

Concordia Theological Monthly

Volume 17

Article 54

9-1-1946

Miscellanea

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Recommended Citation

Peterson, Emil F. (1946) "Miscellanea," *Concordia Theological Monthly*: Vol. 17 , Article 54.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol17/iss1/54>

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Miscellanea

An Evaluation of a Lutheran Day School Education

BY EMIL F. PETERSON *

The purpose of this article is to discuss the Lutheran day school as one of the agencies which the Lutheran Church employs for assisting its parents in the task of giving to their children a sound religious knowledge and training, and a general education in keeping with the standards of the state.

The Lutheran day school functions on the elementary educational level. However, a study of the history of the Lutheran Church reveals the fact that the Lutheran day school is not a widely used institution when one considers the Lutheran Church in the United States as a whole. Large sections of the Lutheran Church have never fostered this institution. Some portions which fostered it from the beginning no longer have such Lutheran day schools. The only portion of the Lutheran Church which still promotes the Lutheran day school with any degree of vigor is the portion known as the Synodical Conference, and even here one often feels that the Lutheran day school is losing ground. What may be the cause for this? Why is the Lutheran day school not becoming a still more vital factor in elementary education in the Lutheran Church? Is the institution at fault?

Questions of this nature must be answered if the Lutheran day school would become a more vital factor in elementary education in the Lutheran Church. A sound evaluation must be made. This is one of the tasks which was set before a small group of pastors doing seminar work in the field of education with Prof. Ove S. Olson, Ph.D., head of Department of Education at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn.

This evaluation of a Lutheran day school education is a subjective, personal evaluation by the graduates of a Lutheran day school. Other more objective studies are being developed. This subjective evaluation was sought by means of a questionnaire mailed to graduates of a Lutheran day school. A questionnaire was drawn up. The school selected for an evaluation was an eight-grade school in an urban community in Minnesota, numbering upwards of 20,000 population. The school has functioned with an average enrollment of 135 pupils per year. For some time the school's faculty numbered three, but during the last three or four years the faculty has been increased, so that it now has one man teacher and three women teachers. During the past fifteen years, the school graduated some 160 children. From this list of graduates 16 names were stricken, because all contact with those persons had been lost. A few of them have already gone to their

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eternal reward. To the remaining 144 the questionnaires were mailed. Ninety-seven of the questionnaires were mailed to addresses in the community in which the school is located. Fourteen of them were mailed to other cities in Minnesota; 17 were mailed to other States in the Union, and 16 of them were sent to persons in the service of their country. Returns were very slow at first. However, after several follow-up letters, results were more encouraging. To date, 53 questionnaires have been returned. This is slightly more than a third of the total, and from these returns it should be possible to present the trend. The questionnaire was divided into four sections, namely, general information, religious aspects of a Lutheran day school education, secular aspects of a Lutheran day school education, and finally, the effect of a Lutheran day school education on subsequent church membership. Each of these sections will be considered separately.

General Information About the Graduates

The general information relative to the fifty-three graduates who returned the questionnaire is very enlightening. The average age of this group was 19.1 years, and the median age is 19 years. The range, so far as age is concerned, is from 13 to 27 years of age. Their occupations are also interesting. Twenty-one of them are still students; 12 are housewives; 5 are in the service of their country; 4 are secretaries; 2 are teachers; 2 are machine operators; 1 is a farmer; 1 is a mechanic; 1 does housework; 1 is a checker; 1 is a bookkeeper; 1 is a clerical worker; and 1 is a truck driver. This group is composed of 14 males and 39 females. Fifteen are married and 38 are single. Those married have been married on an average of 3.1 years and have an average of 1 child. Eleven of the group married Lutherans, and 4 did not. These 53 people attended the Lutheran school on an average of 6.5 years during the years 1925—1945. All 53 received diplomas from the school in the following years: 1931—3; 1932—3; 1933—2; 1934—5; 1935—5; 1936—2; 1937—2; 1938—3; 1939—2; 1940—5; 1941—6; 1942—3; 1943—2; 1944—5; 1945—5. All 53 enrolled in a public junior high school, and 45 completed junior high school; 3 did not, and 5 are in junior high school now. Thirty-seven went on to senior high school; 7 did not, and 9 have not yet entered, but intend to go on to high school. Thirty-two finished senior high school; 8 did not, and 13 have not yet completed senior high school. Twenty-four of them continued with their education beyond senior high school; 17 of them did not, and 2 are still hoping to continue. Of the 24 who continued their education, 2 have received B.S. degrees; 2 have received B.A. degrees; 3 have received A.A. degrees, 2 have received A.A. and B.A. degrees in accredited colleges in the State of Minnesota. Of the remainder 1 has done junior college work; 3 have some normal training; 6 have commercial college training; 1 has junior college and normal training; 1 has normal and commercial college train-

