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Lowering the Standards of Indoctrination.

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There can be no question with regard to the importance of the topic which is here given, for the Bible itself makes it a point to show just what the Lord expects of the members of His Church. Among the very last words of our Savior we have His great commission to His disciples until the end of time: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, *teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*" Matt. 28, 19, 20. While for child-membership in the Church it is sufficient for such a child to be baptized, since by Baptism it receives the grace of God, we begin the special teaching of children at a very early age, in fact, as soon as they are able to pronounce the first words. We encourage the mothers to teach their little children appropriate prayers and also small verses from the Bible. We provide material in the form of pictures and simple Bible stories. We emphasize some of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible, such as the truth concerning Jesus Christ, the God-man, the Savior of the world. We also establish various institutions for the training of the young. Before we receive children into adult membership, we give them a special course of instruction in the fundamental doctrines of the Bible, so that they may be able to examine themselves before going to Holy Communion. 1 Cor. 11, 28.

That this course pursued by us, which is lauded most highly by men of understanding outside of our own circles, is in full keeping with the Lord's will, appears from a number of passages. Thus St. Paul chides the Christians of Corinth for their slow progress in Christian knowledge. He writes: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able." 1 Cor. 3, 1, 2. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes a similar remark when he calls his readers to task for their slow

progress in learning the truth of Scriptures. His words will bear repeating: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the Word of Righteousness; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment." Heb. 5, 12—6, 2. These admonitions are altogether in keeping with other sections of the Bible. Moreover, the Bible demands a certain standard of knowledge before a person may properly become a member.

These standards may be summarized as follows. Generally speaking, they demand an instruction in the doctrines of the Bible, which enables the Christian to make an adequate examination of his life in agreement with the Ten Commandments. In connection with this there is the second demand, that every Christian who partakes of the Lord's Supper must actually be able to discriminate between this meal and ordinary eating and drinking. 1 Cor. 11, 29. From these demands there follows the further necessity of having all members of our Church distinguish between truth and falsehood in fundamental doctrines. If any one is not clear in the doctrine of justification, the chances are that he will in some manner base his faith upon his own strength and works, thereby depriving himself of the full benefit of the Lord's Supper. The same holds true if a person has no adequate conception of the person and the work of Christ, the entire doctrine of atonement. In fact, the various chief doctrines of the Bible are so closely related that it is impossible to set aside any one of them without endangering the entire structure.

It is in this connection that we wish to call attention to a strong tendency which is becoming manifest, not only in isolated cases, but in fairly large circles, namely, the tendency toward lowering the standards of indoctrination. We are not prepared to say whether this tendency is in any way connected with the modern idea of the potency of numbers. In some cases it may be due to mistaken ideals or to false zeal. But whatever the case, it behooves us to look at the situation with the greatest care.

The standards of indoctrination are lowered in some cases if pastors and congregations are satisfied with Sunday-school work *alone*, that is, if no other provision is made to inculcate the doctrines of the Bible in the minds of the children before they are admitted to the final catechumen class. As most Sunday-schools are being conducted, they are not able to devote more than thirty to forty-five minutes a Sunday to the regular lesson of the day. This lesson will, as a rule, comprise a story from the Bible, with doctrinal application, and some drill in the text of the Catechism, in proof-texts, hymn verses, and prayers. Now, it is true that the Sunday-school literature of our Synod has certain high qualities in mind. The lessons are assigned with a view of their doctrinal content and their teaching of Jesus, the Savior. The system is both uniform and graded, the circle being enlarged every two years. The lesson facts as taught in the lower grades are repeated and supplemented in the Intermediate Department by additional details and an application in keeping with the children's development at that time. The spiral method is further employed in the Senior Department, when the lesson text, practically that of the Bible, is supplemented with much historical material and the application made entirely from the doctrinal side. If this material is thoroughly drilled, also in the so-called Catechism Department of the Sunday-school, it may be possible to have children know approximately one hundred Bible stories, the text of the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther, and possibly a hundred proof-texts, by the time they are ready to be received into the catechumen class. — But even at best there is something lacking for full indoctrination. Just as a child may very well learn the fundamentals of arithmetic in approximately a hundred lessons, but would hardly become a mathematician on the basis of such a meager training, so the child may have a mental or memory knowledge of many Bible facts and Catechism statements without having these terms become a real working knowledge in life. We have rightly been saying in the past that the instruction in the Word of God must enter the very flesh and blood of the children in order to be effective. This ideal can hardly be reached even with the best Sunday-school training. After all, five lessons a week devoted to the training in the Word of God are bound to accomplish more than only a half hour a week, which is often inadequate from a number of angles.

