

---

# KATEKŌMEN

---

*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without  
wavering. — Hebrews 10:4*

---

THE JOURNAL OF  
GREENVILLE PRESBYTERIAN  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

---

*Garry J. Moes, Editor*

Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Taylors, South Carolina

Dr. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., President

---

---

MARTIN LUTHER

*LETTER TO THE MAYORS AND  
ALDERMEN OF ALL THE CITIES OF  
GERMANY IN BEHALF OF CHRISTIAN  
SCHOOLS*

AND

*SERMON ON THE DUTY OF SENDING  
CHILDREN TO SCHOOL*

IN

*LUTHER ON EDUCATION*

---

By Bryan Prouty

## INTRODUCTION

In Protestant countries, Luther has had a monumental influence on education; perhaps second to none. More than anything else, the Reformation was a re-discovery of the Bible. During the Reformation, once again, the Bible was elevated to its place of authority. *Sola Scriptura* meant the Bible was the only rule for faith and life. Biblical literacy was, therefore, at the heart of the Reformation and at the heart of everything Luther taught concerning education. Through Luther's influence, schools proliferated throughout Germany and became a significant factor in the spread of the gospel. Schools, however, also through Luther's influence, have become the most effective enemy of the gospel throughout Europe and America. This paper will first examine biblical principles of education and then evaluate Luther's writings against these principles.

## BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF EDUCATION

---

Beginning in Genesis, God reveals a picture of His design for educating children. In Genesis 18:18, God asked, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?" The answer was no, as God explained in verse 19, "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him." In this passage, God told Abraham His purposes. God had called Abraham out of the nations and into a covenant relationship. Because of this special covenant relationship, God intended that Abraham know the ways of the Lord and that he convey that knowledge to his children. God's judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah, in contrast with His faithfulness to Abraham, attested to His goodness in judgment and blessing. God taught Abraham, and then commanded him to teach his children, with the objective that they might "keep the way of

the Lord." Two principles of education are found in this verse, and are confirmed throughout the Bible. First, education's purpose is to glorify God by teaching the next generation to "keep the way of the Lord." Second, education is carried out from father to son, from generation to generation.

Deuteronomy 6 teaches these same principles by commanding fathers to teach the words of God to their children.

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

The point of this passage is that a father educates his children diligently throughout the course of life, in the morning and evening, during the work of the day, and in the house. Everything seen through the eyes must be seen through the lens of God's Word. All work of the hands must be guided by God's Word. The man of God remembers God's Word when he goes out and when he comes home. Deuteronomy 6:24 describes a specific question and answer form of education. When their children ask concerning God's testimonies, statutes, and judgments, fathers are to answer, "The Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day." Instruction is for the glory of God, so that children will observe His statutes and fear the Lord.

The Fifth Commandment, Psalm 78, Psalm 119, Psalm 127, and Proverbs expand on these two themes. In the New Testament, Ephesians 6 teaches the same principles.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." And you, fathers, do not provoke your

children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-4).

Children are commanded to honor father and mother, and fathers are commanded to raise their children in the training and admonition of the Lord. There is a mutual responsibility established in this verse, fathers teach their children to know, trust, and obey the Lord, and children honor their father and mother. A key word in this verse is "but." This word highlights the contrast involved in raising children. Parents will either bring their children up in the training and admonition of the Lord, or they will provoke them to wrath; it is one or the other. Children know that education is a central part of their preparation for adulthood. Whoever teaches them will shape them and, thereby, earn their loyalty.

The apostle Paul described his relationship with Timothy as one of a father to a son. In 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, Paul said, "You know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." Paul described a father's actions in exactly the terms of Genesis 18; a father exhorts, comforts, and charges his own children, so that they will "walk worthy of God." It was by practicing this pattern, that Paul presumed to call Timothy his son.

Especially telling is Proverbs 17:25, "A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him." This verse warns parents of the consequences of raising a fool. Notice that the father and mother bear the grief, not the civil magistrate, the church, or the school system. Responsibility and penalty go together. Children raised to fear the Lord bring happiness, but children brought up to be fools bring grief. It is the fool who says in his heart, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1).

