

Luther on the Education of a Christian

Seminar leader: James M. Kittelson

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James M. Kittelson opened the seminar with the suggestion that there were at least three overlapping approaches to the issue of education: 1) Luther's views on education as showing how religious values permeated the culture of the time; 2) the theological themes and ideas that may be applicable to education today, in spite of possible anachronisms; 3) education as a theme for understanding Luther himself both biographically and theologically. Above all, it is true that education was central to Luther's public career as doctor and professor and a subject to which he returned repeatedly from the "Disputation against scholastic theology", through the reforms at the University of Wittenberg, the proposals in "An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation, . . .", the two treatises of 1524 and 1530, and to the self-conscious effort to "teach" the Reformation through the catechisms, the training of a new clergy, and the revival of disputations at Wittenberg.

The seminar itself consisted of a series of presentations followed by discussion and concluded with a general discussion of the issues that had been raised. *Robert Rosin* began with "The pedagogy of Renaissance humanism with special reference to Melanchthon". He noted that humanism became "method for the Reformation" while the Reformation was "content and market for humanism". First and foremost, *reformatio* meant *educatio* with Wittenberg being the first German university to have all the classical languages as part of its arts curriculum. Through the work of Melanchthon and others (including Luther) humanism survived the early attacks of the "Schwärmer", spread through the Lutheran universities, and down to the Latin schools as preparatory studies. Rosin wondered

whether, by this route, the method of organizing knowledge and instruction according to loci communes may have become formative in Protestant German culture.

Henry Wilson followed with brief summaries of the treatises of 1524 (WA 15, 27-53) and 1530 (WA 30 II, 517-588). With respect to the first, he noted its emphasis upon the founding of schools for both civil and religious reasons and Luther's stress on the necessity of the classical languages. By contrast the treatise of 1530 continued this duality of function but contained an apocalyptic element that tended to emphasize the importance of a trained clergy in the face of present and continuing dangers.

Carl Axel Aurelius, in discussing the catechisms with special reference to the Small Catechism, suggested that the catechetical situations of the 16th and the 20th centuries are similar. The catechism (as "content" and "life" rather than "book") was intended to help provide the self-conscious identity as Christians and members of the church that 16th-century parishioners lacked. Luther adopted an old form but adapted it by way of deletions and additions so as to create not separate statements but an overlay of the same pastoral point. Nonetheless it may be true (Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig) that Luther's catechisms tend to present each part of the faith as independent matters when they have integrity only as they relate to the whole. An unintended distinction between the individual and the community follows.

The following three presentations concerned the role of education in the implementation of the Reformation. With respect to Scandinavia, *Trygve Skarsten* chose the career of Petrus Paladius (1503-1560), the first evangelical bishop

of Seeland and professor of theology at Copenhagen, 1537–1560. Palladius helped to create an evangelical clergy through his supervision of the pastors, his translation of the Small Catechism, and two commentaries on it, by which he established preaching both on the Gospel lessons and the catechism throughout Danish territories. *David Daniel* noted that educators – Johannes Stöckel in particular – were the agents for confessional change in Slovakia even though the territory was nominally Roman Catholic. In the 16th century the nobility founded new evangelical schools and helped to reform the existing town schools. As a result Stöckel's curriculum (based on Melancthon, Johann Sturm, and others) became the model for Slovakian secondary schools. Again, the Small Catechism was one of the basic texts and, as such, the first book printed in Slovak. *Luther Peterson* concluded this section with a discussion of the church and school visitation in Merseburg of 1578, which, he noted, contained uniformly favorable reports on the clergy and no criticism of the schools and their teachers. He argued that some scholars have marked their report cards on the success or failure of the Reformation far too hastily and with little reflection on what was and was not possible in the 16th century.

The seminar's last formal session featured reports from *Marilyn Harran* and *Bernhard Erling* on the contemporary applicability of Luther's educational ideas. Erling questioned whether Luther's pedagogy can be relevant to pluralistic societies in which exclusivist religious convictions are left in abeyance. How, he asked, can

one teacher truly teach many different kinds of people? He doubted that any sort of educational »coercion« with respect to what is »right« and what »wrong« can exist without damaging the »spiritual« aspect of those with different (or no) religious faith. By contrast, Harran noted that for Luther education was not simply a matter of social control but was also to be individually liberating. Service to society (in the sense of *vocatio*) also elevates the goal of education beyond purely individual profit and goes well beyond the issue of sustaining a common culture, as the debate has been framed in the United States recently.

Concluding questions included the extent to which »Western« missionaries employ Luther's educational ideals in their work, whether modern theological education amounts to a modern scholasticism that is about theology but is not itself theology, and above all whether education in Luther's understanding contains room for sapiential or artistic forms of knowledge. Participants generally agreed that the widespread distinction between teaching religion and teaching about religion is not so clearly drawn as is commonly thought.

The seminar finished with the observation that Luther's educational ideals (although not systematically developed) surely differed from both Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Wilhelm von Humboldt. For Luther education was to produce able servants rather than (as with Rousseau through forgetting what one had been taught or with von Humboldt through growing toward »Vollkommenheit«) to maximize the self for the sake of the self.