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## Let's Not Forget the Teacher

By WM. A. KRAMER

In education, as in other pursuits, it is easy to lose oneself in matters of secondary importance. Educators are known to have followed a pet subject for more than a decade, until it seemed that the educational symphony had only one theme. It is enough here to recall the protracted and all-absorbing attention given to methods, tests and measurements, and curriculum revision, each in its turn. Important as these are, the teacher ought to occupy first place in the thoughts of educators at all times, because the success of any school hinges first of all on the teacher. Curriculum, methods, and measurement do not guide the impressionable minds and bodies of young children in their growth to spiritual, moral, social, and physical maturity. The teacher does. This article, then, is a frank appeal to give the teacher his rightful place in the scheme of education. The thought is especially of the Lutheran teacher.

Both congregations and teachers need to be reminded not to forget the teacher. It is easy to see that the congregation may forget its teacher, but, strange though it may seem, the teacher may forget himself with equally disastrous results.

Teachers are important. Take Martin Luther. Students came from all parts of Germany and Europe to sit in his classes, because he was an outstanding teacher with an outstanding message, which he presented in an outstanding way. Then these same students returned home to preach and teach what they had learned from the great teacher in Wittenberg. Even today people spare no expense or effort to study under a teacher who has the reputation of being great, be he a music teacher, education professor, or scientist. We are not surprised at that but think it natural to seek out great teachers in special fields. At the same time we do not always exert ourselves sufficiently to provide the type of teachers for our children that the great cause of Christian education demands. Often we do not supply the conditions which a potentially great Christian teacher requires for his proper development. We forget that a really great teacher in every schoolroom, from the seminaries and teachers' colleges on down to the



kindergarten, would solve most of our educational problems and many of our church problems very quickly.

A great Christian teacher need be neither a famous nor a flashy person, but he must be one who loves God and His Word, who believes firmly in his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who loves children and the teaching of children, and who knows his subject matter. For such a person, method, measurement, and materials fall into their proper place naturally, and he will do the task that he is supposed to do. He will master the techniques that need to be mastered. He will see beyond the confused mass of subject matter and administrative detail, recognizing some of the simple things which an educator must do in order to teach children. He will see the children as individuals and recognize their needs. He will be the kind of person that will be fondly remembered by his pupils for years to come.

The quality of the teacher is influenced to such an extent by the conditions under which he is working that the same person may develop into a success or failure, depending upon the circumstances. Congenial working conditions generally make for better teachers. It is well for congregations to remember this when they expect great things of their teachers, and it is of first importance that they regard the teacher and his work so highly that he can maintain his self-respect and a proper respect for the calling which he has chosen for his life's work.

Men are so constituted by the Creator that they desire to be somebody. Nobodies are always unhappy people. Farmers, lawyers, doctors, pastors, teachers, housewives, all want to be somebodies. They want to feel that they are doing a worth-while task, that they are useful, that their work is appreciated. It is not pride to feel that way, but a simple requirement of human nature. This feeling is perfectly in keeping with the high estate to which man has been created. The point here is that also the teacher wants to be somebody. For the teacher to feel that he is somebody, he must have a high respect for his calling.

On first thought it is hard to understand why a teacher should not respect his calling. Do we not say in sermons that the calling of the Christian teacher is one of the greatest callings in the world? Is not teaching one of the cleanest and



most pleasant occupations? The school day has only seven hours, and in that are included recesses. The school year is short, and plenty of holidays and vacations are added for good measure. The average person works 245—250 days per year, the teacher only 180—190. But that is only part of the story. There is the preparation of lessons, the correction of papers, the writing of report cards, meetings with parents, canvasses for children, summer school, and in most congregations there are many additional duties that vary with each teacher, but that include playing for the church services, choir and band directing, Bible class or Sunday school teaching, teaching in the vacation Bible school, instructing Sunday school teachers, leading in young people's work, serving as congregational secretary, attending meetings and more meetings, until sometimes the teacher is run ragged and begins to wish for a year's vacation in the Ozarks. The Lutheran teacher works, and it does not take much effort to demonstrate the fact. But it is not the work that wears out teachers and makes them lose respect for their calling. Doctors, dentists, lawyers, pastors, and others also work, and they work hard; yet they respect their calling, principally for two reasons. People in the community respect their calling, and they are well paid, though the latter is not always true of the pastor. But at least his calling is respected in the congregation and in the community. In the case of the teacher the opposite is often true. Many people do not respect his calling, and too often he is not well paid.

