. "Berkeley's criticism of 'matter' was . . . absolutely pragmatic. Matter is known as our sensations of color, figure, hardness, and the like."¹⁵

As was stated above, pragmatism is naturalistic and anti-religious, as religion is traditionally viewed. How-

¹³Ibid., p. 451

¹⁴James, op. cit., pp. 51. 201. 222.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 45, italics mine.

ever, the pragmatists claim a form of religiosity for their philosophy. They use terms and words of religion although they do not build on a supernatural base.¹⁶

To the pragmatist the idea of one single supreme being was out of keeping with the rest of his philosophy. Spiritual multiplicity rather than monism allowed room for improvement, an opening in which the positive effects of man could come to grips with realities which are yet indeterminate and unfinished, and in so doing to help in the realization of the ultimate good.¹⁷ This led to the insistence upon man's freedom of will.

Pragmatism's aversion to dogmatism can be gleaned from James' own words: "Pragmatism turns away from . . . principles . . . , has no rigid canons. . . , refrains from looking backwards at . . . a Design. . . , has to postpone dogmatic answers. . . ." ¹⁸

The philosophy of pragmatism demanded the freedom of man's will. It claimed that only through a free will could man make any progress at all. The world is neither friendly nor unfriendly towards man: it is indeterminate. What makes progress possible is man's ability, through interaction with

¹⁶Butler, op. cit., p. 482.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 416.

¹⁸James, op. cit., pp. 55-300, passim.

the events of the world, to redirect those events and courses of action in such a way as to determine the future.¹⁹ James himself claimed an improvement in his physical and mental well-being as a result of his developing belief in the freedom of his own will.

Since pragmatism is anti-religious and not concerned with contacting the supernatural, it follows that the philosophy should deal with day-to-day living. The "religion" of the pragmatist is an attitude toward "life as we know it in the human sphere."²⁰ It offers to day-to-day living the advice to take one experience at a time, since the past is past and the future is yet unformed.²¹

The god which Dewey set up was a set of hazy ideals seen always in the future. God existed not in the present, but was always in the unattainable future. Butler has described it as follows:

Man is within the framework of experience. At certain points he stands at the threshold of the future. In the future he sees ideals. These ideals are the legitimate imagery of man's mind based on his present experiences. Experiences are made to flow in the direction of man's ideals. This uniting of the ideal and the actual in the experience of man is what Dewey calls god. God, the ideal, then, is not in existence in the present, but is always in the future.²²

¹⁹Butler, op. cit., p. 436.

²⁰Ibid., p. 463.

²¹Ibid., p. 476.

²²Ibid., pp. 472-473.

Man, then, created his god. To be capable of this, he must by nature have a worth and dignity. Pragmatism rejected any theory which stated that man was totally depraved. Man had a certain dignity in standing up to his experiences, and he had certain possibilities for action. He had the possibility of making the best of his circumstances and achieving a purposeful control. Evil, then, was not a quality or quantity of itself, but was the failure of man to stand up to life and face the situations which experience presents.²³

Applications of Pragmatism to Contemporary General Education

The goal which pragmatism set for itself was social efficiency. "The pragmatic imperative is that the most important possible difference in the life of each individual be achieved so that as a result society as well as he may be happier."²⁴ Dewey stated essentially the same thing in his Common Faith. "It is the part of manliness to insist upon the capacity of mankind to strive to direct natural and social forces to humane ends."²⁵ Wahlquist stated that for Dewey the common cause was social.²⁶

²³Ibid., p. 475.

²⁴Thomas H. Briggs, Pragmatism and Pedagogy (New York: Macmillan Co., 1940), p. 7.

²⁵John Dewey, A Common Faith (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1934), p. 24.

²⁶John T. Wahlquist, The Philosophy of American Education (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1942), p. 75.

Pragmatism's definition of the pupil became confusing at times. In some instances Dewey emphasized the individual, at other times he seemed to have submerged the individual below the surface of society, emphasizing the total mass of society instead. The pupil is not a self-substantial mind and soul, but is merely a whitecap and wave on the ever-flowing, everchanging flow of society. So said Butler; but he immediately continued that this did not negate the idea of a person as an individual. Indeed, pragmatism recognized a multitude of individual differences.²⁷ This same confusion was evident in Wahlquist's description, for he stated that life was a process of interaction between man (thus, between the individual) and his environment. Man became a part of the environment (and was thus submerged and lost his identity.)²⁸

The theory and method of education which pragmatism espoused has already been given in part. Nevertheless, by putting together what Rugg,²⁹ Butler,³⁰ Wahlquist,³¹ and Briggs³² have said, the following sequence was constructed:

²⁷Butler, op. cit., pp. 458-459.

²⁸Wahlquist, op. cit., p. 77.

²⁹Harold Rugg, editor, Readings in the Foundations of Education (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1941), II, p. 167-168.

³⁰Butler, op. cit., pp. 428-429 and 464-466.

³¹Wahlquist, op. cit., p. 73.

³²Briggs, op. cit., pp. 3. 68.