Psalm 127 paints a vivid picture of the duty to shape and mold children unto the Lord and for His purposes.

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate (Psalm 127:3-5).

As the Lord's gift, children are to be dedicated to the Lord. As arrows, they are sent forth into the world to accomplish a purpose. God-fearing children go forth to accomplish the purpose of glorifying God. Fathers bear the responsibility for molding and shaping their arrows to fear the Lord before sending them into the world. In this way, fathers "shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate."

Two principles emerge in the Old and New Testaments. First, education must have the primary goal of bringing glory to God by passing the faith from generation to generation. Education must be centered on God. Second, education of children is primarily a family responsibility and must, therefore, be parent-directed. Education must be centered in the home. These two principles comprise the goal and method of biblical education.

## MARTIN LUTHER ON EDUCATION

---

Luther's educational writings describe all areas of education, governance, funding, curriculum, and methods of instruction. His two primary works are, *Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen of all the Cities of Germany in Behalf of Christian Schools (Letter)*, and *Sermon on the Duty of Sending Children to School (Sermon)*. Although following similar lines of argumentation, the *Letter* focused more on civil issues, while the *Sermon* focused more on ecclesiastical issues. In these works, Luther argued that parents are biblically responsible to educate their children, however, because in Germany, parents were unable and unwilling, and because both state and church depended on educated adults, therefore, the civil

magistrates of Germany must govern the schools and compel attendance. Luther's recommendations for university reform in *An Open Letter to The Christian Nobility*, are not covered in this paper.

### PARENTS ARE BIBLICALLY RESPONSIBLE TO EDUCATE THEIR CHILDREN

After presenting the deplorable condition of schools in Germany, the excellent opportunity afforded by the light of the Reformation, and especially the availability of the Bible, Luther described what he called, "the highest of all" considerations, "namely, God's command which through Moses so often urges and enjoins that parents instruct their children."<sup>1</sup> Luther argued from three Scriptures, Psalm 78:5, "For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children," Exodus 20:12, "Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you," and Deuteronomy 32:7, "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you." Thus, parents are directed to their children, and children are directed to their parents. Luther said it was a great sin to neglect this duty, "In my judgment there is no other outward offense that in the sight of God so heavily burdens the world, and deserves such heavy chastisement, as the neglect to educate children."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, said Luther, "It is indeed a sin and shame that we must be aroused and incited to the duty of educating our children and of considering their

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen of all the Cities of Germany in Behalf of Christian Schools," in *Luther on Education; Including a Historical Introduction, and a Translation of the Reformer's Two Most Important Educational Treatises*, by F. V.N. Painter, (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publican Society, 1889) <http://books.google.com/books?id=M1beS3rqawIC> (accessed 9/26/2011) 168.

<sup>2</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 168.

highest interests."<sup>3</sup> Luther thought parents should do this naturally, but he saw a great neglect of the duty in Germany. As Luther considered the plight of uneducated children, he finally lamented, "O eternal woe to the world!"<sup>4</sup>

### PARENTS ARE UNWILLING AND UNABLE TO EDUCATE THEIR CHILDREN

However, said Luther, parents were unwilling and unable to fulfill this God given duty. Luther offered three arguments to support his assertion. "In the first place," said Luther, "there are some who are so lacking in piety and uprightness that they would not do it if they could." These parents "harden themselves against their own offspring."<sup>5</sup> Second, Luther argued, "the great majority of parents are unqualified for it, and do not understand how children should be brought up and taught."<sup>6</sup> Finally, "even if parents were qualified and willing to do it themselves, yet on account of other employments and household duties they have no time for it."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, in Luther's experience, education by parents, "where it is carried to the highest point, and is attended with success, it results in nothing more than that the learners, in some measure, acquire a forced external propriety of manner; in other respects they remain dunces."<sup>8</sup> Thus the problem, parents are commissioned to train their children, but are unable to carry out their educational commission. Although this could have been solved by private tutors, said Luther, he observed that it "would be too expensive for

---

<sup>3</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 168.

<sup>4</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 170.

<sup>5</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 171.

<sup>6</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 171.

<sup>7</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 172.

