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The Social Function of Schools in the Lutheran Reformation in Germany

Gerald Strauss

One of the most interesting aspects of the German Reformation for us to ponder is that of the educational reconstruction attempted in all Lutheran states in the sixteenth century. Churchmen and politicians acted in close collaboration, first in response to the reformist zeal charging the Lutheran movement in its heroic years, later in meeting the procedural obligations laid down for officials in the established Reformation's institutional structure. They agreed on fundamental objectives and shared a coherent body of pedagogical suppositions. They had high hopes for the power of education to direct thought and mold behavior. In the new church-state symbiosis they recognized unprecedented opportunities for reform and were eager to act on them. For a time, religion and politics moved in unison toward the enactment of a program of schooling intended in its overall purpose to conform the young to approved patterns of evangelical and civic rectitude.

Our questions concerning a past system of schooling are no different from those we ask about one in the present. What does a society wish its schools to accomplish, and what is, in fact, being accomplished? Who speaks for society in establishing goals? Have those who set the objectives formulated a policy? A program? A feasible program? One to be implemented by schools adequate to the purpose? A purpose representing concrete interests? Of identifiable social groups? With what responses from these groups? And with what consequences—in the short and in the long term—for society itself?

The first thing to note in approaching the sixteenth-century Lutheran schooling scene with these questions is that the evidence is available for supplying answers. (This essay's focus on Lutheran regions should not

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be taken to imply that Catholic and Reformed Germany pursued educational goals essentially different from those of the evangelicals.) Our sources may not suffice for a fully differentiated social history of early Protestant education; but about objectives and performance, and about the evaluation of these, we are very well informed.¹

Who, then, spoke for society in the making of educational policy in sixteenth-century Germany, and who acted in the implementation of it? Governing authorities did, and the administrative bodies appointed by them. In other words—to use the correct terminology—*Obrigkeit, potestates*, as in *Jedermann sey untherthan der Oberkeit, die gewalt über ihn hat* and *omnis anima potestatibus sublimioribus subdita sit*,² that is to say, sovereign rulers possessing *Herrschaft*, dominion and power, and the executive agents and agencies appointed by them to exercise dominion and power. With respect to schools and schooling, the purview of territorial and urban governments in Germany was fixed at an early juncture in the chain of events leading to the established Reformation. This assignment, or self-assignment, happened because governments, in the decades following the late 1520s, took on the job of directing ecclesiastical affairs in their respective domains, and education had traditionally been included among ecclesiastical responsibilities. But this assumption of control did not happen without due consideration being given to the problems at issue in this turn of events.

In principle, instructing the young was the duty and the right of parents. By necessity, however, this obligation now fell to the state. This was because individual parents could only in exceptional cases be relied upon to perform competently the vital—indeed, it was thought to be a fateful—task of child rearing. Luther was his usual emphatic and uncompromising self on this point. “The common man can do nothing,” he wrote in 1524, as he urged magistrates to maintain and govern schools. “He [the common man] doesn’t have the means for it, he doesn’t want to do it, and he doesn’t know how.”³ The experience of the early 1520s, particularly the failure of the community of Leisnig to appropriate sufficient funds—and Luther seems for a time to have held high hopes for Leisnig as the model for a reformation on a communal base—had per-

¹ For a general bibliographical introduction to this subject see Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore, 1978), especially the notes to chapter 1.

² From Luther's German translation of the New Testament and revision of the Vulgate, *D. Martin Luthers Deutsche Bibel (D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [from now on WA])* 7: 69 and 5: 645.

³ *An die Ratsherren aller Städte* (1524), WA 15: 44.

sueded Luther that voluntary, participatory procedures were inadequate to the gigantic task of reform.⁴

Ordinary people being unqualified to undertake their own children's upbringing (Luther included *auffzihen* among the tasks for which he held people generally unsuited) and instruction, government was the only existing alternative. Hence Luther's exhortation in 1526 to his prince that he must act as "guardian-general of the young"—"*oberster furmund der jugent*"—in holding citizens to the support of schools,⁵ a formulation later sharpened by Melancthon to "government as a common father."⁶ In 1530 Luther came out in favor of the use of political force to ensure general school attendance,⁷ and this is the position adopted officially in the *Kirchenordnungen*—ecclesiastical constitutions or ordinances—through which governing authorities in Lutheran territories and cities regulated for their respective domains all aspects of church and religion, including schooling. In these immensely prolix documents we see church and state acting jointly, with the temporal part clearly dominant. As early as 1528, Bugenhagen's ordinances for Braunschweig and Hamburg were confirmed and authorized by the town councils of these cities,⁸ and subsequent ecclesiastical constitutions were always published under the names of the territory's reigning prince: "Christoph, by the Grace of God Duke of Württemberg, our declaration of doctrines and ceremonies as they must be believed, kept, and obeyed in the churches of our principality."⁹ *Schulordnungen*—enabling charters setting up the schools in a given realm—were in nearly all instances appended to these church constitutions. They placed the supervision of all educational institutions firmly in the hands of prince and magistrates, who were the owners and wielders of the instruments of public power.