1) All learning takes place when things and ideas are in motion. Therefore activity is essential. The learner must have experience from which ideas may arise.

2) Activity arouses the recognition of a problem and impels the individual to seek a solution.

3) In attempting to solve this problem, the individual sets up a number of possible hypotheses.

4) These hypotheses are tested by taking action on them. The pragmatic method is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences.

5) The poor hypotheses are rejected and the acceptable ones are put into practice. These practical, workable actions open up new problematic areas, necessitating the repetition of the above cycle of activity.

Pragmatism actually is willing to accept any method. It makes but one stipulation, and that is, that the method must work. Three of the most frequently used methods follow.

One method practically developed by pragmatism was the project method in which creative and constructive projects are the vehicle through which effective learning takes place. It is readily seen that the five steps outlined above are easily adaptable to this method, for the project method either finds a problem or creates one, activity is essential, hypotheses are projected and tested, and workable ones are accepted.

A second feature employed in the pragmatic type of education was discussion. Butler stated the reason for

this. Discussion constituted the means by which group thinking could go on, not only in the classroom, but also in the life of the community.³³

Pragmatic forms of education are active in the search for facts, but they strenuously avoid anything that smacks of fact-gathering orgies. The facts must be relevant. Ultimately, however, the method of searching for facts is more important to the pragmatist than the facts themselves, for it is felt that once the method is ingrained, the individual will be qualified to form his own judgments.

Regardless of which method or aid is used, the true pragmatist feels that example is more potent than words and methods. Meiklejohn can be quoted: " 'A community teaches, not so much by what it says as by what it is and does,' is basic to the pragmatic method."³⁴

³³Butler, op. cit., p. 467.

³⁴Meiklejohn, op. cit., p. 145.

CHAPTER II

THE INFLUENCE OF PRAGMATISM ON CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The various religious bodies in America are so divergent in their doctrinal bases and practical administration that no attempt was made to study each denominational body separately. However, for the purposes of this study, the term "religious education" was equated with the broader aspects of education as carried on in the Protestant churches in America. Before entering upon a discussion of the influence of pragmatism on American religious education, it was considered advisable and necessary to establish a background by stating briefly what the traditional concepts of religious education were.

Religious education has traditionally been conceived of as the agent of a dogmatic or denominational position. This attitude was brought to the American continent by the earliest colonial settlers and reinforced by later immigrations of peoples, especially by those who left the continent of Europe because of religious persecutions of a greater or lesser ferocity. Notable among such immigrants were the German and Scandinavian groups which came in the middle and late 19th century. After the advent and general acceptance of Sunday Schools in America, the purpose of the Sunday School was to ground children in the doctrines peculiar to the specific

denomination.¹

The very purpose of the Sunday School necessitated that its curriculum be content-centered. From the middle of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th this was predominant. Elliott stated that the Sunday School of 1860 and later was subject-centered and that the Biblical and theological approach to religious education was dominant.² De Blois contended that this very aim was the general aim of all Protestant education for 400 years.³

The purposes, aims, and content of traditional religious education determined its method. The object behind the method was the assimilation of the facts of Christianity. As such the method of religious education was memorization, drill, recitation, telling the stories, and stating the doctrines. The pupil's religious education was considered adequate if he could repeat the facts as he had learned them by rote.

The source of traditional religious education was the Bible, or at least a set of a priori accepted facts which were often viewed as having the quality and status of revealed truth.

Elliott recognized a clearly defined conflict between

¹Harrison S. Elliott, Can Religious Education be Christian? (New York: Macmillan Co., 1941), p. 23.

²Ibid., p. 25.

³Austen K. de Blois and Donald R. Gorham, Christian Religious Education: Principles and Practice (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1939), p. 108.

historic Protestant conceptions of religious education and modern educational theory and practice.⁴ It was inevitable that either one side or the other should be defeated, or that a modification of both be effected.

The Influence of Pragmatism on the Philosophy and Principles Basic to Religious Education

Not as a result of the changing philosophy of the American people in general, but as a result of religious leaders' deference to the best thinking of educated Americans a noticeable change has taken place in the philosophy basic to religious education. Because of the similarity between the newer views of religious leaders and those of pragmatists, the author asserts that the religious leaders have been influenced by pragmatism.

No longer was the total depravity of mankind considered an acceptable hypothesis. In its place was substituted the theory that man is infinitely capable of working out his own salvation. Fallaw claimed that the view of sermon and classroom has changed from the total depravity of man to the idea that progressively man might become a god in the very world he despised; that he has infinite capabilities.⁵ Dr. Hodge of Princeton Seminary condemned Bushnell's Christian Nurture on this very point, for he complained that Bushnell had

⁴Elliott, op. cit., p. vii.

