

Montessori, and Jean Piaget. For them, salvation is not through Christ alone but through self-discovery and autonomy. And because that which challenges personal belief is inherently wrong, the traditional institution of school must conform to the psychological self, not vice-versa. These principles deny Christ as the author of truth and that education occurs in service to His truth.

If Lutheran schools mimic public education in theory or curriculum, they will be influenced by that which banishes God's word. Students will see the world as raw material with which to create order and meaning, rather than see the world as having a given order and meaning discovered in Christ. They will seek self-actualization through specialization as a cog in collective society. Whether practical know-how is emphasized at the expense of classical mainstays will be determined, in large part, by demand. But parents might see the value in the Christian polymath and repeal the negative stereotype associated with a "jack of all trades, master of none" approach. They might champion the classical gymnasium to sustain confessionalism "for their own [children's] as well as the common good." They might reply with Gomez Addams, "Why have children just to get rid of them? I'm opposed to the whole nonsense," and keep their children through the education begun in the days of the Reformation.

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January, 2023

# WAS GOMEZ RIGHT?

BY REV. GREG BAUCH

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**IN** the first episode of *The Addams Family*, a truant officer visits the macabre home of "two kids who have never set foot in school." After locating the head of household, the officer declares, "Your kids have got to go to school. Everybody sends their kids to school!" to which Gomez Addams replies, "Ridiculous. Why have children just to get rid of them? I'm opposed to the whole nonsense." It's funny because children should attend school. But as the scene plays out, one learns that Gomez simply believes in a school of different values.

That mid-twentieth-century sitcom patriarch and the fifteenth-century humanists shared a disdain for their respective eras' state of education. And those humanists had an ally in Martin Luther, who sought significant educational reform. Annoyed by his own early instruction, he concluded that children should "study not only languages and history, but also singing and music together with the whole of mathematics." His desire to wed the piety of monastic schools to advances in language and history was never satisfactorily met in his lifetime. But the heirs of the Reformation continued his work and by 1569 produced an order "by which all schools may correspond to one another," so that children "may be better instructed in prayer and the Catechism along with writing and reading, for their own as well as the common good, and in the singing of psalms, and thus raised in a Christian manner." The order specified which books to read in which classes at which hours, prescribing interaction with

authors such as Aesop and Cicero. It nurtured piety through the singing of Latin hymns, public recitation of the Catechism, poetic oration of the church calendar, daily practice of the Psalter, and attendance at “the sermon and Litany.” It so exalted the classical languages that students were to speak only Latin with one another both inside and outside of school, while the final academic levels—corresponding to the “gymnasium” that began at age 14—required the study of Greek. And all of this with the hope of providing “stipend schools... so that our poor rural area and its children who have entered school may, insofar as possible, be given a hand and helped,” since baptism gave each child a claim to the most noble instruction. By the end of the sixteenth century, almost 300 German towns boasted schools founded upon the Lutheran blueprint, and the per-capita density of these schools was nearly ten times that of England.

The model succeeded for decades. The gymnasium—with its emphasis on catechesis, languages, history, and music—led to assuming one’s vocation and studying advanced theology. But just as this model was making strides, the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648) erupted. The resultant woes led to dilapidated school facilities and decreased student attendance. Soon after, new emphases took root. Pietistic schools shifted focus to a practical education and a private devotion that trivialized the non-native tongue. One disciple of pietism, Henry Mühlenberg, became the foremost Lutheran educator in eighteenth-century America. Mass immigration enabled him to set the foundation for 240 schools by 1820. But the catechetical content, which added elements of progressive salvation, left much to be desired. Ultimately, the father of American Lutheranism spurned his own gymnasium training in favor of practical schools while declaring, “It would not be necessary to torment [preaching] candidates with foreign languages.” If the languages were no longer requisite for ministerial students, they were certainly superfluous for all others. A confessional Lutheran ethos and a zeal for classical education would not proceed through pietism.

American expansion was its own challenge to classical education: households were distant, supplies were lean, and teachers were unskilled. Those working in European gymnasiums were unwilling to relocate across the ocean to modest schools with uncertain futures. In addition, the advent of “free” public education created competition in the east. But one group of Germans committed themselves to a Lutheran identity through Reformation-era principles. Shortly after their arrival in the United States in 1839, they organized multiple schools, a college, and a seminary. This included a gymnasium that embraced “all branches of the [classical]

high school, which are necessary for a true Christian and scientific education, such as Religion, the Latin, Greek, Hebrew, German, French and English languages; History, Geography, Mathematics, Physics, Natural History, Introduction to Philosophy, Music, and Drawing.” The school’s proponent was C. F. W. Walther, who believed that Lutheranism hinged on instruction wherein “the old languages were taught.” However, he segregated students by trajectory, encouraging the classical model for church workers and a practical curriculum for all others. Within 50 years, there existed 1,603 schools with 89,202 students; amazingly, schools outnumbered parishes.



Most gymnasiums that survived the American Civil War closed during the Great Depression. Financial demands were a factor. But more significant was a change in mindset: parents called for an education geared toward future professions. Add to the mix a perceived improvement in public school quality by parents and a reluctance to justify the classical model by educators, and the gymnasium lost all appeal. From 1920 to 1930, the number of Lutheran preparatory academies withered from 99 to 55. By the mid-twentieth century, the gymnasium was a dying light, as private schools began emulating public education to appear respectable, merely tacking on a religious instruction dismembered from the arts and sciences.

American public education and the institutions that train future teachers have embraced godless theory and curriculum. The Trinity, original sin, and divine revelation are just a few articles of faith under constant attack. But this is nothing new. Since the Enlightenment, confessional Lutherans have had to fend off the rationalism that rejects God. The eighteenth-century educator, Johann Pestalozzi, proclaims, “Believe in yourself, O Man—believe in the inner meaning of your being. Then you will believe in God and immortality.” This exaltation of self in place of Christ prevails in the most acclaimed pedagogues of our time: John Dewey, Maria