It is only when seen from the vantage point of a much later period of conflicts between church and state, and between individual rights and state power over the control of education, that this amalgamation of schooling and political sovereignty seems ominous.¹⁰ The sixteenth cen-

⁴ For citations of all relevant documents on this point see Werner Reininghaus, *Elternstand, Obrigkeit, und Schule bei Luther* (Heidelberg, 1969), 5.

⁵ Luther to Elector Johann, 22 Nov. 1526, WA *Briefwechsel* 4: 134.

⁶ "Die obrigkeit als gemeiner vater." Quoted in Werner Reininghaus, ed., *Evangelische Kirche und Elternrecht* (Lüneburg, 1961), 19.

⁷ *Eine Predigt, dass man Kinder zur Schulen halten solle* (1530), WA 30 II: 586.

⁸ Reinhold Vormbaum, *Die evangelischen Schulordnungen des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Gütersloh, 1860), 8, 18. Cited from now on as Vormbaum.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁰ For the German debate on this issue from about 1800 see Erwin Stein, Wilfried Joest, and Hans Dombois, *Elternrecht: Studien zu seiner rechtsphilosophischen und evangelisch-theologischen Grundlegung* (Heidelberg, 1958).

ture recognized no *Elternrecht*, no right—statutory or customary—of parents to have their children instructed in private, as opposed to public, schools or to have in some other important way a voice in what their offspring were to learn. Lacking legal grounds on which to challenge state and church control of schooling, opponents had no position from which to wage resistance—except, of course, passively, by indifference and apathy, the traditional weapons of the weak. In any case, nothing written by the educational theorists of the day suggested that formal learning was, or could be, anything other than a blessing bestowed by an *Obrigkeit* upon those privileged to receive it. This is how it was represented in official pronouncements, notably in a host of *Schulpredigten*, sermons preached in church to remind fathers and mothers—I quote the words of Werner Reininghaus—“of their parental responsibility and to awaken in them an attitude of grateful acceptance of the opportunities created for them by the governing authorities.”¹¹ Without posing it explicitly, the question of who should bear primary responsibility for the child’s education—family or state—was being answered definitively in the early years of the Lutheran era. Moving together toward what Gerhard Oestreich, anticipating the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century German state, has called *Sozialdisziplinierung*,¹² Reformation church and Reformation state seized upon the control of schooling as an efficient and effective way of acting directly on individual subjects for the purpose of instilling in them a lasting sense of their places and duties in the well-ordered society.

Lutheran churchmen and theologians heartily collaborated in this effort. Although the final word always belonged to the temporal authorities, it was to the offices and activities of the ecclesiastics that the actual operation of schools was entrusted. They saw in this assignment a powerful opportunity to put the evangelical Reformation into place. Hence their full-throated affirmation of existing arrangements, as when a group of Rostock University professors, urging the dukes of Mecklenburg to take a stronger hand in the governance of schools, addressed them in the—creatively interpreted—words of Psalm 24: “ye princes lift up your gates, that is to say your churches, schools, cities, and entire governments, that the king of glory may come in, meaning that Christ may be known and honored by the multitude through the doctrine of

¹¹ Werner Reininghaus, *Elternstand* (see note 4), 5.

¹² Throughout in his *Geist und Gestalt des frühmodernen Staates* (Berlin, 1969); and in “Policey und Prudentia civilis . . .” in *Strukturprobleme der frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin, 1890), 367–79. On the concept of *Sozialdisziplinierung* in Oestreich’s work see now Winfried Schulze, “Gerhard Oestreichs Begriff ‘Sozialdisziplinierung in der frühen Neuzeit,’” *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 14 (1987): 265–302.

the holy gospel.” The professors did not fail in this connection to quote Isaiah 49:23 to the effect that “Kings shall be your foster fathers” (*deine pfleger*, in Luther’s translation),¹³ an echo, perhaps, of Melanchthon’s view of “government as a common father.”

The eager and—despite the frustrating job of finding the needed cash—sustained response made by all governments to such open invitations suggests that rulers and their advisers sensed the role schooling might play in the extension of public power over the populace. The results of their efforts were, to be sure, a long way from the virtually absolute administrative control later exercised by eighteenth-century German states through their *Landschulordnungen*, most notably Prussia’s *General-Landschul-Reglement* of 1763. However, looking back in time from this point of observation—in my opinion the correct perspective—one can see things definitely tending in that direction. The clearest evidence of this trend is found in the texts of *Schulordnungen*, many of them long and punctiliously detailed programs declaring the regulations for every level and for every aspect of teaching and learning. The most important of these *Ordnungen* are conveniently available for study in three volumes of texts edited by Reinhold Vormbaum.¹⁴ But a vast number of additional school plans, schedules, and related documents may be found in state and municipal archives, all of them, in their anxious concern for regulating everything and leaving nothing to whim and chance, giving confirmation of the sixteenth-century governing mind’s predisposition to arrange things in a definitive order, to stipulate, regulate, and control.

