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# The Future of Christian Education in the Missouri Synod: A Matter of Self-Understanding

Stephen A. Schmidt

The author is associate professor of education at Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Ill. These two papers were delivered at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, under the sponsorship of the Bertermann Lectures series.

Theodore Graebner once suggested that institutional therapy might be a useful enterprise for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.<sup>1</sup> His insight seems more desirable today than in the late 1940s, when he first made the suggestion. Graebner was, of course, proposing the difficult therapy of historical consciousness. He believed that history not only unlocked the secrets of the past but was the birthplace of hope for the future. He was suggesting an important truth about institutions or cultures: healing is often derived from critical self-understanding—looking backward. One can look forward with hope only when one has taken care to understand the past.

Such a disposition is helpful, and I have tried to follow that advice as I approached my task for today. We must understand our tradition if we are to reform or renew it. Further, the particular past of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod contains significant guidelines for our future. We must do a conservative act so that we might have a liberated future. I believe our history contains both correctives and insights for tomorrow.

We need to look within our own tradition, not outside it, for cure and healing. Hopefully we may illustrate that our distinctive heritage ought to be preserved rather than discarded. I wish for our future the heart of our past. The strategy of Christian educa-

tion is surely, as one author recently suggested, "right under our noses."<sup>2</sup>

Permit me to outline the remarks. I will trace briefly the historical benchmarks of our cultural and ecclesiastical past. Secondly, I will develop candid suggestions about the revitalization of that heritage for our present and future. Naturally in the second enterprise one ceases to be historian, risking rather the role of prophet, a dubious undertaking for any person doing history. But there is some comfort in the words of the British philosopher of history, W. H. Walsh, who writes: "Historians may not be prophets but they are often in a position to prophesy."<sup>3</sup>

## American Public Education: A White Protestant Dream

The 1960s marked a watershed of activity among historical scholars of American education. Before Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society*<sup>4</sup> (1960), most students of American education learned their history from Ellwood P. Cubberley's *The History of Education*.<sup>5</sup> Cubberley

<sup>2</sup> Clarence Berndt Jr., "It's Under Your Nose!" *Lutheran Education*, CVIII (November 1972), 157, 158.

<sup>3</sup> W. H. Walsh, *Philosophy of History* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1960), p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960).

<sup>5</sup> Ellwood P. Cubberley, *The History of Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920). (First published as "Syllabus of Lectures,"

<sup>1</sup> Theodore Graebner, "The Burden of Infallibility," unpublished manuscript, St. Louis, Mo., November 1948.

was not a historian by training, but was an educator with an evangelical flair. He painted a magnificent masterpiece, more myth than fact. His thesis was promotional and biased. The public school system was the epitome of the American dream, the paragon of free enterprise and democracy. Carefully planned, American education progressed systematically from the Old Deluder Satan Act to the present. According to Cubberley, the public schools were American, democratic, noble, a blessing of God, and indestructible.

Since 1960 other historians have given serious attention to the American system of education. The Cubberley myth of American education has been exposed as a dream, and a more realistic picture of the public school has emerged. Today there is a large bibliography of excellent historical research available to the interested reader. Bernard Bailyn, Lawrence Cremin, Robert Lynn, Douglas Sloan, Colin Greer, Michael Katz, and Jonathan Messerli are but a few of the new historians of education.<sup>6</sup> The composite picture they trace is far different from the pious prose of earlier educators.

The public school did not rise as a predestined democratic institution. It developed gradually, accidentally, and pluralistically. There was no public education system before 1870. Rather, diversity marked the nation's attempts at education. Far more responsibility was placed on other institutions: the family, the church, the guild, industry, and the Sunday school. Lutherans can boast a system of education in Pennsyl-

vania long before the public school heroes dreamed their lofty dreams. The first fact to underline about American education is that the true nature of its being was pluralistic, at least until relatively recent history.

After 1850 there was a developing consensus based on the work of educators like Horace Mann, Henry Barnard, William T. Harris, and others. The consensus was toward a system of elementary schools guaranteed success by numerous compulsory education laws passed during and after the 1890s.