⁵Wesner Fallaw, The Modern Parent and the Teaching Church (New York: Macmillan Co., 1947), p. 59.

explained away both depravity and grace, and had reduced the whole matter to organic laws.⁶ Chave, writing under the auspices of the International Council of Religious Education, has constructed a religion which can be characterized by ten categories: 1) sense of worth, 2) social sensitivity, 3) appreciation of the universe, 4) discrimination in values, 5) responsibility and accountability, 6) co-operative fellowship, 7) quest for truth and realization of values, 8) integration of experiences into a working philosophy of life, 9) appreciation of historical continuity, and 10) participation in group celebrations.⁷ Nowhere did he state anything which even resembles the idea that man is totally depraved.

The principle that religious education should present the dogmatic interpretations of religious truths or denominational tenets gave way to the view that man's growth in Christian graces was a developmental process; that Christianity was growth instead of knowledge. This principle was stated by Chave:

Religious education must have faith in a developing process, make use of human experience--past and present--and with the creative interaction of free minds move forward to the solution of current issues. It must co-ordinate the latent spiritual forces of society, giving intelligent leadership and working in close co-operation with social, economic, and political movements on a world-wide scale. It must present a comprehensive program for transforming personal-social life by the united efforts

⁶Elliott, op. cit., p. 32.

⁷Ernest J. Chave, A Functional Approach to Religious Education (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1947), p. 22.

of spiritually sensitive parents, teachers, and leaders in every phase of life.⁸

Elliott stated this same thing in somewhat milder terms.

Everything that man knows about God has grown out of his experiences in the world and out of his reflections upon the manifestations of God in nature and in human life.⁹

The source of authority to which religious educators look is determined by their basic philosophy. Those with the authoritarian view claim a direct revelation from God. Those with the educational approach (experientialists) claim that man has been left to discover the manifestations of God and to make his own interpretations of them.¹⁰ The Curriculum Committee of the International Council of Religious Education in 1924 already stated: "Religious education should center in experiences of the child."¹¹ Chave claimed that history is a sufficient source of religious education.

Religious education has unlimited resources in the stories of mankind's achievements and in the concrete instances of those who have triumphed over injustices, sufferings, and tragedies of all kinds . . . there is no need or desirability to try to make the Bible, and especially Jesus, teach everything.¹²

Vieth; in one of his earlier books, stated that when education is life-centered (which was what he was advocating), it grows

⁸Ibid., p. vi.

⁹Elliott, op. cit., p. 311.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 319.

¹¹Ibid., p. 57.

¹²Chave, op. cit., p. 138.

out of experiences and needs of the learners and in turn influences their lives, to make them more Christian. It must lead back into life or it will have no value.¹³ However, it must in all fairness be stated that he modified his views in a later publication, for he said, "That the Bible is central in Christian education is all but universally affirmed by theory and practice."¹⁴ De Blois, of the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, hewed close to the traditional view on this point, for he said that the Bible is basic in religious education and is the full and final source of spiritual enlightenment.¹⁵ The majority of evidence indicates the popularity of the opposite view, however.

The philosophy of religious education in American Protestantism has been modified to include the raising of society to new heights. This goal is to be achieved through the regeneration of the individual. Weigle stated this quite concisely. He maintained that in its education the Church is primarily interested in persons; its concern is for the enrichment of their experience, the development of their character, and the quality of their service as free, responsible, co-operative members of the human race. In the

¹³Paul H. Vieth, Teaching for Christian Living (Third edition, St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1929), p. 51.

¹⁴Paul H. Vieth, editor, The Church and Christian Education (St. Louis: published for the Co-operative Publishing Association by the Bethany Press, 1947), p. 80.

¹⁵De Blois, op. cit., pp. 126-127.

power of the Spirit of God, the church undertakes the regeneration of society through the regeneration and Christian education of individuals.¹⁶

The Influence of Pragmatism on the Aims and Objectives of Religious Education

Elliott's statement, "Modern religious education is a part of progressive education,"¹⁷ prompted a study of the aims and objectives of religious education. His further contention that the Curriculum Committee of the International Council of Religious Education was composed of men who would "place back of the work of the Curriculum Committee a thoroughly representative body of American educational opinion,"¹⁸ was added support for the probability that the aims and objectives of religious education had been influenced by pragmatic modes of thought.

Whereas the emphasis in traditional religious education was on the assimilation of factual knowledge and the content of Scripture, it has changed to character building and personality development. Mildred Moody Eakin said that one needs to realize that a far-reaching change in our concept of teaching goals is under way; that it is no longer true

¹⁶Philip Henry Lotz, editor, Orientation in Religious Education (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), p. 95.

¹⁷Elliott, op. cit., p. 40.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 57.

that we can proceed as if transmitting biblical material and doctrinal ideas were our main job.¹⁹

The principles and policies of the Religious Education Association reflect the aims of the organization. As listed by Davis, they are: 1) to develop the scientific, universal, and co-operative spirit, 2) to imbue education with the religious ideal, religion with the education ideal, and to publicize the progress of these two points, 3) to assure effectiveness through organizational independence, 4) to bring about recognition of the Bible as the primary source for religious education, 5) to develop a keen sense of the social responsibility of religion, 6) to study the psychology of growing persons, 7) to promulgate the philosophy that education is not fragmentary but a unifying process, 8) to advance character education in the church program, 9) to carry on research, and 10) to arrange conferences, conventions, and the like.²⁰

Price and his colleagues stated the functions of the Sunday School as follows: 1) to provide inlets and outlets for a happy growth of the individual, 2) to help the individual achieve normal adulthood by way of creative functioning at the social level, 3) to build character, 4) to build the right philosophy of life.²¹

¹⁹Lotz, op. cit., p. 197.