Organizationally at least, this endeavor must be counted a success. In every German state, primary and secondary schools were built up, enlarged, equipped, ably staffed (more or less), tied together in sequence, and given fully articulated teaching programs and a clear sense of mission. This part of the story of Lutheran education has been told often. By the 1560s and 1570s, something like an integrated school system existed, or was coming into existence, in most of the Lutheran states in the Holy Roman Empire—integrated in the sense that its levels and streams were linked in a coherent structure, and that the educational apparatus as a whole was closely tied in its stated aims and assigned functions to the objectives and operations of the ecclesiastical and political organs of the state.¹⁵

What purpose did this apparatus serve? Luther’s call for *Christliche Schulen* to replace the “donkey stalls and devil’s dens” of his own

¹³ *Monumenta Germaniae Paedagogica* (from now on MGP) 38: 253–54.

¹⁴ *Evangelische Schulordnungen*, 3 vols. (Gütersloh, 1858–64).

¹⁵ Evidence for this development is given in Strauss, *Luther’s House of Learning*, chap.

childhood¹⁶ set a goal without much specificity beyond the exhortation that boys and girls should be trained to play their several parts in upholding God's spiritual and temporal realms.¹⁷ Luther's language and choice of examples on the occasion of this appeal suggest that he was thinking primarily of well-placed townsmen with ambition for their offspring and the means and social connections to speed them on their careers: "the men to govern land and people," as he wrote, "the women to manage the house, children, and servants."¹⁸ From among these circles young men would be taken to staff the proliferating bureaucracies of the expanding Reformation state and church.

Melanchthon's 1528 school ordinance for Saxony made this the official aim of schooling. Schools, he wrote, are "for raising up people who are skilled to teach in the church and govern in the world."¹⁹ Announcing this aim more formally, the *Schulordnung* of Württemberg of 1559—taken as a model by many subsequent ordinances²⁰—makes a preamble of the proposition that "honest, wise, learned, skilled, and God-fearing men are needed to serve in the holy preaching office, in worldly governments, in temporal posts, in administrative offices and households, and . . . schools are God's chosen and rightful instruments for raising up such men."²¹ A rigorous selection process—at least, it was intended to be rigorous—advanced the more clever, or perhaps simply the more compliant, pupils to the upper forms and, from there, to elite schools such as the Saxon *Fürstenschulen* or the Stuttgart *Gymnasium*, and thereafter to university. Instructions to "pick out the most gifted" (*die geschicktesten auswählen*) appear in every *Schulordnung*,²² while "dull heads and slow talents" (*ungeschickte köpfe und ingenia*) are ordered demoted to the vernacular benches at the bottom of the educational edifice, where all lessons were given in German.²³

What was learned in these common schools catering to the undifferentiated pre-teen children of ordinary folk was rudimentary indeed, even when judged by the period's own standards. Württemberg's *Schulordnung* summarizes the German-language curriculum as "prayers and catechism, and in addition some writing and reading for [the pupils'] own use and the public good, also psalm singing and Christian con-

¹⁶ *An die Ratsherren*, 31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Vormbaum, 1.

²⁰ E.g., the *Schulordnung* of the Duchy of Braunschweig 1569; that of Saxony 1580.

²¹ Vormbaum, 68–69.

²² E.g., Saxony 1528. *Ibid.*, 8.

²³ Duchy of Mecklenburg school ordinance for city of Güstrow. MGP 38: 472.

duct.”²⁴ Regulations called for conscientious teaching in these popular schools (“let the schoolmaster teach German writing and reading with as much diligence as is given to the teaching of Latin”²⁵); but the substance of what was taught was very thin, as it was in what learning was imparted to girls: “reading and writing, and if both of these can’t be mastered, at least some writing, the catechism learned by heart, a little figuring, a few psalms to sing,” and “stories from the German Bible.”²⁶ As the Mecklenburg *Schulordnung* summed it up in 1552, “Habituate [girls] to the catechism, to the psalms, to honorable behavior and Christian virtue, and especially to prayer, and make them memorize verses from Holy Scripture so that they may grow up to be Christian and praiseworthy matrons and housekeepers (*Christliche und lobliche matronen und haushälterinnen*).”²⁷ Needless to say, female pupils were kept out of schools offering the kind of learning that fitted a young person for a place in the public world. Poor boys, on the other hand, if born with good heads and agile minds, were—when things went according to plan—marked by observant teachers and, with financial aid from their government, sent to Latin schools to prepare them for careers in the church or the state. The clerical profession seemed especially suitable for boys of modest background. Every territory opened one or several boarding schools for the nurturing of such otherwise wasted talent.²⁸