<sup>8</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 188.

persons of ordinary means."<sup>9</sup> For Luther, the end of this line of reasoning was, "necessity requires us to have teachers for public schools."<sup>10</sup>

### THE CIVIL MAGISTRATES MUST TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SCHOOLS

Given the deplorable state of education in Germany, and the failure of parents, Luther implored the princes and magistrates of Germany to take up the task. Luther instructed the magistrates that this task was not optional, but a duty before God:

If parents neglect it? Who shall attend to it then? Shall we therefore let it alone, and suffer the children to be neglected? How will the mayors and council excuse themselves, and prove that such a duty does not belong to them?<sup>11</sup>

Significantly, at this point, Luther did not turn the German princes to the Bible, but to ancient Rome. "In ancient Rome," Luther observed, "the boys were so brought up that at the age of fifteen, eighteen, twenty, they were masters not only of the choicest Latin and Greek, but also of the liberal arts."<sup>12</sup> This allowed the young men of Rome to enter the army or hold a governmental position immediately after their scholastic training. "As a result," said Luther, "their cause prospered; they had capable and trained men for every position."<sup>13</sup> In this conclusion, Luther reflected the Renaissance spirit of the age in which he lived. It is clear that under the rule of the Catholic Church, literacy and the Scriptures were intentionally withheld from the common man. Compared to the dominion of popes, priests, and monasteries, Roman education looked attractive. Based on the example of Rome, Luther appealed to the magistrates' duty for the welfare of their cities:

---

<sup>9</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 172.

<sup>10</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 172.

<sup>11</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 171.

<sup>12</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 172.

<sup>13</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 173.

Therefore it will be the duty of the mayors and council to exercise the greatest care over the young. For since the happiness, honor, and life of the city are committed to their hands, they would be held recreant before God and the world, if they did not, day and night, with all their power, seek its welfare and improvement.<sup>14</sup>

---

### SCHOOLS BENEFIT THE GOVERNMENT

---

Luther spent considerable effort demonstrating the proposition: Government depends on educated men, therefore, government has a duty to educate men. Luther said, "This consideration is of itself sufficient, namely, that society, for the maintenance of civil order and the proper regulation of the household, needs accomplished and well-trained men and women."<sup>15</sup> Based on Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, Luther claimed, "Since then it is certain that civil government is a divine ordinance, an office and institution necessary for men in the present life, it is easy to see that God does not design that it should perish." Therefore, since government is instituted by God, it must assure its own proper execution and perpetuation through education. Luther said this duty was particularly true since government enforced law.<sup>16</sup>

---

### EVERYONE SHOULD FUND SCHOOLS

---

Luther argued that because all people benefitted from a well educated populace, all people ought to fund it. First, Luther compared educational expenses to other governmental expenses:

If it is necessary, dear sirs, to expend annually such great sums for firearms, roads, bridges, dams and countless similar items, in order that a city may enjoy temporal

---

<sup>14</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 173.

<sup>15</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 186.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Luther, "Sermon on the Duty of Sending Children to School," in *Luther on Education; Including a Historical Introduction, and a Translation of the Reformer's Two Most Important Educational Treatises*, by F. V.N. Painter, (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publican Society, 1889) <http://books.google.com/books?id=M1beS3rqawIC> (accessed 9/26/2011) 236.

peace and prosperity, why should not at least as much be devoted to the poor, needy youth, so that we might engage one or two competent men to teach school?<sup>17</sup>

Education is at least as valuable as these other governmental functions, and should be funded appropriately. Furthermore, because the Reformation had relieved people of so many ecclesiastical expenses, they ought to devote some portion of the money saved to education.

Formerly he was obliged to give up so much money and property for indulgences, masses, vigils, endowments, testaments, anniversaries, mendicants, brotherhoods, pilgrimages, and other like humbug; but now that he is rid by the grace of God of all that robbing and giving, he ought, out of gratitude to God and for His glory, to give a part of that amount for schools in which to train the poor children, which would indeed be a good and precious investment.<sup>18</sup>

---

#### SCHOOLS BENEFIT THE CHURCH, BUSINESS, AND ADD TO PERSONAL ENJOYMENT

---

In his *Sermon*, Luther wrote concerning the spiritual and temporal benefits and penalties afforded the church through schools. Luther wrote, "It is certain and true that God has instituted the office of the ministry with His own blood and death," and that this office must be "continued till the day of judgment."<sup>19</sup> Parents, therefore, should not neglect providing well educated children for the future benefit of the church and gospel. Luther sent his sermon to ministers throughout Germany precisely so they would use it to promote schools. Luther himself preached this sermon several times. Luther pointed to the benefits of schools for technical professions such as medicine, and for merchants who must conduct trade throughout the world. Finally, Luther pointed to the personal enjoyment inherent in learning.