ing; 1 has additional training in a music conservatory, and 2 are in nurse's training. Forty-nine of the group listed themselves as active members of the Lutheran Church; 2 gave no church affiliation; 1 is affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, and 1 gave no answer to the question. The follow-up question concerning church affiliation: "If no, why are you not an active member of the Lutheran Church?" was answered as follows: the girl who joined the Catholic Church alleges that "after 2 years of conscientious study of several religions, due to the fact that I felt a 'lack' of feeling of something missing in the Lutheran religion, I studied Catholicism and am convinced it is the true religion." One girl stated that she was not an active member because of failure to transfer her membership. These were the only answers to this question.

Religious Aspects of Lutheran Day School Education

The second section of the questionnaire covers the religious aspects of a Lutheran day school education. One of the first questions in this section was: "What does the religious training which you received in the Lutheran day school mean to you?" The following quotations are representative of the answers given to this question: "It means that I had inbred in me the truth of the Bible and the basic doctrines of the Lutheran Church at an early age—a background less easily persuaded to doubt and an uncertainty of belief in later years." "It taught me right and wrong and how the Bible wants us to live as Christians." "It gave a deep understanding of the grace of God." "I think the religious training I received will aid me in rearing my children to be good Christians." "My religious training has meant very, very much to me. It has been my happiness during sunny days and my guiding light and only support through darkest nights." "It obviously meant a great deal and has been one of the basic factors both in the maintenance of my faith and in setting before me relatively high aims in life." "My religious training meant very much to me. I felt I was fully prepared for confirmation when I reached that age." "To me it meant a stronger faith and a better understanding of God's Word." "It taught me to really know my Savior, and helped me to decide for myself right from wrong when I got out in the world. It made me lead a better Christian life." "It means very much. It gave me a very sound background and foundation upon which to continue my Lutheran training. It gave me something very precious that I can keep all my life." "It means a firm, real foundation for a religious belief in a Triune God, a desire to do His will and, if possible, to help other people find such a belief."

In response to the question "Was your faith strengthened?" fifty answered yes. No negative answers were recorded for this question, but 3 left the question unanswered. Forty-two thought that the religious knowledge received was adequate; 2 did not answer the question, and 9 were of the opinion that their religious knowledge was not adequate. Their opinions as to what was lack-

ing may be seen from the following quotations: "The religious training was quite thorough and adequate as far as it went; but had my religious training ended there, I doubt that it would have been adequate for life." "I think we could have had more practical religion for our daily lives." "The integration of faith with daily life, not in so far as making religious knowledge a rigid standard by which to live, but rather to make of it a constant companion, a natural component of everyday life and thought." "As a foundation in doctrine it was adequate, but I feel religion should live in a child's life." "We had the same Bible History from the sixth to eighth grade." "It was not adequate because we discussed same Bible History from sixth to eighth grade."

In answer to the question whether the religious teaching was effective, 49 answered yes; 2 said no, and 2 did not answer. The two who said no, wrote: "We need teachers who either by interest in promotion of children's activities or actual participation in such activities can make their Christianity a more integral part of each student's life." "It took some hard experience to make me realize what a living, working faith can be. A child can and should be given help in that direction."

A question concerning whether any other type of religious training would have meant the same was misunderstood by 18 of those who returned the questionnaire. They understood the question to mean a religious training outside the Lutheran Church. Six did not answer the question. Of the remaining 29, 24 thought that no other religious training could replace their Lutheran day school training, and 5 thought that Sunday school or some other type could have meant the same.

Whether these graduates of the Lutheran day school would send their children to a Lutheran day school brought out a good deal of discussion. Thirty-nine said that they would. Two were uncertain; 1 said "for a few years"; 4 did not answer the question, and 7 answered no. Those who would, gave their reasons as follows: "I would because I think a child should have religious training each day besides that taught at home, in Sunday school, and in confirmation classes." "There the child receives the 'one thing needful.'" "There secular knowledge is taught in the light of God's Word. There discipline is based on God's Word. There the child is under the influence of a Christian teacher." "Yes, for by receiving daily instruction in addition to what I would teach them, they would have a definite and lasting impression of Christ and His way of life and live their lives accordingly." "Yes, I would send my children to a Lutheran day school, for the religious training received at home and Sunday school is not enough." "I would send them to a Lutheran school because it would give them a background for their future life that couldn't be replaced as fully in any other way."