The greatest effort was given to monitoring the curriculum of the Latin School, the plan of studies designed to bring to maturity the type of man considered most useful to, productive in, and representative of the well-ordered Christian polity. The Latin course was the track laid down for all who were expected to play a leading role in making it work. Several aspects of this rigorous academic shaping process are worth mentioning here. In its contents and in its teaching practice, it was the humanist program, taken over virtually without change except for the inclusion in it of the catechism. But for this addition, the Reformation’s pedagogy appears taken straight from the educational tracts of Vives,

²⁴ Vormbaum, 71.

²⁵ Baden-Durlach school ordinance of 1536. *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁶ *Jungfrauen-Schule* in Wittenberg, 1533. *Ibid.*, 27–28; Braunschweig school ordinance of 1543. *Ibid.*, 50–51.

²⁷ MGP 38: 215.

²⁸ Urban schools generally admitted poor children free of charge “*um Gottes willen*,” e.g., Rostock, 1534. MGP 38: 122. For the care with which poor boys were selected for the pastorate, see the regulations in the Württemberg school ordinance, Vormbaum, 104. It was often stated that *gute und fruchtbare ingenia* are found among the poor as well as the rich: e.g., Vormbaum, 70, 102.

Erasmus, and Johann Sturm.²⁹ Begin serious formal education early in life. Concentrate on language, especially on Latin, which is “a tongue sacred to the learned.” All learning depends on correct pronunciation and on fluency in writing and speaking—Latin, of course. Speech is the best index to the quality of a mind, memory the clearest sign of its power. Superior results are obtained by close imitation of classical models. As Roman and Greek authors offer the best preparation for an intelligent and active life, ancient literature must be the pupil’s steady mental diet.³⁰ The right technique for feeding it to him is by means of ephemerides or commonplace books in which each pupil’s growing stock of knowledge is to be stored for lifelong utilization. Dialectic and rhetoric prepare the mind for putting this accumulation to purposeful use. Method is the key to all effective learning; every step along the educational way must be governed by rules and by close surveillance of the pupil’s—and the teacher’s—adherence to them. When this is done, learning will build in the able pupil to form a mental culture composed in equal parts of *eloquentia*, *sapientia*, and *pietas*.

The finished products of this learning process were men equipped to play leading roles in the organized society emerging out of the turmoil of the early Reformation. To say it in a vivid phrase used by Walter Sohm: “the fully educated graduates of the Latin school were the offerings brought by humanism to the state and to the church.”³¹ In their mentality—a mental cast patiently cultivated during ten or more years of schooling—and in their speech and bearing, they exemplified the intellectual and civic posture deemed appropriate for members of the ruling social group: they embodied the culture of the elite. Their activities in the world were expected to transmit this culture to those destined, like them, to rise to topmost positions in ecclesiastical and political administration. Among those who were not so destined, they would engender

²⁹ Desiderius Erasmus, *De pueris statim ac liberaliter instituendis declamatio* (1529) (*Collected Works of Erasmus* 26 [Toronto, 1985], 295–346); *De recta latini graecique sermonis pronuntiatione dialogus* (1528) (*ibid.*, 365–475); Juan Luis Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis libri quinque* (Antwerp, 1531; English translation by Foster Watson, *Vives: On Education* [Totowa, N.J., 1971]). Johann Sturm’s pedagogical treatises are discussed in Walter Sohm, *Die Schule Johann Sturms und die Kirche Strassburgs* (Munich and Berlin, 1912). Ultimately these treatises are all based on Plutarch’s *De liberis educandis*, translated by Guarino in 1411, and Quintilian’s and Cicero’s books on the education of the orator, the former published by Poggio in 1417, the latter recovered in 1422. An argument for a sharp break between Lutheran curricula and late fifteenth-century humanist educational reforms is made by John N. Miner, “Change and Continuity in the Schools of Late Medieval Nuremberg,” *Catholic Historical Review* 73 (Jan. 1987): 1–22.

³⁰ Latin and Greek authors and titles given in Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, book III, especially chapters 6 and 7.

³¹ Walter Sohm, *Die Schule Johann Sturms*, 92.

respectful esteem and willing deference. In this way—and this is saying only the obvious—schooling operated in the interest of the dominant groups, as an instrument of acculturation.