Compulsory education was hardly a democratic dream; rather, these laws were passed in opposition to pluralism. They meant the demise of pluralistic attempts at education—specifically the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and private academy efforts to educate. The public school system was not an agent of simple democratic thought but was rather repressive in scope. Compulsory public education has never served large portions of our population well (among those groups one can list Jews, Catholics, Lutherans, Indians, and Blacks).

Also demythologized today is the ideal of the public school as nonreligious. The truth is just the opposite. Public education has always been a partner with white American Protestantism. Robert Lynn has carefully traced that development in his recent work.<sup>7</sup> Sunday schools preceded the public school, and only when Protestant America was convinced that she controlled the public schools did the Sunday school movement become secondary and auxiliary to the public school system.

Recent Supreme Court decisions regarding religion and public education are late announcements that the public school system has changed.<sup>8</sup> They

on the History of Education, with Bibliographies," 1902.)

<sup>6</sup> These authors represent a few key reinterpreters of American educational history. They have in common training as historians and approach the history of American education without the obvious pro-public school bias. They bring, as well, a serious disciplined approach to

<sup>7</sup> Robert W. Lynn, *Protestant Strategies in Education* (New York: Association Press, 1964), pp. 19-20.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-54.

symbolize what has happened in the 20th century. The Protestant public school is no longer Protestant; it is no longer unified and certainly no longer white. Recent trends in American education since 1900 indicate a developing new pluralism *within* the system with divergent values and little consensus as to the goal and aim of the common school.

Secularism has replaced religious values. Variety marks the schools, dependent on location, racial consistency, or dominant ethnic membership. According to Jonathan Messerli, schools have always worked best in small towns where they represented the major complexion of the town.<sup>9</sup> Few educators in America still claim that the public school is the unifying agent of society—and there is a good deal of doubt that it ever was.<sup>10</sup>

With the collapse of the Protestant consensus, American education has again become concerned with moral education. The great engine of Protestantism is defunct, and there is no emergent strategy to take its place. Thus it is understandable that Protestants are concerned and alarmed about religious education. It is not unusual that new strategies are being planned. The public school no longer belongs only to WASPs. The old Sunday school—public school partnership is tired and inefficient. Were we, as Lutherans, to look among Protestants for a strategy of education, we would look in vain, for they have no viable option. And even the best attempts by educators as astute as John Westerhoff<sup>11</sup> seem, at least to this

observer, to be house church games rather than institutional response to the need for change.

The Sunday school goes on about as badly as it did a decade ago. Criticism is raised, flourishes, and dies. Some new attempts are made, new curricula are endless, but the problem remains.

All this leads me to look closer to home for clues for the future. Winthrop Hudson points to the potential strength of American Lutheranism.<sup>12</sup> I hope to show that this strength grew out of its past strategy of education.

### Education in the Missouri Synod

There is no dearth of historical data for the interested student. The carefully done chronicles of Walter H. Beck and August C. Stellhorn<sup>13</sup> are available. John Damm's dissertation on the Lutheran school system is a good interpretation of Missouri Synod school efforts.<sup>14</sup> Two Lutheran Education Association Yearbooks, Arthur Repp's and my own, provide easy access to data.<sup>15</sup>

The early model of Missouri Synod education had German origins. The parish took seriously the education of its young. The home-church-school synthesis was dramatically successful

<sup>12</sup> Winthrop Hudson, *American Protestantism*, a volume of *The Chicago History of American Civilization*, ed. Daniel T. Boorstin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 176.

<sup>13</sup> Walter H. Beck, *Lutheran Elementary Schools in the United States: A History of the Development of Parochial Schools and Synodical Educational Policies and Programs* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1939) 2d ed. (1965); and August C. Stellhorn, *Schools of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963).

<sup>14</sup> John S. Damm, "The Growth and Decline of Lutheran Parochial Schools in the United States, 1638—1962," unpublished Ed. D. dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1963.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur C. Repp, ed., *One Hundred Years of Christian Education*, LEA Yearbook (River Forest: LEA, 1947); and Stephen A. Schmidt, *Powerless Pedagogues*, LEA Yearbook (River Forest: LEA, 1972).

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Messerli, class lectures, Columbia University, 1967.

<sup>10</sup> See Henry J. Perkinson, *The Imperfect Panacea: American Faith in Education, 1865—1965* (New York: Random House, 1968); or Michael B. Katz, *Class Bureaucracy and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971).