---

<sup>17</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 186.

<sup>18</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 166.

<sup>19</sup> Luther, "Sermon," in *Luther on Education* 211.

I will not here speak of the pleasure a scholar has, apart from any office, in that he can read at home all kinds of books, talk and associate with learned men, and travel and transact business in foreign lands.<sup>20</sup>

## THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT MUST COMPEL SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

---

Given these many benefits, Luther concluded, "I maintain that the civil authorities are under obligation to compel the people to send their children to school, especially such as are promising."<sup>21</sup> Luther presented two, lesser to the greater, arguments establishing civil government's duty to compel school attendance.

First,

IF: "The government can compel such citizens as are fit for military service to bear spear and rifle, to mount ramparts, and perform other martial duties in time of war,"

THEN: "how much more has it a right to compel the people to send their children to school, because in this case we are warring with the devil, whose object it is secretly to exhaust our cities and principalities of their strong men."<sup>22</sup>

Second,

IF: "The Turk does differently, and takes every third child in his empire to educate for whatever he pleases,"

THEN: "How much more should our rulers require children to be sent to school, who, however, are not taken from their parents, but are educated for their own and the general good, in an office where they have an adequate support."<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, said Luther, "Wherever the government sees a promising boy, let him be sent to school. If the father is poor, let the child be aided with the property of the Church."<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 255.

<sup>21</sup> Luther, "Sermon," in *Luther on Education* 260.

<sup>22</sup> Luther, "Sermon," in *Luther on Education* 260.

<sup>23</sup> Luther, "Sermon," in *Luther on Education* 261.

<sup>24</sup> Luther, "Sermon," in *Luther on Education* 261.

There are many flaws in these arguments. First, military service is not comparable to school attendance. Military attendance applies to adults; school attendance applies to children. The biblical age of eligibility for military service is 20 (Numbers 1:3). A comparable argument would allow government to compel school attendance after age 20. It would be a tyrannical state that compelled adults to education, given sufficient benefit. The context makes clear, though, that Luther was referring to school attendance for children. In which case, he is arguing that a future civil benefit justifies current civil force. This argument commits the fallacy, "What Proves Too Much, Proves Nothing." Marxist governments use the same argument to compel instruction in Marxist doctrine or training children for the collective good. If this argument is valid, no area of life is off limits to government force.

Military service is provided for in the Bible as a civil function. School attendance, on the other hand, is a religious function. In *Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should Be Obeyed (Temporal Authority)*, Luther divided people into the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. Civil magistrates wield the sword of authoritative force only in the kingdom of the world. When civil authority is exercised in spiritual or religious matters, Luther pointed to the harm done to the soul. Luther said, "When a man-made law is imposed upon the soul to make it believe this or that as its human author may prescribe, there is certainly no word of God for it."<sup>25</sup> Luther's argument applies to education, for education has to do with what one believes. No Christian, who holds to the Reformed faith, should tolerate civil government-mandated schools which inculcate Atheism, Catholicism, Unitarianism, Islam, or even liberal Arminianism. In *Temporal Authority*, Luther said,

---

<sup>25</sup> Martin Luther, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should Be Obeyed*, <http://pages.uoregon.edu/sshoemak/323/texts/luther~1.htm> (accessed 9/9/2011)

"Where the temporal authority presumes to prescribe laws for the soul, it encroaches upon God's government and only misleads souls and destroys them."<sup>26</sup>