Some who said they would not send their children gave the following reasons: "I would want approved, educational facilities similar to those of the public schools." "Because the advantages

of a public school are much greater. Better trained teachers and more material to work with." "The religious training was effective, but other subjects did not compare with the same grades in the public school; therefore it makes it harder when you enter public schools." "It seemed harder to start in public school after attending Lutheran day school."

A question with reference to whether or not the Lutheran day school as it was known by these graduates has a place in our present educational system was answered yes by 43; no answer from 2; yes and no, 1; with few improvements, 1; and 6 declared no. Reasons advanced by those who answered positively may be seen from the following: "Leading educators admit that religious training is an important part of education and the building of character." "Because scholastically it is equal to the public school, and the religious angle is our advantage." "Because of the achievements and successes of its former students." "I believe religion should daily be taught to all children, for it certainly makes them more conscious of God and the debt we owe to Him and combats juvenile delinquency." "I believe a Lutheran day school is very important, especially nowadays, since it gives the students a better knowledge of God's Word and helps them to appreciate their Church." "Modern education still talks of 'aims and objectives'—our school had a *real* aim and objective; it teaches the ultimate meaning of life. Besides eternal life, a goal in our temporal life is a good psychological asset." "I believe if there were more schools of this type, and if they became powerful and well organized, the future of our nation would not be a thing to cause so much worry." "Yes, the State has failed. Now it is up to the Word of God." "I think that the Lutheran day school has a place and should have a place in our present-day educational system, for it is religion that makes better men and women." "Because the present-day morals are low, and Christian training is the strongest influence for building good character." "Parents want their children to learn the Christian ways, and they can learn them and receive a better understanding of them when they spend schooltime learning and not one hour on Sunday." Those whose answer to this question was negative gave as their reason the following: "It is complete in religious instruction, but lacks in other instruction because of not enough space for experiments in science, physical education, and training." "It does not have the proper equipment." "Because most schools are going in for athletics and sports, which we didn't have, and sports are playing an important role in the present and future education." "Have not enough time for each subject, and there are too many subjects. Cannot learn as well." "Because it lacks physical training, recreation, and other subjects the public school offers."

Secular Aspects of a Lutheran Day School Education

The third section of the questionnaire concerned the secular aspects of a Lutheran day school education, and the first question

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in this section concerned a rating of the secular education received in the Lutheran day school. In answer to this question, 10 rated their secular education as excellent; 26 as good; 11 as fair; and 2 as poor, and 4 gave no answer. Those who rated their secular education as excellent stated the following: "It must have been excellent, because I never had any trouble in high school or college." "Our classes, even if not always equipped with the latest in texts, laboratory gadgets which a public school could afford, were aimed at giving a solid factual background for high school work. Composition and outlining were stressed to a very practical advantage." "In comparing ourselves with our friends who came in the ninth grade from public schools, we were definitely more advanced." "I am very sure I would not have been taught or learned any more in a public school. What I appreciated the most was the Christian background in all the subjects." "In high school I have always been in the upper third of my class and several times on the honor roll. This background of my knowledge I received in the Lutheran day school." "An average student does not have difficulty when attending a public school after his basic education at a Lutheran day school."

Those who rated their secular education as good expressed themselves thus: "Only good because they are not as strict with the students in getting their lessons. They seem to be much more lenient than the public schools." "With the exception of a few subjects the secular education of a Lutheran day school is similar to any other institution. The few subjects not included have only a slight effect on later education." "Excellent to me means there is little or no room for improvement, and that is not the case in any school; but it was good in that I never found myself inferior to students of public schools." "My personal secular education was fully as adequate as that of my public school friends."

Those who rated their secular education as fair declared: "It does not offer as many subjects as public schools do." "As I remember it, there was a lack of variety in subjects." "The subjects in most cases were good. In seventh and eighth grade, English was low compared with most schools, but mathematics on the other hand is higher." "Teaching methods are inefficient." "In the Lutheran day school I was an A student, and in the public school a B or C student. This is because we did not have everything in the Lutheran school and in the public school it was completely new."

Those who rated their secular education as poor said: "We missed cooking, serving, the proper musical education, and gymnastics." "The Lutheran day school I attended fell short in too many subjects. The religion course was excellent, but every subject that is taught in a public school should also be taught in a Lutheran day school. As in my case, I went to a public school after graduation from the Lutheran day school, and it was very hard at first because there were so many subjects we had not had."