Without overextending its relevance to the sixteenth century, one can elaborate this line of interpretation and arrive at a number of general propositions concerning education in a hegemonic setting. Schools reflect social divisions and replicate them. They accomplish this stabilization of social stratification by means of streaming. In every stream and at every level, though in varying forms and ways, the reigning ideology is presented as universally valid knowledge, value, and truth. Teachers are trained to accept their role in this system of cultural reproduction. Their success is measured by the pupil's unquestioning adoption of the dominant culture's stock of ideas, as expressed in sanctioned formulae. Access to governing ideas, style, and speech is not restricted to a particular social class; but acculturation to this code promotes a young man, whatever his birth, to the ranks of those who are called to represent it in the larger society. A set of mutually reinforcing pedagogical assumptions links the code to techniques of transmitting it. Education works because all human beings are educable. Its essential purpose is to mold the young into a desirable form, this form being determined by society. The educational process must begin in childhood and must be well advanced before the onset of puberty. Its early phases consist largely of breaking the child's will and setting restraints to his natural inclinations. To do the job properly, all schooling must be public, private education being destructive of common goals. Equally destructive are habits of questioning, criticism, ambivalence, suspended judgment; they must be inhibited. Schooling, therefore, must purvey certainties.³² In its formal procedures, it reflects the existing social order (modified somewhat by desires for its amelioration) and promotes it by accustoming the pupil from the start to hierarchy, authority, and the sanctity of the status quo. Everything done in school serves this purpose in one way or another.

Take grammar as an illustration. Grammar was present from first to last in the classical program, pervading all classes and all subjects. In his *Instruction of the Visitors to the Pastors in Saxony*, which includes a lesson plan for Saxon Latin schools, Melancthon warns that where boys are not "pressed and driven" (*gedrungen und getrieben*) to the study of grammar, "all learning is lost and in vain. For," he continues, "no greater harm can be done to the arts than to fail to accustom the young to grammar."³³ The essence of grammar is, of course, rules—normative

³² For a discussion of the application of these educational aims to the pedagogy of the Reformation, see Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning* chaps. 2–4.

³³ Vormbaum, 7.

and prescriptive rules—and drill. In all the years of a boy's academic development, grammar was therefore his daily routine. When you get to the end of etymology, syntax, and prosody, Melanchthon tells teachers, "start over again, from the beginning."³⁴ One wonders, what was the real object here: deep knowledge of grammar as "the mother and nurse of the other arts,"³⁵ or internalization of a rule-bound discipline as the paradigm of a rule-bound life? Both of these objectives were aimed at, it seems to me, with high hopes and expectations for the second one. The pattern of grammar being fixed and regular, its implantation as the individual's armature of thought was expected to guard against the temptations of whim and will and to recall the imagination to correct and authorized rules so that its tendency to free-wheeling speculation might be counteracted.

As for mastering the content of the curriculum's reading list, this was largely a matter of filling the blank spaces in commonplace books and ephemerides, an easily acquired and—once it was learned—habitual technique of organizing knowledge, and a method useful equally to pedagogues and pupils: to pedagogues trying to control their pupils' comprehension of literature, and to pupils whose future careers in religion, law, and administration demanded a constant recycling of the pieces of excerpted wisdom taken from the canon of authors and filed under approved rubrics.³⁶ Teachers inspected notebooks at regular intervals to ensure that no illicit opinions crept in and no authorized truth was omitted. Uniformity was the salient virtue. "The same books in all schools," directed the Württemberg school ordinance, "none changed or altered in any way, and each to be read at the appointed time as shown in our ordinance, and when finished to be read again from the beginning."³⁷ This regularity was an axiom of humanist pedagogy. It was made explicit in Vives's definition of art as "a collection of universal rules brought together for the purpose of knowing, doing, or producing something."³⁸ Later it was carried to its extreme by the Jesuits. "Nothing maintains the entire discipline so much as observing the rules," says the *Ratio* of

³⁴ *Ibid.* Repeated many times in other ordinances, e.g., Schleswig-Holstein 1542. *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁵ Valentin Trotzendorf in the school ordinance for the Goldberg Gymnasium, 1563. *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁶ For a discussion of this technique see Anton Schindling, *Humanistische Hochschule und freie Reichsstadt: Gymnasium und Akademie in Strassburg 1538–1621* (Wiesbaden, 1977), chap. 5, especially 180–95.

³⁷ Württemberg school ordinance 1559, Vormbaum, 72. For similar sentiments: Hessen 1537 (*Ibid.*, 33), Braunschweig 1569 (MGP 8: 25–26), Pomerania 1563 (Vormbaum, 168), and many more.

³⁸ Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis* I, 3.