<sup>11</sup> John Westerhoff, *Values for Tomorrow's Children: An Alternative Future for Education in the Church* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1971).

during the first 50 years of Synod's history. Slowly, however, that synthesis gave way to the American Protestant pattern of Sunday school and public school. Originally the Synod had more parish schools than churches, but by 1900 the majority of Lutheran parishes did not support schools. Those parishes not supporting schools adopted the Protestant strategy. This strategy was never so successful with Lutherans for obvious reasons: it was a Protestant strategy.

In my *Powerless Pedagogues* I have shown that post-World War I efforts placed greater emphasis on the agency of the school than on the total parish.<sup>16</sup> Pastors became known in Synod as school men or Sunday school men. The struggle over agency took priority over total parish concern. Victory of the Sunday school—public school strategy was guaranteed in Missouri primarily because of financial conditions.

Across the Synod today varying degrees of parish life are evidenced. But what is most apparent is the consistent strong parish base within the Missouri Synod. Congregation life is alive. The surprising health of parish schools in the midst of financial, social, and educational crises indicates the firm parish structure of church life in the Synod. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod maintains a viable, strong communal existence. The parish community, which is the heart of education, is still forming the next generation of little Lutherans.

One cannot shrug aside the many problems of church life in the Synod. There are shattered parishes in city and ghetto. There is an erosion of community, symbolized by the need of the Lutheran Education Association to commission the 1973 Yearbook, *The Catalytic Community*,<sup>17</sup> as an en-

couragement to parishes. There is a crisis of faith everywhere.

There is the acute secularism seen in the church, noted, for example, by the chapel attendance of our teacher training students and by the new retirement policy of the church. Gone are the days of constant care for the aged teacher or pastor. The policy now seems to be: where there is a financial crisis, protect the institution! Urbanization has also taken its toll on the parish community. Some seventeen schools closed last year because of financial problems. Many pastors are disillusioned by young teachers' attitudes toward parish life.<sup>18</sup> Across the church are signs of crisis. The Missouri Synod is struggling at its educational heart—the parish community.

Yet the vitality within the church is even more surprising. Witness the recent article on founding parishes in the Missouri Synod.<sup>19</sup> Visit Saint Paul's, St. John's, or Grace, old, large, surviving parishes in metropolitan Chicago. The parish, for all its weaknesses, still forms and informs generations of young Lutherans. The Synod still supports three full-time teacher training institutions, investing a larger percentage of the synodical dollar in teacher education than in the education of clergy.<sup>20</sup> Secondary schools continue to grow, and higher education seems more alive than ever. We resolve, in convention, to close an institution, and the immediate area constituents renew efforts to maintain that institution.

<sup>16</sup> Lester R. Bayer, "Report on Findings: Survey Concerning Teacher Education Graduates," Board for Higher Education, LCMS, St. Louis, Aug. 24, 1972.

<sup>19</sup> Frank D. Starr, "Founding Churches: Active, Diversified," *Lutheran Witness Reporter*, VIII (Feb. 13, 1972), 1, 4, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Hopmann, dean of administration, Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, interview, Jan. 16, 1972. According to Hopmann, in the 1972–73 school year there were 2,189 pastoral students and 4,513 teacher-training students.

<sup>16</sup> Schmidt, *Powerless Pedagogues*, pp. 72-94.

<sup>17</sup> James Cassens, "The Catalytic Community," unpublished manuscript for 1973 LEA Yearbook, to be published in June 1973.  
<https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol44/iss1/27>

My view is clear and realistic. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod parish is alive and well in the 20th century. And this is where education is happening: in schools, Sunday schools, VBS, PTL, LLL, ladies aid, church picnics, dart leagues, basketball teams, quilting society, LWML, choirs, and so forth. In a collage of activity and interaction, young people are learning to model their lives after adults, often on a first-name basis with instant facial recognition.