²⁰Lotz, op. cit., p. 449.

²¹J.M. Price, et al., A Survey of Religious Education (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1940), pp.178-9.

The aim of the International Council of Religious Education, as stated by Vieth, is as follows:

The aim of religious education from the viewpoint of the evangelical denominations is complete Christian living which includes belief in God as revealed in Jesus Christ and vital fellowship with Him, personal acceptance of Christ as Saviour and His way of life, and membership in a Christian church; the Christian motive in the making of all life-choices, and the wholehearted participation in and constructive contribution to the progressive realization of a social order controlled by Christian principles.²²

Vieth's own set of aims, as gleaned from his book, follow:

1) Consciousness of God and relationship to Him, 2) an understanding and appreciation of the personality, life, and teachings of Jesus and a conscious acceptance of Him and loyalty to His cause, 3) a progressive development of Christlike character, 4) the ability and disposition to share in the building of a Christian social order, 5) the ability and disposition to participate effectively in the life and work of the church, 6) a Christian interpretation of life and the universe and the development of a Christian philosophy of life, 7) a knowledge of the Bible and other religious heritages of the race.²³

In another work of his, Vieth stated that Christian education must seek to help persons face their problems realistically, understand the religious heritage and apply

²²Vieth, Teaching for Christian Living, p. 27-8.

²³Ibid., pp.29 ff.

it wisely in the building of their lives, and give guidance in the stream of corporate experience which the church seeks to embody.²⁴

The three major aims listed by de Blois include 1) God-consciousness, 2) Christlike personality, and 3) social consciousness.²⁵

While some of the aims mentioned above do deal with the assimilation of factual knowledge, the preponderance of the evidence indicates that that is considered a minor aim and that the major emphasis is placed on character building and personality development.

This aim, since it deals with present day-to-day living, suggests a de-emphasis on preparation for death and an increasing emphasis on effective guidance for present experience. That very thing was brought out by Elliott, for he contended that the objectives of religious education as determined by the International Council of Religious Education contained no attempt to formulate certain fixed and authoritative beliefs at which the process of religious education must arrive, but that ". . . they ask for the utilization of the best religious experience of the race as effective guidance for present experience."²⁶

²⁴Vieth, The Church and Christian Education, pp. 59-60.

²⁵de Blois, op. cit., pp. 111-119.

²⁶Elliott, op. cit., p. 66.

Vieth made a similar statement when he said that the aim and objective of religious education is to teach the pupil to live; that the teaching of a church school must be life-centered.²⁷

While no definite citations can be made, one gets the impression that a further objective of modern American religious education is to break down the walls which separate denominations and church bodies from one another.

The Influence of Pragmatism on the Practices and Currioulum of Religious Education

Every philosophy will influence practice. The evidences presented above indicate that the philosophy of contemporary American religious education has been modified to some extent by pragmatism. It is reasonable to assume, then, that its methods have also been influenced by pragmatism. The following bears this out.

Eavey, in advising Christian teachers, attempted to impress upon them the desirability of wise selection of method. He said that the best method to use in teaching is the method that will bring the best results in terms of the objectives of education.²⁸ He did not indicate progressive methods, but since the aims and objectives of

²⁷Vieth, Teaching for Christian Living, p. 26.

²⁸C.B. Eavey, Principles of Teaching for Christian Teachers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1940), p. 298.

modern religious educators have approached those of progressivism, the deduction is that they must choose the methods to conform to those aims.

De Blois, a Baptist, can be considered a conservative and traditionalist. Yet even he stated that the methods developed and employed in the American public schools are probably as efficient as any that have been used anywhere, and they should be utilized and adapted, as far as seems practicable, by religious educators.²⁹

One of the first areas in which a change in practice and method was noted was in the use of psychology, sociology, and related sciences in the use of religious education. Elliott contended that since the turn of the century, religious education has looked less to theological conceptions for its point of origin, and took empirical data and educational insights as the basis for the development of program and method in religious education.³⁰ This happened as follows. The developments in general education and educational psychology made by Throndike, Wolfgang Koehler, and Dewey and others had an influence upon the leaders in the churches. These took positions as denominational or inter-denominational secretaries or on the boards of denominations,

²⁹de Blois, op. cit., p. 216.

³⁰Elliott, op. cit., p. 4.

and brought their criticism to bear on the old methods of religious education.³¹ He accused modern religious education in the following terms:

Modern religious education has gone astray because it depends upon human psychology and sociology instead of on divine revelation for an understanding of the human problem.³²

Orville Davis stated his discoveries very plainly. He found that the efforts of the Religious Education Association have led to a more intelligent use of the laws of learning and growth, of the findings of psychology and sociology in the service of religious education.³³

The shift in aims from the assimilation of factual knowledge to the development of character has forced a shift in method from the former presentation, memorization, drill work, and the like to the newer method centered in experiences. Vieth acknowledged the necessity of subject matter in the curriculum of religious education, but he maintained that the child learns to do by doing.