1599,³⁹ and this could stand as the motto of the Reformation's whole educational enterprise. "For God is a God of order" it was said, "*ein Gott der ordnung*, who demands that, in school no less than in the other walks of life, all things must be done in the correct and orderly way."⁴⁰

For another example, let us consider religious instruction. To my mind, nothing illustrates better the overall aims of Reformation schooling, and the assumptions on which they stood, namely, that education inculcates certainties and that teaching assures the perpetuation of the status quo by accustoming coming generations to a voluntary acceptance of it. Notions of a conflict between learning and piety never occurred to Reformation educators, who saw no need to raise again the humanists' question whether "arts and erudition hinder the progress of religion."⁴¹ The conviction that they were, in fact, perfectly complementary was implicit in every stated aim of schooling in the Reformation: to teach "learning, the fear of God, and good discipline," to give instruction "above all things in the fear of God and good behavior [*Gottesfurcht und gute Sitten*] and also in the liberal arts and languages,"⁴² to imbue the young with "spirituality, the liberal arts, and honorable manners" (*geistlichkeit, gute künste und ehrliche sitten*).⁴³ "And this is best accomplished," the school ordinance for Mecklenburg directs, when, "along with instruction in liberal arts and languages, pupils memorize the catechism and selected psalms and verses from Scripture."⁴⁴ What was meant in these pronouncements by "fear of God" and "spirituality"? The Württemberg ordinance informs us. "As for the implantation of the fear of God in the boys," it says, "let them sing every morning before lessons, and again every afternoon, the first and last verses of the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*, in Latin, and reverently. And before going home at noon and again in the evening, let them recite from memory a portion of the catechism." These exercises were accompanied by "daily practice in catechism," a weekly catechism exam on Fridays, and attendance at all services followed by a quiz on the sermons heard in church.⁴⁵ An essentially mechanical routine, this regime was expected to lead boys to a

³⁹ "*Disciplinam omnem nihil aequae continet atque observatio regularum.*" *Ratio studiorum* (1599) in MGP 5: 395.

⁴⁰ "*Denn Gott ist ein Gott der ordnung, welcher will, dass es wie in allen Ständen, also auch in Schulenstand, mit Unterweisung der Jugend recht und ordentlich zugehe.*" From school regulations for the city of Wismar, 1644, MGP 44: 84.

⁴¹ Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis* I, chaps. 4, 6.

⁴² From school ordinances for the Duchy of Zweibrücken, 1575, MGP 49: 122; 1581, *ibid.*, 142; 1602, *ibid.*, 159.

⁴³ From visitation ordinance for Mecklenburg, 1541, MGP 38: 141.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁴⁵ Vormbaum, 91–92.

godly disposition, which, the Württemberg ordinance explains, is the prerequisite for *eusserlich Disziplin und Zucht*. Procedures were the same in Saxony⁴⁶ and—or nearly so—in most other Lutheran states. Memorizing scriptural texts was relied upon above any other instructional method, and apparently it was not unusual for model pupils to have a repertoire of fifty or sixty psalms ready for recitation.⁴⁷ Great faith was placed in repeated verbal performance: declaiming aloud, in unison as well as individually and in small groups, prayers, hymns, verses from the New and Old Testaments, above all questions and answers from the catechism.

By the 1530s, in large part owing to the prestige gained by Luther's own catechisms, the catechism had become, certainly the chief, and virtually the sole, instrument of religious instruction in the schools of the German Reformation. From first grade in elementary school, where ABC primers fed straight into the Shorter German Catechism,⁴⁸ to the uppermost class of the *Gymnasium*, where preceptors lectured on the catechism in Greek and Latin, it dominated the curriculum as the pupil's authoritative source of theological knowledge and fixed frame of religious reference. Why this was so is not difficult to understand. Established religion requires experienced, informed guidance: the catechism gave it. The Bible is complex and far from unambiguous: the catechism offered reliable interpretation. It asked all the necessary questions and supplied the correct answers. It made first-hand occupation with Scripture practically unnecessary. The Bible itself became an adjunct to the catechism. This is why so little encouragement was given in the pupil's formal education to individual Bible reading. Most school plans make no mention of it at all. Pupils regularly attended services, of course, and heard the Scripture preached there. But this is the point: preaching was authoritative. Private reading, even when championed as part of a carefully drawn program of studies, was unpredictable in its consequences. This was the lesson responsible Lutherans drew from the events of the mid-1520s. They were determined thereafter to do all that lay in their powers to prevent a recurrence.

Every *Schulordnung* issued during the sixteenth century reflects this resolve. The best hope for prevention of future trouble rested with the catechism. "Because schoolmasters stand *in loco parentis*," states the ordinance of Brandenburg of 1573, "they must devote the greatest care

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 247 (1580).

⁴⁷ See the description given by pastor Georg Zeämann of Kempten, in his *Schulpredigten* of 1618 quoted in MGP *Beiheft* 1 (Berlin, 1916), 10.

