

Three Books for a Lutheran School

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The heritage of classical Lutheran education is rooted in two branches of the seven liberal arts: the quadrivium or fourfold way of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music; and the trivium or threefold way of grammar, logic, and rhetoric. However, the crown jewel of Lutheran identity in the day school is the use of three theological books to cast a Lutheran perspective on our understanding of the seven liberal arts: the Bible, the catechism, and the hymnal. This essay will describe the pastoral use of these three books for the Lutheran school, using the worship life of my church's day school as a case study.

The use of the Bible in public worship is guided by a Lutheran lectionary. I use the one-year series in the *Lutheran Service Book* because it annually repeats sacred texts, has a lively legacy in Lutheran Orthodoxy, and is sorely needed by the many students in our day school who do not hear these pericopes on Sunday morning. It is temptation for pastors and teachers to read unreasonably short lessons in school chapels or even to skip the reading of the Scriptures altogether and proceed directly to the object lesson. However, since faith comes by hearing, I believe that it is good pastoral practice to read the entire pericope to their ears (e.g., Matthew 21:1–9 for Advent I), reserving all commentary for its rightful place in the sermon.

Preaching to young children is a challenge because of their limited attention span and vocabulary. This concern probably explains the object lessons that I have witnessed, most regretfully the use of the song “So Long, Farewell!” from “The Sound of Music” as a hinge to Jesus’ Farewell Discourse in John’s Gospel! However, the quantum intellectual leap from the secular object to the sacred text requires abstract thinking, an intellectual ability that normally develops around age twelve. Yet the hearers of mainline children’s sermons are usually under the age of twelve. The motto of Concordia Theological Seminary from the Pastoral Epistles, “Preach the Word!” (2 Timothy 4:2), reminds and inspires me to stand in the pulpit, to wear the usual vestments of the minor office, and to preach a short and simple sermon of Law and Gospel.

The teachings of the Bible are summarized in children's terms in the catechism, a book that must be incorporated into the school chapel. "A Form for Opening and Closing Christian Schools" (*TLH* 50–52) is modeled on the catechetical vespers of early Lutheranism and prescribes a catechism lesson between the Collect and the Scripture lesson. I choose a short and simple catechism lesson from the most basic texts of the catechism. For example, an appropriate catechism lesson for Advent I is the Second Petition ("Thy kingdom come") because it offers a Law handle based on the false expectations of the Palm Sunday crowd and a Gospel handle based on the right expectations of a kingdom under the cross. We learn the catechism lesson at the prescribed place in the liturgy and repeat it several times throughout the sermon, thereby drumming into the ears of the faithful all that they truly need to know for their salvation.

The hymnal provides liturgy and hymns to give doxological expression to the doctrine in the Bible and catechism. In addition to "A Short Form" in *TLH*, there are also several daily offices (Matins, Vespers, etc.) in *LSB*. I cannot stress enough the ancient maxim, "repetition is the mother of learning." Pick one liturgy, learn it by heart, and pray it repeatedly. Picking one liturgy encourages stability and the use of the memory. Learning the liturgy by heart helps to incorporate non-readers into the liturgy. Praying it repeatedly fosters liturgical learning for life, especially if these principles are reinforced by the rituals of the liturgy, such as making the sign of the cross. To take a lead from Proverbs, "Train up the children in the liturgical way that they should go, and when they are old, they will not depart from it."

Hymns should be chosen from official LCMS hymnals (*TLH*, *LW*, and *LSB*) according to text, tune, and context. Texts should be evaluated by their theology, tunes by their appropriateness to the theology in the text, and the context according to the capabilities of the students and the season of the church year. Of inestimable help in this regard is the booklet, "Singing the Faith: A graded and seasonal approach to learning Lutheran Hymns and Liturgy" by Richard and Barbara Resch (Concordia 2003). For example, one choice for non-readers for Advent I is the refrain of "Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel." The readers could sing the entire hymn, while the non-readers join in the refrain. The teaching of the hymn will require a competent church musician, pastoral visits to the classrooms, and cooperation from the teachers. But the rewards for the church and school are beyond measure.

As the pastor uses three books for the Lutheran school, he should ask himself two ongoing questions for evaluation: (1) Is the liturgy done well? and (2) Do the students understand what is going on? The obstacles may be numerous, but as the pastor brings these three books to the school, he knows that the Good Shepherd is gently tending His flock through the work of the pastor. It is through the pastor's reading and preaching of the Scriptures that Christ shares the good news of His cross and resurrection. It is through the pastor's instruction in the catechism that the Good Shepherd leads the flock beside the still waters. And it is through the pastor's liturgical leadership that Christ incorporates His sheep into a high and holy doxology to Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit.

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