It is true, of course, that the teacher's calling is frequently lauded; for instance, in educational sermons, at installation services, and on other occasions — perhaps more often during a teacher shortage than otherwise. But deep down in our synodical thinking there is ingrained some strange quirk of reasoning which interprets the teacher's call and calling in a way to discourage the teacher. He does not quite know whether he is fish or fowl, and the uncertainty has a disquieting effect upon him. Intelligent people want to know their place. They are in danger of becoming restless when their position is not properly defined. Even so there will always be many who are great enough to look beyond themselves to the cause in which they believe and which they serve, and these continue to be great teachers regardless of what others think. But not all teachers have that ability.



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**A criticism of our synodical reasoning with regard to the teacher may not be readily accepted. A calm consideration of the following facts will serve as partial evidence that something is wrong here. A few years ago it was not uncommon for church publications to contain appeals for higher pastoral salaries without so much as mentioning the teachers, who, as a rule, were less adequately paid. It still happens today, though less frequently. In discussing the doctrine of the call, great care is often taken to read every one but the pastor out of the office of the Word. Efforts are made to do this as painlessly as possible, but the success of these efforts is negligible. In meetings attended by both pastors and teachers it is almost a foregone conclusion that a pastor is chairman and a teacher secretary, though the ability of the persons in question might dictate a reversal of the offices. In salaries the difference between that of the pastor and the teacher has often been, and in some cases still is, too great. Pastors and laymen receive honorary degrees from our institutions of higher learning, often without having attended any university at all, while teachers with earned academic degrees and outstanding service to the Church, for instance, as long-time professors at teachers' colleges, have never been so recognized and honored. In the mailing of free materials from various departments of Synod, teachers have sometimes been overlooked to the detriment of the Church and the irritation of some teachers. The above are evidences, but not the only ones, that the teacher has not occupied the place in our synodical thinking that he ought to occupy. Somewhere along the line a reasoning has crept in which has tended to make him the forgotten man. This is not to deny that part of it may have been the teacher's fault, but certainly not all of it.**

**The cure for the condition is simple. If synodically we can take the step from lip service to actual appreciation of the teacher and his work, actually regarding his office as part of the ministry, without making a pastor of the teacher, we will have leaped the main hurdle. Then if we turn responsibility over to the teacher and permit him to develop and use his particular talents, we shall have a man who will love his calling and who will feel that he is engaged in a great work, as he is in truth. Let us stop forgetting the teacher and begin using the potential power that resides in two thousand con-**



secrated people who can do great things if we give them the opportunity.

In congregations with a number of teachers the board of education ought to study the teachers' inclinations and abilities and the needs of the congregation, and with the teachers' consent assign to each of them some important phase of congregational work. Too often we fritter away our powers in many small and comparatively insignificant matters, or we load one teacher with so much work that he can hardly bear the burden. Why should the principal of a large school also be the organist and choir director, or vice versa? The principal has enough work with his principalship and teaching the upper grade or grades. The organist and choir director will develop faster and better if music is his only extra duty. Make someone else responsible for young people's work, someone else for the records of all members and mission prospects from birth to confirmation, and yet someone else for other important phases of congregational work, if there are enough teachers to go around. It is self-evident that all these assignments are to be executed in co-operation with the pastor, for the pastor is the head of the congregation.

With a good teacher in charge of a special phase of congregational work, the wise pastor will do little more than to inform himself that the work is being done right. As long as that is the case, he will be happy to be relieved of pressing duties, and he will give the teacher every opportunity to develop in his work and to use his initiative. If the teacher must go to the pastor for approval of every minor move, the teacher's initiative will be stifled, and he will not be able to perform creditable work. Between the pastor and the teacher there will be an understanding that special problems or new policies will be thoroughly discussed and agreed upon before action is taken. Then the teacher proceeds, assuming full responsibility, and the respect for his calling is correspondingly increased, both on the part of the congregation and on his own part. While care should be taken not to burden the teacher with too many duties besides teaching, every teacher ought to have some activity in which he deals with and directs adults. This will help him to keep a balanced view of life. The teacher should be held to report on his special activity to the voters periodically, and occasionally in writing in the



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church periodical. This will keep the congregation informed, it will make for a better acquaintance between the members and teacher, and will help develop respect for his work and calling on the part of the congregation and the teacher himself. As this respect increases, it will not be too hard for the congregation to show the teacher also in a tangible financial way that his efforts are appreciated. Let's not forget the teacher. Synod and every congregation and individual in Synod should remember not to forget him. The Kingdom of Grace will profit from the greater service which the teachers will perform if they are not forgotten.