The present emphasis on a life-centered curriculum of religious education grows out of a dissatisfaction with the results which have been achieved by religious teaching. For a long time we have been saying that book learning is not enough. The attainment of knowledge as an end in itself is not the aim of education. Pupils learn to do by doing. We must go beyond instruction to the development of attitudes, ideals, purposes which have their fruition in character and conduct. Consequently we are eager to embrace the new emphasis which gives promise of larger results.³⁴

³¹Ibid., pp. 49-50.

³²Elliott, op. cit., p. 141.

³³Lotz, op. cit., p. 451.

³⁴Vieth, Teaching for Christian Living, p. 55.

He illustrated this by demonstrating how to teach a boy to play basketball. One does not first sit down in the library and teach the philosophy, etiquette, and rules of the game and then take the boy to the gym, hand him a ball, and tell him to start playing. No! One takes the boy to the gym, gives him a ball, and by playing, teaches him how to play basketball.

De Blois stated that modern educators can no longer use the knowledge theory, but in constructing the curriculum of religious education, they must ask, "How can we plan a curriculum that shall adequately prepare the pupil to realize the full possibilities of his life, and to become a completely competent personality?"³⁵ Thus de Blois also came to rely on the growth and development theory and has translated this into terms of curriculum and practice.

Here experience, however, is not education. Experience must be guided to become education. The teacher is to be the guide and assist the learner in so facing life's experiences, so directing and enriching them, that they may continuously grow more Christlike.³⁶ This reliance on purposeful and guided activity was further demonstrated by Vieth.

³⁵de Blois, op. cit., pp. 246-248.

³⁶Vieth, Teaching for Christian Living, p. 63.

Method is a part of the curriculum. We have taken the position that the curriculum centers in experience. Through it we seek to enrich experience in order to give it wider meaning. Through it all we seek to lead the pupil in gaining a better control of his experience so that his responses may be more Christlike. Through it we seek to bring about a continuous reconstruction of experience to take full account of the more and more mature knowledge, attitudes, and habits of conduct that may have grown out of this process of experience in living the Christian life.³⁷

Vieth has listed thirteen types of experiences which he considered useful in this area, and has also constructed a table of criteria for the selection of activities. It is significant that out of nine criteria, only the very last one mentioned that the activity should have religious value.³⁸

It is to be noted that, as a result of the utilization of psychology and sociology, the development of attitudes through experiences, and the use of purposeful activity, almost all recent curricula of religious education have been built on graded lessons rather than on the uniform lesson plan.

In that same connection it is seen that contemporary religious educators desire to enrich the experiences of growing persons through all means of extraneous materials.

³⁷Vieth, Teaching for Christian Living, p. 96. In a footnote Vieth gives credit for this idea to Dewey, Democracy and Education, chapter vi.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 188 ff.

Chave said:

In presenting facts, demonstrating relationships, and motivating conduct, the religious teacher must welcome modern techniques such as audio-visual aids, drama, radio programs, forums, charts, pictographs, socialized reports, sampling polls, use of pictures and illustrated books and booklets.³⁹

One of the most popular methods for accomplishing this has been the problem-project method. De Blois advocated it and showed its usefulness by stating:

One of the basic principles of the project-problem plan lies within the meaning of the phrase, "we must learn to do by doing." This plan is intensely practical, lies in the area of social comradeship, is vigorously active, is character-building, is good in the domain of habit-formation.⁴⁰

The foregoing showed the changes which have occurred in religious education in philosophy, aims, and practices. However, there is at the present time, a reaction to the radical progressivism which was a part of some theories of religious education. This reaction wishes to combine both the best aspects of the traditional concepts of religious education and the best parts of pragmatic thought. Included in the group who desire this are Vieth, of the International Council of Religious Education, Elliott, of the Union Theological Seminary, Emil Brunner, R.G. Homrighausen of Princeton Theological Seminary, and R.C. Miller of the Church Divinity School of the Pacific.

³⁹Chave, op. cit., p. 141.

⁴⁰de Blois, op. cit., p. 201.

Vieth cautioned against both extremes of teaching only the Bible and teaching only the pupil, and maintained that the only acceptable theory of the curriculum is a synthesis between the subject-centered viewpoint and the viewpoint that the curriculum must be wholly in terms of life-situations and experiences of the child.⁴¹

Brunner is quoted by Elliott as saying:

That which makes education Christian is the Christian faith, and this is something which does not belong to the sphere of education which is human, but to that which is higher than education, viz., the life of faith. . . . Nevertheless, it is necessary to use human instrumentalities for the proclamation of the Word of God.⁴²

Homrighausen felt that religious education presupposes a fixed body of knowledge which must be made intelligible to an effective in the learner.⁴³ To make the knowledge intelligible to the learner would require the traditional methods, and to make it effective in the learner would require an emphasis on pupil activity and co-operation.