### The Parish as Educator

*Powerless Pedagogues* has documented this educational development in the chapter by the same title. The parish is educator, with every activity, every agency, every relationship forming a unifying experience for many young Lutheran Christians. The parish remains a place of community and continuity, both necessary for the forming process of Christian nurture. In my most happy moments I can fantasize that Missouri has created in many parishes the kind of organismic community Horace Bushnell advocated with such eloquence.<sup>21</sup>

If we can agree on the reality that still forms young Lutherans, then we can focus more clearly on that process and the ministry needed for such education to be effective. My argument is true not only of parishes. Possibilities for community are emerging in small cities, small towns, and ghettos. These spaces and places of community may well form a new national type of education. For example, Brownsville, N. Y., public school works not because it is a public school, but because it is a community. The wave of community control efforts in American education symbolize the awareness of the educator to that sort of community interaction. I am suggesting that the Missouri Synod has the epitome of local community control—in some

cases more than we need. While not defending inverted or parochial parishes, I am supporting the notion that a community must in fact exist before significant education can happen. We have such a community in the local parish.

I will comment in more detail later, but I want to raise two difficulties which exist in the content of my thesis. While we do have close parish enclaves, we do not have a successful parish professional education ministry, either clergy-trained or teacher-trained. Secondly, I believe our present parish style of teaching—namely, preaching—is inefficient for both education and the formation of community.

### The Lutheran School a Viable Option: Somewhere

We need to make a rational and eloquent plea for the continuation of parish education with full-time Christian day schools. In the past our rationale for such an agency has often been suspicious. I suspect that we have been provincial, bigoted, biased, and often more concerned about ethnic preservation than education. We need not defend the Christian day school on the basis of past rhetoric. A new case can and must be made for full-time parish education in the structure of Christian day schools. The skeletal outline of such an argument could be built along these lines.

1) Parish schools provide access to the Good News, both experientially and as part of the curriculum.

2) Parish schools provide a needed alternative to public mass education. Such options are increasingly unavailable to many Americans.

3) Parish schools provide an alternative process to secularism within the educational process. John Strietmeier is correct. The Spirit creates faith, but always within the media of cultural realities: Word, sacraments, pictures, hymns, books, stories, actions,

<sup>21</sup> Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1888).

and so forth.<sup>22</sup>

4) Parish schools provide a vital ministry for the church, especially in urban areas. God's community does what needs doing for society when society is not doing well. American urban education is in shambles, and parish schools could provide a ministry to the whole child, a literating mission of reading, writing, and arithmetic, mixed with a heavy measure of love and Good News.

5) Parish urban schools can become a ministry of the whole church in a specific place. Financial support of such schools demands a larger District- or Synod-wide support basis.

6) Parish schools can serve as a prophetic word in the community and the educational community. Missouri owes the larger American educational community its distinctive voice. Historically, schooling is what we have done best, and we need to share that insight. The measure of inhumanity in education is possible only if there is another model. Our schools could become such models.

7) Finally, parish schools can be remedial communities for the disturbed, the loveless, and the lonely. Potentially we have the ability and resources to provide special care for those outcasts in the world. Lutheran schools have functioned, historically, in this manner—often taking the cast-offs. I can think of no better reason to continue our schools—if we are what we say we are, the community of the loved.

In summary, I propose that the future of Christian education in the Missouri Synod lies with the parish as an intimate, learning community. I suggest that the community forms its own through formal and informal structures. Among the most desirable agencies of Christian nurture for children is the Christian day school. I believe that agency is worth preserving

if it remains true to its trust as the church in mission, forming young minds in the image of Christ.

In such workshops of Christian experience children can learn with intellectual honesty and Christian cultural reinforcement. Home-church-school still form the best educational option available to Lutherans. Historically, schools have been extensions of the home, not the state. Perhaps we might learn what early Lutherans and early Americans knew: that there must be a unity of forces in the lives of children. Our hope is to create that unity in the parish community, where worship, learning, and living form a united whole.

### The Question of a Teaching Ministry

The thesis of *Powerless Pedagogues* underlines the dramatic urgency of this problem. Teachers in the church are unsure of their status in the ministry and professional life of the church—and with good reason. The church has been as confused as the teachers. Lutheran professional educators are neither clergy nor lay. The late Carl S. Meyer stated this succinctly in a recent article, "An Additional Look at the Ministry in American Lutheranism."