Another error in Luther's argument was the assumption, "a benefit derived from," implies "an authority over." The civil government certainly derives significant benefit from well educated men. The benefit, however, does not imply a right of compulsion. Civil government has a duty to suppress evil. This is the means by which civil government preserves a society where people live in peace and the gospel is proclaimed. The church has a duty to proclaim the Word of God, administer the sacraments, and exercise church discipline. These are the means whereby the church promotes a society where people live in peace and the gospel is proclaimed. Parents have a duty to raise God-fearing children. It is the means whereby they promote a society where people live in peace and the gospel is proclaimed. Every individual person has a duty to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation and to obey God's Word. These are the means whereby every person promotes a society where people live in peace and the gospel is proclaimed. In all these areas, God is glorified. If civil government has a right to compel education for children because of the benefits it derives, then the government equally has a right to compel the church to proclaim the gospel, or to compel faith in people. If there is a right conferred by the benefit of education, then there is a right conferred by the benefit derived from proper discipline or any other aspect of raising children. All these activities contribute to the preservation of government. Modern governments have not missed this lesson. Today, government regulates more and more aspects of child training. God, however, has wisely given different responsibility to different institutions. A failure on the part of civil government to suppress evil does not convey a right to vigilantism. The church is not allowed to enforce laws, or

---

<sup>26</sup> Luther, *Temporal Authority*

educate children, even though a benefit is derived. Parents must educate their children and train them in the fear of God because God commands it. God's commands always result in good.

Luther placed great emphasis on the benefits which education offers civil and church government. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Painter characterized Luther, he said, "The two great reasons always prominent in Luther's mind for the maintenance of schools were the welfare of the Church and the needs of the State. Around these two central thoughts may be grouped nearly all that he wrote on education."<sup>27</sup> This is unfortunate, because Luther wrote of more than these benefits, however, taken as a whole, the emphasis on civil and ecclesiastical benefit cannot be missed. Luther erred when he assigned educational responsibility to the civil government for this is not the teaching of Scripture. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, this emphasis was so entrenched that Painter, commenting on state education, could say, "The best theory of civil society requires that popular schools . . . should be fully subject to the civil and political power."<sup>28</sup>

Luther's observation that parents were unable and unwilling to educate their children applies equally well to the civil government and the church. Conditions of ignorance, apathy, and selfishness are conditions of sinful human nature. All institutions are equally subject to them. Although in Luther's day, the civil government appeared to be the most able to educate the populace in a biblical manner, the opposite condition is equally evident in history. The state has often been the most godless of institutions. Neither is the church immune from sin, as the reign of the Catholic Church and modern liberalism demonstrate. Despite its failings, God vested the family with the authority to train children.

---

<sup>27</sup> Painter, *Luther on Education* 122.

<sup>28</sup> Painter, *Luther on Education* 36.

Where Luther deviated from this standard, he deviated from Scripture. Luther certainly upheld the God-centered principle of education. This is the greatness of his educational writings. However, he erred in his failure to uphold the parent-directed principle. On the whole, Luther's writings in this area are more pragmatic than scriptural. Indeed, Luther's educational writings contradict his other writings concerning the limits on civil authority. Unfortunately, Luther set a precedent for Protestant countries. Commenting on Luther's influence, Painter said, "Thus Protestantism . . . placed in the service of [state] education *the most effective stimulus and the most powerful interest that can be brought to bear upon men* [emphasis added]."<sup>29</sup> Schools in the hands of the godly are a great tool for the propagation of the gospel; schools in the hands of the godless are an equally great tool for the destruction of faith.

In Luther's defense, it should be noted that he faced an illiterate world with the Roman Catholic Church threatening to reverse the Reformation through whatever means necessary. The Reformation depended for its lifeblood on a knowledge of the Bible, and thus, literacy was an essential ingredient in the establishment of Protestant churches. Luther was still alive after his encounters with the Catholic Church only because he was protected by Prince Frederick. In Luther's day, civil power looked like the only force that could counter the Roman Catholic Church. Biblical literacy was certainly the most important means by which the Reformation advanced.

---

<sup>29</sup> Painter, *Luther on Education* 52.