Miller adequately stated the need for eclecticism in the matter.

The center of the curriculum is a two-fold relationship between God and the learner. The curriculum is both God-centered and experience-centered. Theology must be prior to the curriculum.⁴⁴

The best statement of all of Christian education, and

⁴¹Vieth, The Church and Christian Education, p. 145.

⁴²Elliott, op. cit., p. 72.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 68-69

⁴⁴R.G. Miller, The Clue to Christian Education (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 5.

especially of the noted reaction from the extreme of progressivism was found in Miller:

The chief source of all of our teaching is the Bible; the chief interest of our teaching is the learner; and the chief end of our teaching is the God and Father of Jesus Christ.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 16.

CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE OF PRAGMATISM ON THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD, AS EVIDENCED IN THE THEORETICAL WRITINGS BASIC TO ITS SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS

In Materials describing theory and practice

On February 22 and 23, 1949, a conference of members of the Board for Parish Education of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and many leaders of parish education in that church body was held. Its purpose was to examine the Sunday School curriculum which had been in service in that church body, to evaluate it, to reorganize it, and to improve it where necessary. The results of this conference were published in a mimeographed booklet entitled The Sunday School Curriculum.¹ Since this conference laid the basis for the Sunday School materials of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, it was deemed necessary to study that volume for evidences of pragmatic influence before proceeding to the remaining materials.

The author consciously and continually was compelled to caution himself against assuming that all ideas contained in

¹Board for Parish Education, The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, The Sunday School Curriculum; Preliminary Studies, Including a Report of the Sunday School Curriculum Conference, Feb. 22-23, 1949, and an Interview by Mail (St. Louis: Board for Parish Education, The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, n.d., mimeographed.)

pragmatic philosophy were necessarily the exclusive property of that philosophy, and also against assuming that statements made by the authors of the following works were necessarily a result of pragmatic influence. With that point in mind, the author presents in the following paragraphs the evidences and allows the conclusions to be drawn from them in the final chapter.

In a paper read before the Sunday School Curriculum Conference, A.H. Jahsmann stated: ". . . the true and Biblical educational aim and philosophy may also find something worth adopting in this (viz., the progressive) method of approach."² He did not list those things which he considered worth adopting.

However, A.G. Mueller, before the same conference, evaluated the Concordia Sunday School materials. He contended that ". . . our lessons are developed on the pattern of the Herbartian method modified to suit the Sunday School. Presentation (preceded by Approach), Discussion, and Application."³

H.J. Boettcher, in attempting to formulate the basis on which content of the curriculum is to be chosen, said that

²Ibid., p. 12.

³Ibid., p. 29.

" . . . the following subsidiary criteria should be reckoned with:

.

b) cruciality -- the matter must be crucial, present a crisis, be dynamic. . . .

.

e) relevancy to basic values -- tie up with what the child thinks of other areas in which it learns; eg., science, democracy, etc. . . .

.

g) adjustment to the psychology of learning."⁴

Point b) above reflects the theory of pragmatic thought that life situations and activity arouse problems which must be solved. Point 3) is characteristic of the pragmatic approach in which the total experience of the child are taken as the learning situation, rather than the isolation of subject fields. Point g) is in keeping with the contention by Elliott above, that religious education has come to rely more and more on the use of psychology in its method.

In the same conference, Carl Lindberg developed his theory of the general method of effective instruction in Christian education. In it he proposed a method which

⁴Ibid., p. 32.

is quite reminiscent of the theory proposed by progressive education:

1. Create a conscious need.
2. Make material meaningful.
 - a. The child must be able to interpret material in the light of his own experiences.
 - b. The main idea of the material must be clear.
3. Learning is a continuous process of differentiation followed by reintegration.
4. Material must suit the level of maturation.
5. Begin with the interests of the child.⁵

To a lesser degree Frank Colba assumed the need for and advocated the extensive use of handwork, projects, and extra-class activities in the Sunday School. He summed his ideas up in the statement: "We all agree also that we learn by doing."⁶ However, this is not necessarily an indication that his thoughts were influenced by pragmatism.

The phrase "learning by doing" is a popular one with the authors whose works were examined here. Alfred Schmieiding repeated it in his Understanding the Child, an introductory book on child psychology.⁷ As a whole, the book displayed no evidence of any borrowed ideas from pragmatism, for even the above quotation is not exclusively pragmatic.

⁵Ibid., p. 45.

⁶Ibid., p. 53-54.

⁷Alfred Schmieiding, Understanding the Child (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945.)