Their status as semi-clergy was an ambivalent one, but the tendency has been to regard them as a little less than pastor and a little more than layman.<sup>23</sup>

Some teachers are convinced that they are full ministers of the Word, public ministers of Word and sacrament. Some are less sure. Churchmen have written and continue to write about the teacher with confused rhetoric. Allow a few illustrations.

<sup>23</sup> Carl S. Meyer, "An Additional Look at the Ministry in American Lutheranism in the 19th Century," mimeographed essay presented to the Commission on Mission and Ministry in the Church, St. Louis, Mo., Dec. 10, 1971, p. 8.

1897 A teacher's office is disgraced when the teacher becomes lazy or doesn't study further . . . and when he doesn't remain within the bonds of his office but desires to become a kind of assistant pastor. Many teachers have disgraced their office by becoming political or by taking part in congregational affairs in a prominent manner.<sup>24</sup>

n. d. Some pastors can handle large congregations, weak pastors usually end up in small congregations, and then some pastors who can't handle their pastoral office but have gifts for teaching can be used in our schools.<sup>25</sup>

1931 Now it is true that the female teachers have shown a great service to Synod in time of need but it cannot be denied that a teacher who has been educated at our seminary and who has made the teaching office his life's calling can better serve the school and the congregation than a female teacher. The vocation of women and their life's goal is marriage, in which they as helpmeet of man and mother of the children find their real satisfaction.<sup>26</sup>

1954 He is counted among the clergy though he is not a pastor.<sup>27</sup>

1972 The earliest church seems not to have operated with the distinction between clergy and lay nor with the distinction between a chief office and auxiliary offices.<sup>28</sup>

1972 It's too bad when dedication becomes a thing we cannot wholeheartedly support. Actually the double

<sup>24</sup> H. Speckhard, "Theses Treating the Parish Teachers of our Synod and the Appointment of Female Teachers," *Evangelisch-Lutherisches Schulblatt*, XXXII (1897), 326-33.

<sup>25</sup> W. Wegner, "Are There Certain Conditions Under Which a Teacher Might Be Advised to Enter the Preaching Ministry," mimeographed paper in archives of Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, n. d., pp. 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> "The Teaching Personnel of Our Parish Schools," *Der Lutheraner*, LXXXVII (1931), 34-35.

<sup>27</sup> Erwin Lueker, *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 1037.

<sup>28</sup> Robert H. Smith, "Auxiliary Offices in the New Testament," mimeographed essay presented to Commission on Mission and Ministry in the Church, St. Louis, Mo., Dec. 10, 1971, p. 13.

status of the teacher, half-minister and half-layman, has a counterpart distortion in the pastor, all minister and not layman at all. If Martin Luther's dictum could have been realized in the Missouri Synod it would have been well. "The pastor is a layman who works for other laymen."<sup>29</sup>

Such conceptual confusion could only create uncertainty and professional anxiety among teachers. Uncertain of their status, teaching ministers have reflected the image they learned well and have acted accordingly: powerless, inept, and often passive.

There is a conventional wisdom about the Missouri Synod's view of ministry. The pastors are ministers, the teachers are almost ministers, and the laymen are just Christian, not really part of the ministry of the church. We have, like it or not, taught the church that ministry was rank, something separate and special. Whether or not we have conveyed the image of servant is another matter. I believe two matters of clarification must occur.

1) The concept of ministry must be clarified in the church at large. There is one ministry of Word and sacrament, and many forms of that ministry. Every servant of the Word—pastor, teacher, lay worker, deaconess, youth worker—is part of the public ministry. We need to expand the office to include all functions of the ministry as equal co-partners in God's service of Word and sacrament in the church.

2) The practice of ordination remains reserved for the pastoral ministry. I believe we will continue the debilitating, confused status of teachers in the church until we formally ordain all ministers publicly into their offices. If ordination is a useful practice (and I have reservations about that practice) then we ought to ordain the entire public ministry of the church, not only the preaching

<sup>29</sup> Richard R. Caemmerer, letter to author, July 5, 1972.



ministry.