The following question concerned any advantage or difficulty

in transferring to public schools. Seventeen had an advantage; 16 did not have an advantage; 6 made no transfer, and 14 gave no answer. Nineteen experienced difficulty, and 14 did not, and no answer was given by 14. Six made no transfer to public schools.

Those who experienced an advantage described their advantage thus: "I had the advantage of being able to memorize things easily. This ability was taught to me through memorizing daily hymns and Bible passages." "Sounder knowledge of some subjects such as literature, ancient history, music, and the like." "There was an advantage in the grammar, arithmetic, and geography which I learned in the Lutheran school. It was much more adequate than children in the public school received." "A more cultural background due to serious religious training." "I was posted to a certain extent on the theory of evolution which is present in history and science classes. It did not cause any confusion in my mind." "I felt I had an understanding of right and wrong in dealings with other people, as well as a knowledge of prayer to strengthen me." "I was ahead of all my classmates."

Those who experienced a difficulty stated the difficulty as follows: "It was hard to get into clubs and gangs, because most of the others knew everyone else since they first started school." "I had difficulty in science." "The studies were harder, and the teachers were stricter." "I found the studies hard to get." "In the ninth grade, I especially had difficulty in mathematics. Also, my study habits in school were not the best." "It was harder to start public school." "I had no difficulty exactly, but I found on entering high school that I was lacking in some specific knowledge in science and English grammar." The reasons for these difficulties were stated thus: "The standard of subjects is below that of public schools." "Some of the problems that came up in mathematics and other subjects were not fully explained. We would go on to another lesson without fully understanding the previous one." "I do not believe the work is as hard as it is in the public schools." "If day school students could enter a public school without a feeling of inferiority, that seems to be predicted, there would be no trouble. It was only natural for most of us to feel a little backward when we knew how different the other schools were to be, and there seems to be a lack of facilities in the school."

The next question in this section referred to a rating of scholarships in high school. Sixteen of the group rated their scholarship in high school as good; 12 rated their scholarship as fair; 16 as average, and 1 as poor. Eight did not answer the question.

A question asking whether in the opinion of these graduates a public school education would have offered better opportunities than a day school education was answered in the affirmative by 9 and in the negative by 40, and no answer was recorded by 4.

Those who were of the opinion that a public school education would have offered better opportunities than a Lutheran day school education made the following statements: "In shop, mechanical drawing, and agricultural classes." "I think I would have been

better fitted for my junior and senior high school years. Even in college I came across things I had not fully understood in grade school." "The Lutheran day school gives no chance for personality development as a public school does." "The facilities mentioned above, plus the mingling with more students and the limitations of one class per room, allowing for more concentration and less confusion." "Physical education and a science laboratory would be provided." "I would have had a better background for my teaching profession."

So far as additional activities in the public school are concerned, 34 of these graduates were positive that additional activities were offered by the public school. Sixteen of them were not, and 3 did not answer the question. Among the activities offered by the public school of which these graduates were deprived in the Lutheran day school, were athletics, home economics, physical education, sewing, cooking, shop, mechanical drawing, domestic science, regular study periods, general assemblies, glee clubs, band or orchestra, experimental work, drama clubs, visual instruction, library activities, lyceum speakers, social activities, and practice in public speaking.

When asked whether these activities had any effect on their lives, 10 answered yes; 27 answered no, and 16 did not answer the question. Some of the effects are contained in the following statements: "I have never had the fundamentals of home economics usually picked up by other girls in grade school, and I have missed it. I have also missed the gym training given in other schools." "I believe being deprived of these things affects a person's future education rather than having an effect on your life." "The effect so far has been slight, but with the broadening of educational facilities, the effect will be greater in the future. If I had more training in sciences and languages, my opportunities for advancement would be very good." "I was not prepared for the full school life the public school offered. I had no chance to develop my personality when I was young." "I feel a definite tenseness in social affairs to which I had no proper introduction as a child." "It has perhaps caused me an inferiority complex." "The obvious effects I had was difficulty in the ninth grade in getting up in front of the class and giving a report. This one problem took years to remedy."

Effects of a Lutheran Day School Education on Subsequent Church Membership

The final section of this survey concerned the effect of a Lutheran day school education on subsequent church membership. In this section it was found that these graduates attend church on the average of 3.2 times a month. They attend Communion on an average of 4.3 times a year. Two indicated that they were serving a Lutheran congregation, one as a teacher and one as an organist. Thirty-seven of them did not hold any office in a Lutheran congregation, and 14 did not answer the question. Their activity so far as organizations in the Lutheran Church was as follows: 17 were ac-

tive in young people's organizations; 5 were active in Sunday school work; 7 in choir work, and 2 were active in women's organizations.