Prof. Theo. Kuehnert, in his book Directing the Learner,⁸ showed pragmatic influence, although it was evident that he strongly espoused the traditional approach to religious education, which is based upon the facts of revealed truth. His statement, "Nevertheless, it must in all fairness be admitted that the child-centered movement has made contributions toward progress in modern education,"⁹ was applied to religious education as well, especially in the use of pupil activity, use of the child's experiences, pupil expression, and the use of materials of all sorts to enrich the experience of the child. He distinguished between learning as impression, as Herbart had emphasized, and learning by expression, as Dewey advocated. He stated that, ". . . expression and child activity are not out of place in religious education," adding that instruction or guidance of the child will be much more effective if 'this principle is applied.'¹⁰ After his pleas for a fair amount of expression, Kuehnert returned to impression, calling upon the need for revelation of divine truths and teacher activity in supplying the needed facts.¹¹ It may be seen, then, that Kuehnert was eclectic, attempting to choose the best of each, but using some principles of pragmatism nonetheless.

⁸Theo. Kuehnert, Directing the Learner; an Introduction to the Study of Method (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1939).

⁹Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 38-39.

¹¹Ibid., p. 41.

Schmieding's book, Teaching the Bible Story,¹² has been widely used in the training of Sunday School teachers and as a textbook in classes at Concordia Teachers College, Seward, Nebraska. Throughout the book he has warned against the use of almost all devices which the progressive school would adopt. Method, for him, must always be subservient to doctrine. An example of this may be found in the following. Schmieding claimed that the theory and the method of beginning with the child's experiences and leading to the Bible story was unacceptable, since it put the Bible Story at the ". . . tail end of some discussion based on the child's present limited experience, and substitutes "human intellect and experience for divine revelation."¹³ Furthermore, he demanded excision of all extraneous details which might confuse the learner.¹⁴ Pragmatism would, on the other hand, use all the details as a supply from which the student chooses the pertinent items to use in the building of his concepts. The whole book manifested a cautious attitude against even the external methods to be employed, which may in any way be associated with progressivism.

¹²Alfred Schmieding, Teaching the Bible Story (Rev. ed. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944).

¹³Ibid., pp. 54-55.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 84.

A short statement is sufficient for an analysis of Jahsmann's book, Leading Children Into the Bible.¹⁵ His book represented the traditional school of thought in teaching. There was no noticeable influence of pragmatism on the ideas contained therein.

The following three books dealt primarily with the administration of the Sunday School, and did not indicate pragmatic influence. They are: Winning and Keeping¹⁶ Rein's Building the Sunday School,¹⁷ and Mueller's Vitalizing the Sunday School.¹⁸

In his book, Building Better Bible Classes,¹⁹ Feucht had especially two themes which occurred with frequency and which are heralded by the progressive school. The use of "life situations" in the method of studying the Bible was advocated.²⁰ The second slogan which appeared often enough to be of significance was "learning by doing."²¹

¹⁵Allan Hart Jahsmann, ed., Leading Children Into the Bible (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950).

¹⁶Winning and Keeping; a Manual for Lutheran Sunday Schools (Published under the auspices of the Board of Christian Education, Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944).

¹⁷R.C. Rein, Building the Sunday School (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950).

¹⁸A.C. Mueller, Vitalizing the Sunday School (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947).

¹⁹Oscar E. Feucht, Building Better Bible Classes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950).

²⁰Ibid., pp. 8, 9, 25, 27, and 32.

²¹Ibid., pp. 65, 74, and 107.

In other materials

A.G. Mueller, in his book Growing Up With Jesus,²² used a number of expressions reminiscent of pragmatic thought. Whether these were exclusively the direct result of pragmatic influence or not has not been determined. Nevertheless, they have been presented in the interest of completing the investigation.

As in the case of several authors' works already cited, Mueller used the popular phrase, "learning by doing," and supplemented it with the statement, "no impression without expression."²³

The idea that one should use life situations as the point of departure for instruction is contained in the book. Mueller stated: "Simple conversation leading over into the child's daily experiences is a fine method of instruction," and, "showing children pictures, telling them stories, letting them learn prayers, songs, and verses, is not forcing their natures; it is simply enriching their environment and thus providing the essentials for spiritual growth."²⁴ The contention that these statements are traditional may be made by some, but the author suggests that at least the terminology developed by the progressivists is present, and that some ideas are also possibly present.

²²A.G. Mueller, Growing Up With Jesus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1948).

²³Ibid., p. 14.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 41 and 46.

On the other hand, Mueller's repeated reference to the natural sinful state of the child immediately drew the reader back into the thinking of the traditional school of religious educators.²⁵

Every Teacher a Trained Teacher is a brochure explaining the Concordia Teacher Training Series and advocating its use. It made the statement that the program of the Concordia Teacher Training Series ". . . reflected the accepted principles of Christian Education,"²⁶ but did not continue with a description of what those principles were. On a following page, however, the claim was made that two of the books of the program have been prepared by recognized church leaders --- progressive men abreast of the latest educational trends and techniques.²⁷ The implication seemed to be that the methods espoused by these two authors were in keeping with those considered by secular educators to be the best. Since secular educators in the United States are in the main disciples of John Dewey, the further implication might be drawn that the two authors referred to espoused the methods of progressive education. The author does not feel that such reasoning is forced.

²⁵Such references are found on p. 26 and other places in the book.