William Rusch, associate executive secretary of LCUSA, Division of Theological Studies, recently read a paper on commissioned ministries to synodical and district presidents of the Lutheran churches in America. His proposal was to establish a commissioned ministry in the church, distinct from, but not inferior to, the ordained ministry. He stated that such a ministry would be "not inferior to the more traditional type of church service. The commissioned and ordained ministries are parallel, but their tasks are different. The distinction is not one of honor and authority but function."<sup>30</sup>

From my knowledge of the history of ministry in the Missouri Synod I doubt the wisdom of those proposals. I believe we have but one option: to have one ministry or to continue to perpetuate one elite ministry with several minor, "almost" ministries. So long as preaching and teaching ministers remain human, that is, no doubt, the way we will function.

My proposal is to ordain the entire public ministry of Word and sacrament. After that ordering, it will be a simple procedure to provide functional categories or standards for the functions. No one minister can do all the ministering—not even clergymen. I might add here that teaching difficulties with confirmation classes is a reflection of that dilemma. Pastors have not been trained to teach, yet our ministry definition assumes that they can teach.

There is a related concern, but since I have no special wisdom for working out a solution, I will only trouble you with the matter in passing. In my most honest moments I observe that any form of specialization in the church separating a professional church elite from the Christian body tends toward the creation of hierarchy

and special privilege. Professionalism is only a half-virtue. We still have to do with servanthood. Professionalism and servanthood seem, in my experience, to be in contradiction—at least in the history of our Synod. Shepherds have often seemed to be more king than shepherd. I am not certain that one can maintain a formal professional public ministry without the constant risk of special privilege, pride, and arrogance—all contradictory to the symbols of servanthood. Perhaps baptism is the only ordination any of us need?

By now I suspect some of my listeners are restless about a solution to broaden the ministry without a word about training. I hasten to outline my position on the matter of training for the teaching ministry.

1) As Martin L. Koehneke has often said, our schools of higher education ought to serve as universities of church vocations.<sup>31</sup> Teachers, directors of Christian education, and pastors ought to be trained together. The possibility for communication and dialog between the functionaries of the ministry would be greatly enhanced. Several faculties within the Synod currently have that potential without serious addition to existing personnel.

2) Synod ought gradually to phase out undergraduate education and establish only graduate schools for the professional ministry. This would, I believe, be fiscally sound and pedagogically desirable. We could recruit from diverse undergraduate backgrounds, thus enriching the ministry. It seems problematic that the Synod can continue to maintain her present undergraduate system of education. That pattern is already clearly evident in the phasing out of the prep school high school departments and the development of community Lutheran high schools. Perhaps that same

<sup>30</sup> News Bureau Release, Lutheran Council in the United States of America, New York, Dec. 1, 1972, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Martin L. Koehneke, statement to faculty of Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Ill., June 1971.

pattern will develop in our undergraduate college programs. Present higher education moneys could sustain a large percentage of graduate study were that our single concern.

3) Were we to operate graduate schools only, I believe we could standardize the training period of the ministry. Teachers, pastors, and DCEs would all require a two- or three-year period of minimal training. Specialization could be built upon that minimal ministerial program for entrance into a special ministry.

4) In such a program, teachers would receive more theology than in the present system. Were we to accept certified teachers with the B. A., we could build a careful program of instruction in theology and church practice on that graduate experience. Far more attention could be given to adult and preschool skills.

5) Such a proposal has value for the pastoral ministry as well. Men and women could specialize in one form of ministry but have access to the other functions. There could be a core program of theological training for all ministries with increased attention to human relationships and political science.

I believe this proposal would be more economical than our present segregated structure. It would be less costly, more efficient, and would tend to accomplish the destruction of our current step pattern of ecclesiastical hierarchy within the ministry of the church. Graduate education for all ministries could be heavily subsidized by the same synodical subsidy currently used for undergraduate study.

Finally, I believe that the parish must remain the basic orientation of ministerial training. Community is the last option for a humane Christian future. The parish is a traditional pattern of continuity in the Synod. The total organization of the ministerial curriculum should be built toward that ministry. Then we could nurture what

James Cassens calls the catalytic community. The formation of Christians always happens "where faith begins,"<sup>32</sup> in the community called congregation.

The third concern which must be met if we are to maintain a useful teaching ministry is the need to review our synodical polity. The Walther compromise and the subsequent 50/50 franchise arrangement is not conducive to good educational planning. Teaching ministers need to be included in synodical decision-making. At present teachers are excluded from voting at the District and synodical levels. Franchise proposals have been attempted by teachers three times in the history of the Synod; however, each time they were rejected.