## ROBERT LOUIS DABNEY'S CRITIQUE OF GOVERNMENT EDUCATION

---

Robert Louis Dabney effectively argued against government-directed education. Dabney said, "Tuition in Christianity is essential to all education which is worth the name."<sup>30</sup> This includes "the absolute necessity of Bible instruction."<sup>31</sup> Dabney argued that, if Christian schools and private education required Bible instruction then, "Why do not the state schools? Its necessity is argued from the principles which are of universal application to beings who have souls. . . . Alas! The answer is: The right conclusion cannot be applied to state schools."<sup>32</sup> Dabney's argument was that Scripture is the one element absolutely essential to right education, however, being secular, state schools are effectively disabled from performing this essential function. Dabney stated the obvious conclusion, "The state cannot educate and should not profess to [educate]."<sup>33</sup> This conclusion follows directly from Christ's words, "He who is not with Me is against Me" (Matthew 12:30). The Christian faith is all-encompassing to every area of faith and life. Education that does not teach Christianity, by definition, teaches against Christianity. Dabney concluded that state-directed education must result in one of three conditions. The first option is for government to "force the religion of the majority on the children of the minority of the people."<sup>34</sup> This would be acceptable to Christians only so long as they are in the majority. Christians must obey Christ, not the majority, in matters of faith. The second option allows communities of

---

<sup>30</sup> Robert Louis Dabney, *Discussions*, vol. 3. *Philosophical*, ed. C. R. Vaughn (Mexico, MO: Crescent Book House, 1897) <http://www.archive.org/details/discussions03dabn> (accessed 12/5/2011) 267.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Louis Dabney, *Discussions*, vol. 4. *Secular*, ed. C. R. Vaughn (Mexico, MO: Crescent Book House, 1897) <http://www.archive.org/details/discussions04dabn> (accessed 12/5/2011) 211.

<sup>32</sup> Dabney, *Discussions* vol. 4, 211.

<sup>33</sup> Dabney, *Discussions* vol. 4, 212.

<sup>34</sup> Dabney, *Discussions* vol. 3, 264.

different religions to form their own state funded schools. This option requires some citizens to fund educational "opinions which they regard as false and destructive."<sup>35</sup> The final option removes all religious reference from education. Of this option, Dabney said that no Christian could advocate such a plan, indeed, no adherent of any religion could support it. Such a plan implicitly teaches the irrelevance of religion, and thus, the irrelevance of God. Therefore, Dabney said, "It is the teaching of the Bible and of sound political ethics that the education of children belongs to the sphere of the family and is the duty of parents."<sup>36</sup>

## LUTHER ON THE CONTENTS OF EDUCATION

---

Implicit in Luther's plan for education is the centrality of the Bible. Luther urged that Greek and Hebrew be taught as the best support for the study and comprehension of the Bible. Luther said, "Since, then, it behooves Christians at all times to use the Bible as their only book and to be thoroughly acquainted with it, especially is it a disgrace and sin at the present day not to learn the languages, when God provides every facility, incites us to study, and wishes to have His word known." According to Luther, knowledge of the ancient languages was essential to preserve the true gospel.<sup>37</sup> History also occupied a central place in Luther's curriculum. He said of history, "History is nothing else than an indication, recollection, and monument of divine works and judgments, showing how God maintains, governs, hinders, advances, punishes, and honors men, according as each one has; deserved good or evil."<sup>38</sup> Luther recommended the value of the Socratic method "as a means of

---

<sup>35</sup> Dabney, *Discussions* vol. 3, 264.

<sup>36</sup> Dabney, *Discussions* vol. 3, 264.

<sup>37</sup> Luther, "Sermon," in *Luther on Education* 176.

<sup>38</sup> Luther, *Luther on Education* 153.

awakening the mind and impressing truth,"<sup>39</sup> which may explain his focus on the catechetical means of teaching scriptural truth. In teaching the catechism Luther focused on understanding, "Let them be questioned from article to article, and show what each signifies and how they understand it."<sup>40</sup>