⁴⁸ E.g., Saxony 1580, Vormbaum, 237.

to our young people and instruct them with the utmost earnestness in the catechism and, for the rest, in the liberal arts and the singing of hymns.”⁴⁹ In Hanover, “so that young people may learn the fear of God no less than the liberal arts,” the Latin school taught them “catechism, grammar, good behavior, and also languages.” In the upper forms, where the New and Old Testaments formed an integral part of the curriculum, the emphasis in the teaching of Scripture was placed on language and grammar.⁵⁰ In Mecklenburg, in 1552, “upper form boys read the gospel in Greek, and it must be expounded to them by giving them easy topics, making clear their meaning and letting the topics be declined and conjugated.”⁵¹ In Württemberg, Scripture seemed mainly to serve as a means of gaining proficiency in Hebrew and Greek, so that—to quote the 1559 ordinance—“through the study of these texts [pupils] may advance to careers in theology, in the other arts, in governing posts, offices, and in householderships.”⁵²

Preparing pupils for high office was always the salient objective. Superior schools in Saxony “instruct the young in languages, arts, and most of all in Holy Scripture, so that, in time, we will suffer no lack of pastors and other learned men among us.”⁵³ Scripture seems to have functioned here—and elsewhere⁵⁴—mainly as a vehicle for language training,⁵⁵ and little ingenuity seems to have been devoted to creating a learning atmosphere in which the deeper significance of Holy Writ might be understood. The teaching of Scripture did not seem to vary much from drill in catechism. Here is what the *Schulordnung* of Pomerania said in 1563 about Bible study in the third form of that duchy’s Latin school:

To accustom the boys from earliest youth to Holy Scripture and divine doctrine, the schoolmaster must, on Wednesdays or Saturdays, expound to them the Gospel According to St. Matthew or the Epistle of Paul to Titus or to Timothy, and also several selected psalms. . . . But he must not attempt learned interpretation. Let him explain the text plainly, that is to say grammatically, and let him implant the right understanding of it by teaching the boys definitions, asking them repeatedly *Quid Deus? Quot personae divinitatis? . . . Quid lex? Quid peccatum? Quid evangelium? Quid gratia? Quid fides? . . . Quid ministerium? Quid magistratus?* And above all things he must exercise the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁵⁰ Hanover 1536. *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵¹ MGP 38: 210. Similarly Mecklenburg 1552, Vormbaum, 64.

⁵² Vormbaum, 69.

⁵³ From regulations for the *Fürstenschulen* in Meissen, Pforta, and Grimma, *ibid.*, 268.

⁵⁴ E.g., in the regulations for special boarding schools for talented poor boys in Württemberg, *ibid.*, 102.

⁵⁵ On the advisability of teaching the Bible in the ancient languages, see Bugenhagen’s memorandum of 1531 in MGP 38: 116–17.

students with all diligence in Latin speech and style, and to this purpose schoolmasters must speak only Latin in class, and never fall into German.⁵⁶

What had changed, then, in Bible study as a result of the Reformation? For most pupils, including those educated in the classics, the Bible was still a book to be heard rather than read. Most of those who did learn to read it learned it in the ancient languages, the better to expound it or apply it, in their professions, later. Of course, more attention than ever before was now given to effective preaching. But private reading was not fostered. Preaching and oral explanation were still the most highly valued path to Scripture, and this was the path given official sanction in the teaching programs of Lutheran schools. Even the young men chosen for the ministry encountered Scripture as a largely passive experience;⁵⁷ for the rest, exposure to the Bible was entirely inactive. In any case, it was not from the Bible but from the catechism that all were expected to take their religious knowledge.⁵⁸ There are exceptions to this pattern,⁵⁹ but they are rare. Most ordinary folk got their religious instruction not from the Bible but from the catechism, from religious hymns, and from prayers (*Catechismus, Kirchengesang, und Gebet*), along with regular admonitions to display their fear of God in the form of disciplined (*züchtig*) conduct in the world.⁶⁰ Professionally trained pupils enrolled in Latin schools read the Bible in the setting of a carefully constructed learning program, and mainly in the ancient tongues; they, too, relied on the catechism for what they needed to know about their religion.⁶¹ To convey a glimpse of how the process of total catechization was intended to work in ideal circumstances, I quote David Chytraeus, a theology professor in the University of Rostock, as he outlined the duties of pastors, teachers, and householders in the Duchy of Mecklenburg in 1578:

Pastors in their churches, schoolmasters in their schools, and heads of household at home among their children and servants must practice the catechism with the utmost industry. Preachers will take their Sun-

⁵⁶ Vormbaum, 172–73.

⁵⁷ Cf. Walter Sohm, *Die Schule Johann Sturms*, 109–18 on the essentially passive exposure to Scripture given in Johann Sturm's pedagogical program.

⁵⁸ E.g., Württemberg 1559, Vormbaum, 71.

⁵⁹ E.g., *Schulordnung* for the German-language school in Güstrow 1602, MGP 38: 473; *Schulordnung* for Darmstadt, 1594, MGP 33: 206.