"Let's not forget the teacher" needs also to be told to the teacher himself. Much has been said about appreciation in the foregoing. While it is true that the teacher seeks recognition and that he is justified in doing so, he must be sure not to seek it in a sinful fashion. Acclaim by the congregation and the world is not what the Christian teacher wants. Flames, ropes, swords, and the guillotine have been the recognition of many a man of God who has left a permanent mark for good upon the Church and the world. The Christian teacher of today may be slated for a similar reward if the world keeps on its dizzy downward course, but that should not disturb anyone unduly. The teacher is here to serve God and man, not to seek acclaim and recognition. He must fight the sinful desires of his selfish heart, as every other Christian. Realizing that he is leading blood-bought souls on the way of life, he will not care much when ignorant or uninformed people despise him and his work. He knows in his own heart that he is serving God and man, and who can do more? Having food and raiment, he will be content, though he could use more of earthly goods to advantage. He will develop his abilities and let the Lord show him where to use them to the best advantage. He will look at the boys and girls before him and see the Church and the world of tomorrow, and in the thought that his faithful service will help to build a better church and world, he will gain new strength for the tasks of today. In the hurry and bustle of his daily work he will not neglect to go aside for those moments with God and His Word which renew his strength, so that he may walk and not faint.

Besides these, the wise teacher will do some of the prac-



tical things which will help to make his work more pleasant and less distracting. If he is serving in a congregation where every teacher is expected to attend every meeting and to take an active interest in every organization of the congregation except the ladies' aid — and there are some of that kind — he will frankly discuss the situation with the pastor, his colleagues, and the board of education, trying to find an arrangement that is more conserving of the teacher's time and energy. Considering that even a teacher who serves for 50 years has not many more than 100,000 hours of time to devote to his school and congregation, it is of the utmost importance that he use his time economically. The sands of this world are running out fast, and there is no time or energy to waste in the Kingdom of God.

Another way in which a teacher may increase his joy in his work is for him to engage in some kind of creative activity. This has really been covered in a general way in speaking of the development of talents and the assignment of duties according to natural gifts and preferences. Where talents and preferences are taken into consideration, some kind of creative work will almost surely develop. But the possibilities for creative work go beyond the immediate duties in the congregation. For example, many teachers have the ability to write for publication, but they do not use the talent. Occasional articles for the *Lutheran School Journal* perhaps come first to mind. The market is also crying for Christian literature of all kinds, and a teacher who begins to train himself for writing in his younger years will be able to do the Kingdom of God and himself great service. The need for textbooks and instructional materials in Lutheran schools is only beginning to be met, and it will be many years before it is satisfactorily supplied. Before that takes place, revisions of present books and materials will be necessary. There will be a constant need for many teachers to engage in the planning and writing of instructional materials. The *Lutheran Witness*, the *American Lutheran*, the *Walther League Messenger*, *Today*, the periodicals for young people and children, and even CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY are open to teacher authors. Why not give the urge to write a chance to develop along useful lines?

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There are many outlets for the creative impulse besides writing: in music, art, neighborhood mission work, church publicity, schoolroom arrangement and decoration, and in many other ways, limited only by the teacher's initiative and endurance. The point is that every teacher should put all energy into his schoolwork that is required, but he should have at least one other activity which leads him into work with the adults of the congregation or the community, or which provides work different from the daily school routine. This will help the teacher to forget himself and his troubles, and at the same time it will raise the respect for his calling.

All that has been stated here is said in a spirit of helpfulness and in an effort to serve Christ and the Church by giving the teacher the place which he properly deserves. The congregation can do much through proper appreciation of the teacher's work, through provisions for congenial working conditions, and through an appropriate salary for the teacher. Synod can help by clarifying the status of the teacher as far as his call is concerned. But the teacher will have to do most of it. His own appraisal of his calling will determine to a large extent the joy which he finds in his work. If he is convinced in his own mind that he is called by God to minister to the children of the congregation and to such adult groups as he is assigned to teach, he will maintain the respect for his calling that is necessary to make him successful. He will thank God for his work, he will find a measure of appreciation among the people whom he serves, and he may even find appreciation in the form of material benefits. He who loves God the most will serve Him best, and God will also occasionally give the faithful teacher glimpses of blessings upon his labors, so that he may love his calling the more.

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