What else did Luther prescribe for the schools of Germany? He said, "As for myself, if I had children and were able, I would have them learn not only the languages and history, but also singing, instrumental music, and the whole course of mathematics."<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Luther said, "My idea is that boys should spend an hour or two a day in school, and the rest of the time work at home, learn some trade and do whatever is desired, so that study and work may go on together, while the children are young and can attend to both."<sup>42</sup> These are among the most beautiful of Luther's educational writings. They should inspire all parents, for here, Luther is thinking like a father. He was imagining his own children and his plans for them. It is not hard to see Luther's passions in life come through in his aspirations for his, yet to be, children. This is how all fathers should view education, and the kind of dedication all fathers should display toward their children. These few sentences demonstrate the biblical principle of parent-directed education. Parents need not conduct every aspect of their children's education. However, they must plan, encourage, and direct education for a God-centered effect on their children's lives. They must conduct enough of it themselves so that they understand their child's strengths and weakness and maintain the mutual duties of honor and training. Parents should discuss with their children their sense of call and purpose in life. This view of education reveals another purpose for education

---

<sup>39</sup> Luther, *Luther on Education* 147.

<sup>40</sup> Luther, *Luther on Education* 147.

<sup>41</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 190.

<sup>42</sup> Luther, "Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen," in *Luther on Education* 191.

itself, that is, to enable parents to teach their own children so that they can pass on the faith from generation to generation. Although Luther clearly adopted this purpose for himself, he failed to relate it in his writings. Prior to the Reformation, the vast majority of women were not educated. Luther called on Germany to educate girls as well as boys, so that they might fully receive and comprehend the gospel. Women must rely on Scripture as their only rule of faith, and so they must be equipped to access the Scriptures for themselves. The duties of motherhood are a vital reason to educate women. Mothers bear, nurture, and train their children. When important aspects of training are transferred from mothers to state schools, a part of the nurturing bond is transferred with them. Mothers should be educated to train their children in literacy and the Bible as well as in domestic duties. The prevalence of women in education attests to their skills in this type of training, as well as their God-given affinity for it.

The problem with state-directed education is that it is planned and directed by the state for its own benefits and priorities. By relieving parents of their duty to plan, direct, and implement education, the state hinders the mutual duty of honor and training between children and parents. This principle is equally true of church-directed education. When Luther looked at his own family, he beautifully demonstrated the biblical principles of education. Unfortunately, when he looked at the deplorable state of education in the midst of the Reformation, he saw a need for the opposite principle of state control.

---

## CONCLUSION

---

In Martin Luther, are found the best and worst influences on education. The priority Luther placed on education, especially the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers which opened education to all people, has resulted in great blessings. His ideas concerning

curriculum continue to benefit schools even today. However, his plan for state control of schools was not scriptural and thus led to the destruction of true education seen today. At a time when protection from the Catholic Church was of primary concern, and the German princes provided that protection, Luther could not foresee the consequences of his advocacy for state-directed education. As civil government became separated from the church, it had to find a non-theological foundation for its educational authority. It found it in principles of natural law. In 1889, Painter described the new foundation:

But a leading benefit is the new basis upon which education itself has been placed. A true science of education has been established, the principles of which are found, not in some theological tenet, but in human nature . . . The effort is made to develop the native physical, mental, and moral powers in the direction of a perfect manhood.<sup>43</sup>

A more anti-Christian principle of education cannot be found. This is the legacy of state-controlled education.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Luther, Martin and Franklin V. N. Painter, *Luther on Education; Including a Historical Introduction, and a Translation of the Reformer's Two Most Important Educational Treatises*. by F. V. N Painter. Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1889. <http://books.google.com/books?id=M1beS3rqawIC> (accessed 9/26/2011)

Dabney, Robert Louis, *Discussions*, vol. 3. *Philosophical*, ed. C. R. Vaughn (Mexico, MO: Crescent Book House, 1897) <http://www.archive.org/details/discussions03dabn> (accessed 12/5/2011).

Dabney, Robert Louis, *Discussions*, vol. 4. *Secular*, ed. C. R. Vaughn (Mexico, MO: Crescent Book House, 1897) <http://www.archive.org/details/discussions04dabn> (accessed 12/5/2011).

---

<sup>43</sup> Painter, *Luther on Education* 56-57.

Luther, Martin, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should Be Obeyed*,  
<http://pages.uoregon.edu/sshoemak/323/texts/luther~1.htm> (accessed  
9/9/2011)

Note: Pagination of the electronic documents in Adobe Digital Editions was difficult to follow. Page numbers listed may be + or - a page.