A second way in which the standards of indoctrination may be lowered is found when certain pastors and congregations attempt

too much with a Sunday-school or an institution of the same nature. Since the International Sunday-school lessons have received so much publicity, the writers of the various commentaries on these lessons being praised as the most expert religious educators, the lessons have also been examined in our circles. Now, there can be no question concerning material which is taken from the Bible itself. The sections, as assigned, are parts of the Bible, and they undoubtedly have their value in making known great truths. But there are some objections which cannot be set aside. In the first place, the Bible itself makes a distinction between fundamental and less fundamental doctrines, between primary and secondary material. The literature used in our circles, as stated above, has as its chief characteristic the doctrinal side, particularly the facts concerning Jesus, the Savior. The lessons of the International series very often deal with secondary truths, interesting knowledge in themselves, but hardly from the standpoint of indoctrination. Besides, every lesson commentary based on the International series contains far too much material. The number of references, the mixture of archeological and historical material with that of doctrinal matters, is bound to confuse the average untrained teacher. It would even tend to confuse the trained teacher. And as for the children, they would, to paraphrase an ancient German proverb, not be able to see the forest for trees. In this respect one may very well say that he who does less will usually accomplish more, and he who attempts the impossible, according to pedagogical information, will lower his standards of indoctrination.

These standards may, furthermore, be lowered when pastors and teachers, in preparing children for confirmation, after they have attended nothing but a Sunday-school, try to get along without training-classes or their equivalent. It is a prime requisite of a good class of catechumens that they already possess a memory knowledge of the Catechism and of the chief Bible stories used by way of proof. If a pastor is employed in doing a great deal of drill work, when he ought to be engaged in unfolding the text itself, the children are going to lose, and the result is bound to show in the future. Almost the same disadvantage is connected with the practice of some pastors, who turn over not only training-classes, but also the catechumen classes, to others. We must become more fully conscious of the purpose connected with catechumen work, namely, to prepare children (and adults) for adult membership in the congregation. This includes not only the privilege of receiving the Lord's Supper, but also the fundamental training with regard to the entire

Christian life. The pastor himself must feel the necessity of connecting pastoral work with his catechumen classes. While the emotional side cannot be stressed too strongly, all catechumens should become conscious of the fact that religion is not a matter of merely the head and the mind, but of the heart and the soul. Therefore the pastor himself should, all things being equal, have charge of the catechumen class, so that the standards of indoctrination, in this respect, may not be lowered.

But the chief mistake, in many cases, has been made with regard to adults. While it is very hard to make definite rules concerning the number of lessons to be given, and while many applicants for membership in our Church may have a fairly wide knowledge of Scripture terms, it will never do to have willingness take the place of conviction. If people have had a fairly thorough training in fundamental doctrines before they apply for membership in a Lutheran congregation, it may often be sufficient to study just certain points of difference in which the knowledge is particularly deficient. At the same time no pastor can really be satisfied with just a few lessons on certain fundamental points, much less with a series of sermons, the hearing of which is taken for granted and the assent to which is taken in lieu of a confession of the heart. It is a very difficult thing to prepare even an adult for membership in a Lutheran church in less than twenty to forty lessons. If one attempts more by doing less, the chances are that we shall soon have a membership which is not really a membership by conviction, but only by force of circumstances. This ought to be avoided by all means. It is time that every one concerned in this discussion take an analyzed inventory in order that he may be ready to give an answer for every soul entrusted to him, lest the accusation of being unfaithful in any one department of our work be made against us with some show of justice.