⁶⁰ E.g., Württemberg 1559, Vormbaum, 160–65.

⁶¹ For a very different approach to catechization, one that attempted to engender individual responses to the faith, see John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning, and Education, 1560–1640* (Cambridge, 1986), passim, especially 186.

day afternoon sermons from no other texts than the catechism, and once they have brought it to an end, they will start over, from the beginning, without cease or letup. . . . In the same way must the catechism be taught in the schools, day after day, with the same words, in Latin or German, the school master saying it to the pupils, the pupils reciting it back to him. . . . And every housefather must do likewise at home, making his children and hired help recite the catechism before they go off to school in the morning or to work, or sit down to a meal. . . . And lest the young and simple be thrown into confusion by the addition, omission, or substitution of even a single word or syllable, let all this be done *auf einerley weyse allenthalben stetes und ewiglich*—in a uniform manner, always and forever.⁶²

Of the three target sites mentioned by Chytraeus—church, school, and home—only the school offered a sufficiently dependable environment to give the process a chance to work. Traditional learning psychology—essentially Aristotelian in provenance—justified the hope that systematic habituation would produce desirable mental and behavioral dispositions in the learners.⁶³ As the *Schulordnung* of Hanover asserted in 1536: “we normally remain all our lives what we are taught to be in our youth.”⁶⁴ More than anything else, schooling was designed to effect this lifelong habituation, and to do so in the most systematic way possible. Whether the system was successful in accomplishing this aim is, of course, open to question.⁶⁵ But the aim itself is not in doubt. Education works by inculcating habits, not only habits of conduct, but also—and more importantly—habits of thought, of attitudes, of inclinations. At the primary and secondary level, schooling was essentially habit training. The humanist’s course of liberal studies and the churchman’s catechism drill constituted a teaching program in which the acquisition of knowledge was promoted through a technique of habituation: everything divided into small units of study, memorized, endlessly repeated verbatim in oral recitation. Commonplaces arranged everything in quotable statements ready to spring to mind when the need arose. The well-educated schoolboy had a notebook *für alle memorabilia*—for everything worth remem-

⁶² From David Chytraeus, *Der fürnembsten heubtstück christlicher lehr nützliche erklerung* (Rostock, 1578), quoted in MGP 38: 336–37.

⁶³ For a discussion of the psychology of learning utilized in the Reformation, see Strauss, *Luther’s House of Learning*, chap. 4.

⁶⁴ Vormbaum, 32.

⁶⁵ The unceasing appeals made throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Lutheran churchmen to parents, to send their children to school, suggests that popular response to educational opportunities was not always enthusiastic. And the evidence in visitation reports makes it possible to argue that schooling was less effective than had been anticipated in producing the hoped-for change in habits. For a discussion of the problem of response to Reformation pedagogy, see Strauss, *Luther’s House of Learning*, chaps. 12–13.

bering in each subject.⁶⁶ Having completed his training, the pupil, when he spoke, fell readily into cadences not his own. His memory furnished learned phrases for every occasion. When reflecting on something, his mind came back with catalogued and labelled formulae. In such a system, learning was made useful, tidy, orderly, above all ideologically safe.

Actuality may not have been quite as bleak as this picture suggests. Results always fell short of intentions. On the other hand, the picture is essentially accurate as to the aims of pedagogues, school administrators, and the political and church figures who stood behind them. These men were not petty tyrants. Most of the time, most of them seem to have felt kindly toward their charges. But they were deeply worried about the state of the world, and twenty or thirty years of Reformation in Europe had done nothing to dispel their fears and allay their anxieties. The prospects seemed anything but favorable. In the Latin School these men saw a spark of hope because, as they believed, the new generations of leaders being trained up in them would, in the years of their intensive schooling, internalize the approved values and would thus be intellectually and psychologically prepared to exhibit and promote them in their lives. At the core of these approved values lay the structuring ideas of authority, hierarchy, and order, the prerequisites of a stable society. As the ministers of these ideas, Reformation schoolmen were anything but liberal educators, despite their devotion to the liberal arts. They were dismayed to see—as the preamble to one school ordinance put it—“the flower of our young men wasted by being allowed to live by their own will.”⁶⁷ “Not to let them have their will” (*ihnen iren willen nicht lassen*) was the essence of education, a process in which natural wishes, habits, inclinations, and tastes were replaced by a higher volition, the will of society’s cultural masters. To the extent that they helped bring about this substitution, the schools of the Lutheran Reformation functioned as instruments of acculturation.

⁶⁶ Visitation ordinance for the Darmstadt *Paedagogium* 1655, MGP 27: 135.

⁶⁷ From regulations for preceptors at the *Domschule* in Güstrow 1619, printed in H. Schnell, *Das Unterrichtswesen der Grossherzogtümer Mecklenburg-Schwerin und Strelitz*, MGP 44: 33.