Were Synod to establish its professional ministry along the lines suggested earlier, we would still need to divide our ministerial franchise by representation to all functions in that ministry. I do not believe we have an option. The "auxiliary" ministries waited too long to demand a decision in the life of the church. How that franchise occurs (all ministers in a circuit are eligible, or some new representation quota) will be a difficult and technical matter. However, it is not without possible solution.

A related injustice needs immediate correction if we are serious about a viable teaching ministry. I refer, of course, to the situation of the woman in the church. The theological issue, if there is one, is not our particular concern here today; the literature on each side of the question is already too numerous. Frankly, I believe the matter is simply political. Women teachers have been doing and are doing exactly what men teachers do. They preach in classrooms, forgive sins, lead prayers, attend voters' meetings, and in a place or two even distribute the Sacrament. Yet they are given contracts instead

<sup>32</sup> See Ellis Nelson, *Where Faith Begins* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1967).

of calls and do not receive officially the literature of our Synod. They are, in fact, not members of the Synod, and their salaries reflect their lower membership status.

The argument in our church is not whether or not they dare minister. They have and they do—publicly. Ordination for women teachers would simply acknowledge what we have already been doing—thus making it official. Teachers are public ministers also when they are women. I was serious when I wrote in *Powerless Pedagogues* that the solution to the role of women in the church “may lie precisely where it has always been—in the public ministry, for women have always been part of that ministry in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.”<sup>33</sup>

Unless the church moves forthrightly on this issue, we place into jeopardy the continued excellent service of thousands of women in the church. It is also a fact that women cannot clarify their ministry without your assistance. Missouri has always legitimized her political decisions with theological rationale. I solicit your assistance as we seek to rectify this impossible contradiction.

One needs yet to say a word about team ministry. If we are to create a ministry of persons working together in a parish, we are going to have to give far more attention to shared leadership and democratic group process. A separate trained pastoral ministry will not develop quickly into team members. Pastors must be trained in the process for shared leadership.

We still think too narrowly of ministry. Two illustrations from recent church life are in order. President Preus' 1972 Christmas letter is symptomatic of our traditional problem. Addressing his letter to “Dear Brothers in Christ,” he writes:

It is so wonderful to think of the Gospel ringing out from the thousands of pulpits of our churches in many different languages to people of many different cultures and economic conditions.<sup>34</sup>

The view that the ministry includes all ministerial functions does not occur in his Christmas dream. When I wrote to him about it, he assured me that his view of ministry was the same as mine, and I have no reason to doubt that statement. Our problem is that we are all programmed into our past.

A related incident is the recent synodical decision to produce a 125th-anniversary film. This also illustrates the pervasiveness of our problem. The *Chicago Daily News* reported on the making of that film. Evidently the film includes a staged “ordination” into the preaching office as the epitome of faithful service in the church. I doubt that the film conveys servanthood. Certainly the *Daily News* reporter did not.<sup>35</sup>

Ministry, from my view, is the practice of Word and sacrament shared by all the people of God. The public ministry is practiced by all those set aside to do specific functions of that ministry. Within a parish that ministry is still confused and focuses largely on the pastorate. In my local parish the two pastors and school principal are called team ministers; the teachers, secretaries, custodians are staff—a gross distortion of any good Lutheran practice.

Team ministry cannot happen if we do not equip all participants for shared function and shared decision responsibility. That team concept cannot occur unless we first symbolize and install all ministers in the same fashion without separate, special practices for special functions.

<sup>34</sup> J. A. O. Preus, Christmas letter, St. Louis, Mo., December 1972.

<sup>35</sup> *Chicago Daily News*, “Lights, Cameras, Packed Congregation,” Dec. 2-3, 1972, p. 47, James Bouman, reporter.

### Revitalizing the Sub-Culture; Renewing Old Strategies

I have always believed that ideas inform actions. As an educator I believe that one's thoughts influence one's behavior. The strategy for education grows from the goals of our philosophy of education. In the case of Lutheran education it seems crucial to develop our pedagogy from our theology.

Lutherans can do well to remember their theological roots, for they are the roots of life. The good news of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is good news. No church body can capture its meaning. Only as Jesus Christ is birthed in our worship, our Eucharist, and our teaching does the good news come alive.