The money question has not been solved in the Lutheran Church. Forty-one of the graduates did not answer the question concerning the portion of their income contributed to the church. The 11 who did answer the question contribute on an average of 5 per cent of their income, and 1 indicated that \$20 a year was being contributed. However, 20 did indicate how they apportioned their contribution. Fourteen of them give 50 per cent to the local congregation; 2 of them give 60 per cent to the local congregation and 40 per cent to missions; 2 of them give 75 per cent to the local congregation and 25 per cent to missions, and 2 of them give 66 $\frac{2}{3}$ per cent to the local congregation and 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ per cent to missions.

At the end of the questionnaire an opportunity was given for additional remarks and suggestions, and some of the statements that appear in this section are significant. One young man writes: "Offer the students more subjects, and let them have a choice." "Where there are two and three classes in one room, there should be an extra room for a study hall. There should be more outside activities. Having a speech class that presents plays would give the children many benefits." "The teaching and administrative work should be separated." "I certainly enjoyed, and received a great benefit from, the year I went to Lutheran school. I only wish I had gone there longer." "Enlargement of the teaching staff and enlargement on subjects of a scientific nature." "I definitely think that there should be a new school." "A good physical education program should be planned. A better course in science should be taught. There should be extracurricular activities during the entire year." "More discipline, better library. The school should maintain a higher standard." "Improvement of playgrounds, supervised play, and facilities for indoor sports." "More definite class schedules which are followed by teachers." "New textbooks and approved methods of teaching." "More current topics." "Let's have an art class that gives the children a chance to express themselves and not an art class that consists of tracing a picture out of a book."

The authors of this study are fully aware of the shortcomings of this type of investigation, but in spite of its shortcomings, it does show the evaluation which the graduates of a Lutheran day school place upon the education they received. In order that a comparison may be made of several Lutheran day schools, the authors of this study are interested in making evaluations of a similar nature in other Lutheran day schools, and anyone interested is invited to write to the authors for further details. It is also realized that this is a personal, subjective evaluation; for that reason other more objective standards of evaluation are being developed, which will in the end give a rather complete picture of the Lutheran day school and the type of education it offers.

The results of the study presented here are recorded for the purpose of study by all concerned, and as the results are studied, many things will be brought to light. Some general impression, however, cannot escape the attention of the reader.

The study shows that the Lutheran day school merits consideration and study by the Lutheran Church as a whole, and more careful attention by those groups of the Lutheran Church which still are promoting this type of elementary education. Furthermore, it proves that certain statements with reference to the Lutheran day school are false. It is often said that a Lutheran day school education stints the desire to continue one's education. This study shows that more than two-thirds of the graduates continued or will continue in high school, while almost half went on with their educational work beyond high school. The study shows that so far as religious training and knowledge is concerned, no apologies need be made for the work of the Lutheran school. Furthermore, it shows that the graduates of the Lutheran day school are willing to give their support to the Lutheran day school. The study shows that this Lutheran school was weak in the general education which was offered, and, perhaps, here is where the greatest lessons can be learned. It is an issue which should be faced frankly and honestly. While there are those who seem to think that all evils in this sphere are removed by the religious training received, the fact remains, and this study supports it, that if the Lutheran day school is to be a still more vital factor in elementary education, it must maintain standards in general education set by other schools.

Immediately connected with this problem are the extracurricular activities. While some may be uninterested in such activities, the study indicates that this problem and the problem of standards mentioned above are the real stumbling block for the Lutheran day school. In this connection the contention that the Lutheran day school has not fitted itself into the trends of modern times is correct. Many of the problems of extracurricular activities are problems of the junior high school age. Where congregations are operating an eight-grade school, these problems arise because the system is wrong. Two things are possible. The one is to limit the Lutheran day school to six grades, so that junior high school problems will not arise. The other and more practical, where feasible, is to add the last year of junior high school, making the Lutheran school consist of six elementary grades and three years junior high school. Where this is done, the congregation must provide sufficient space, facilities, and teaching staff to carry on junior high school work. It must, also, make provision for some of the extracurricular activities which are promoted in these grades in other schools.

All in all, the Lutheran day school is a worthy cause. If it will make a few adjustments to meet modern tendencies, it can be a still more vital factor in elementary education.