²⁶Board for Parish Education, The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, Every Teacher a Trained Teacher; a Description of the Concordia Sunday School Teacher Training Program (St. Louis: Board for Parish Education, The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, n.d.) p. 5.

²⁷Ibid., p. 6.

Investigation of the following booklets and pamphlets showed no evidences of pragmatic influence:

Schoenfeld, A Confidential Chat With Beginning Sunday School Teachers

He Depends on You

Jahsman, More and Better Sunday School Workers

Mueller, The Sunday School and the Home²⁸

²⁸See Bibliography for publishers and dates.

CHAPTER IV

THE INFLUENCE OF PRAGMATISM ON THE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOLS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD

A description of the entire "Concordia Life in Christ Series of Sunday School Lessons" is found in Table 1. The lessons for all divisions from Nursery to Senior follow essentially the same pattern. This is as follows: a) Introduction and Motivation, b) Scripture selection is cited, c) the lesson is presented, d) discussion questions at the end of the lesson are studied, e) a catechesis follows, f) prepared questions and statements are marked correct or incorrect, g) a selection is memorized or recited, depending on previous preparation, h) a portion of the Lutheran Catechism is studied, i) a short prayer is assigned for memory work.

The Junior, Senior, and Adult Bible Classes are outlined on the same basic pattern, but more freedom for adaptation is allowed. In all classes the use of audio-visual and other aids is strongly advocated.

A close study of this entire series (specifically the units of instruction for the period July to September, 1952) revealed no direct influence of pragmatism on the instructional materials actually used in the Sunday Schools of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. Arguments that the emphasis on activity and other such items reflect pragmatic influence

have been advanced by some critics, but such arguments seem to be opinion rather than established fact.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions can be drawn from the evidence presented in the above chapters.

1. Pragmatism is directly linked with the theory of evolution.

2. Pragmatism is an un-Christian philosophy, rejecting all forms of revealed truth, a single supreme being, and substituting a naturalistic religion in which man creates his own god from the body of currently accepted ideals.

3. Methods of education flow directly from the philosophy of pragmatism.

4. The aims of traditional American religious education were content-centered and its methods were designed for the assimilation of facts.

5. Contemporary American religious education has been influenced in its philosophy and methods by pragmatic thought.

6. The source of authority for American religious education has shifted from the Bible or revealed truth to the best experiences of the human race.

7. The aims of American religious education have shifted from the primary aim of teaching a way of sal-

vation to the aim of teaching a way of life.

8. The methods of American religious education have been redesigned to reduce the amount of factual knowledge to be assimilated, and to increase the development of attitudes and ideals.

9. A minority of American religious educators has been advocating a form of eclecticism in American religious educational philosophy, which would attempt to combine the better qualities of both traditional and progressive educational theory.

10. Certain authors of the Sunday School materials of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod admitted the influence of pragmatism on religious education in the church.

11. Some authors of Sunday School materials of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, although not admitting the influence of pragmatism on their works, nevertheless used ideas and thoughts prevalent in pragmatic literature.

12. A certain number of books show an aversion to pragmatic thinking.

13. The instructional materials of the Sunday Schools of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod show no definite traces of the influence of pragmatism.

14. The extent to which pragmatism has influenced the Sunday School materials of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod depends upon the individual authors represented, and not upon the policies or criteria of Synodical boards or committees.

Concordia Life in Christ Series of SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS		Bible-based		Christ-centered		Life-directed	
Department	Year	Pupils' texts		Teachers' helps	Periodicals		
Nursery Roll	1	Concordia Nursery Packet		Hints in leaflets		Tiny	
Nursery Class	2	Story Picture Lessons for the Nursery		Teaching Pictures		Tots	
	3	Story Picture Lessons for Little Children		Concordia Sunday School Teacher (Lower Division)	Bible Stories in Pictures	The Child's Companion	
Beginner	4	Beginner Bible Lessons		Concordia Sunday School Teacher (Upper Division)		Young World	
	5	Weekly leaflets - two year course		Concordia Bible Teacher	Walter League Messenger	Lutheran Witness	
Primary	6	Primary Bible Lessons		Helps in Study Book		This Day	
	7	Weekly leaflets - two year course		Instructor's Guide and Tests			
Junior	8	Junior Bible Lessons		Parish Education			
	9	Quarterly booklets - four year course					
Intermediate	10	Intermediate Bible Lessons					
	11	Quarterly booklets - four year course					
Senior	12	Senior Bible Lessons					
	13	Quarterly booklets - four year course					
Junior Bible Class	Conf. 18	Concordia Bible Student					
Senior Bible Class	18 to 24	The Bible Studies for Juniors					
Adult Bible Class	25 up	The Bible Studies for Seniors					
Teacher Training Course		The Adult Bible Class					
Superintendents		Series 100 - Books of the Bible					
		Concordia Teacher Training Series					
		First Series - six courses					
		Second Series - four courses					
		Boards of Education					

Table 1

A.C. Mueller and A.H. Jahsmann, eds., The Concordia Sunday School Teacher, Beginner-Primary Division (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, July-Sept., 1952), I, 4, inside cover.

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