In the past Lutherans have a time or two veered from the good news of the Gospel. Sometimes we have practiced a gospel of good words, or right doctrine, or a pure book, or a special sense of correctness. Sometimes our pedagogy has been authoritarian, rigid, dogmatic, and biblicistic. Sometimes we have been satisfied with pious proof-texting or simple lifted literalisms rather than serious Scripture study.

The teaching of the Missouri Synod reflects the ways in which we have drifted. Sometimes our materials are off center. Occasionally we have acted like sect rather than church. Our strategy was inverted and self-preserving. To rediscover our heritage at its core is to hear the good news as it was proclaimed and acted out during our 125 years of sinning. To rediscover the past is to rediscover the primacy of the Gospel.

We are the church not because we are better or more chosen or more German. We are the church because the Word of God still penetrates our churches, classrooms, and lives. If we believe it we can, as Walter Bouman states, "risk our tradition" in the real

world of ecumenicity.<sup>36</sup>

As we remember our heritage we might also find in it a corrective for our strategy of nurturing. Lutherans committed themselves early to the parish as the nurturing community. It is "right under our noses" if we can recapture, by good hard parish education, the center of our strategy. All the elements of parish life are educating and consciously molding and renewing these elements into a meaningful collage of good news. Merton Strommen's recent research seems to indicate that parish styles are either Law or Gospel.<sup>37</sup> There are times when our words are right but our parish life-style denies the goodness of the Gospel. New nurturing vitality may happen if we pay attention to a pedagogy of parish *paideia*—conscious concern about all the structures of the parish.

Some of our cherished traditions need changing. The present constitution of Synod is such a document. It is anachronistic. Representation is grossly unfair to laymen and to all presently defined auxiliary ministries. The mass conventions of the Synod are a financial embarrassment. Some of the theology we have tried to pass in convention has been at least inadequate if not harmful to the church. I believe we need to start from scratch to redefine a new polity and structure for the 20th century. There is a need for greater lay participation in the affairs of the church and a need for more appropriate decision-making processes.

During the early decades of Synod's history, the parish schools enrolled more non-Lutheran children than Lutheran. Those schools served their

<sup>36</sup> Walter Bouman, *Christianity American Style* (Dayton, Ohio: George A. Pflaum, 1970), pp. 105 ff.

<sup>37</sup> Merton Strommen, lecture at Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Ill., February 1971, on the basis of his research for *A Study of Generations*.

## FUTURE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

communities with vitality and openness. The time has come to redirect our efforts in education toward salvaging persons demonized by stupidity, hunger, and illiteracy. We need to open our schools to the world—the non-Lutheran world. The mission of His love is a mission to the whole child. We need to renew that open door policy. I would like to see mission money diverted to a new priority: young persons in all the ghettos of our culture.

We must take time to rebuild our subculture into His kind of counter-culture, standing over against the world. The church must recapture the position of prophet. I worry about how political we can become in behalf of parochialism and how quiet we remain about Vietnam. Counter-culture implies constant dialog with the world, making wrong judgments but living in forgiveness.

This kind of counter-culture must recreate a place where Christian humanism can be nurtured. Our schools and parishes must become workshops, laboratories of sinning boldly—where people can act out their rage, hate, lovelessness, and despair and can boldly be affirmed, loved, forgiven, and healed. Such a counter-culture will be nurtured by its links with earlier counter-cultures:

the communities of Christians back into history. We can remain under the judging and healing Word which first gave life to such a community.

In summary, I am suggesting:

1) That the Missouri Synod listen carefully to her past and hear once again the Good News.

2) That she recreate her uniqueness in Word, sacrament, and community.

3) That she build nurturing communities of parishes and schools to give healing as they stand against the mainstream culture.

4) That she build new schools and renew her mission to young enslaved persons through a pedagogy of care and concern in classrooms of love and learning.

5) That she reorganize her structures more appropriately to the 20th century.

6) That she place herself under the Word of judgment and mercy.

The future of Christian education is hopeful if we are committed to its core, Jesus Christ, and if we can recover the best of our past strategy—the home-church-school—in the community called parish, open to all persons for healing and hope.

River Forest, Ill.