

JOHN JACOB SAUER AND EDUCATION

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John Henry Elija Sauer was born on Maundy Thursday, April 12, 1827, in Eckstedt, Germany. The son of poor parents, he acquired an interest in languages at an early age. It seems that the reading of Huebner's Bible History quotations in Latin provided a catalyst for this reading, and study of Latin. From there he began to study Latin quite intensely, and eventually his interest lead him into other studies of French, and even a desire to learn the Greek of the New Testament.

Driven by this desire to learn, especially the languages, Jacob Sauer studied at every opportunity as a child, to the neglect often of other duties. Eventually, through many difficulties he began study at a teacher's college in Germany. There he studied the classical languages Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. These studies continued until rebellion broke out in 1848 and Jacob was drafted into military service.

At this point in his life Jacob came to the decision that it would be best for him to leave Germany and its battlefields behind and emigrate to America. Seeking and receiving a discharge from military service he, with his brother, John William, embarked on their long journey to America in the year 1849. Nearly penniless and destitute, they had only thirty-one cents between them <sup>and</sup> a few belongings on which to survive, when they arrived in New York.

From New York they continued westward, seeking work where they could find it, and setting their course for Wisconsin. Finally, after many hardships, they arrived in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, only to find that they still could not find work. But it was there, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, that Elija Sauer was to begin his new life as a minister of Jesus Christ in the newly formed Wisconsin Synod. It was there, near Milwaukee, that Elija Sauer met a fellow Thuringian who directed him to an opportunity for starting a new school in the Milwaukee area. He began this school, and neighboring laborers gladly sent their children there for an education.

Before we go any further, however, with the events of Elija Sauer's history, the background of Lutheran education would serve a useful purpose here, and aid in understanding what educational development Elija Sauer went through in his years at Milwaukee.

Apparently there was, at the time of the first synod convention in 1850, the rule established that the pastors of the Wisconsin Synod were to teach "week-day school" outside of Sunday school.<sup>1</sup> Here we see a long instilled tradition in the Lutheran church; parochial schools. Luther's concern for the Christian training of the young is clearly revealed in his writing the Small Catechism of 1529. Luther's emphasis on Christian education was carried on to the beginnings of Lutheranism in the United States. So, at the time of the early beginnings of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, we hear C.F.W. Walther confess: "...next to the pure doctrine our schools are the greatest treasure we have."<sup>2</sup>

However, this was not always the case. Due to rationalism and state control of churches in Germany, the pure Christian doctrine of the parochial schools was lost. The state and local community, as they gained control of church and school, replaced many of the teachers and much of the curriculum with state officials and more secular subjects respectively.

This trend, of course, also had its influence in America where so many sought religious freedom, but brought the rationalism of Europe along too. M. Lehninger makes note of the fact that in the eastern synods of America rationalism took a severe toll on church schools. He states:

If human reason was sufficient to bring mankind happiness in this life and in that to come, why then should the Church struggle to maintain special church-schools, particularly at a time when the state was willing and ready to spread a net of tax-supported public schools over its realm, schools in which all the children, regardless of race and creed, could receive free instruction?<sup>3</sup>

Added to this thinking was the introduction of Sunday schools from England, where there was no public education. Robert Raikes in 1779,

when the "Enabling Act" was passed permitting religious groups outside of the Church of England to conduct religious services and operate religious institutions, began his concept of a Sunday school. This concept he felt, "...may be an instrument, under God, of awakening spiritual life in the basest children and, supplemented by day classes, can form the basis of national education."<sup>4</sup> We might note that he mentioned the "basest children" because he carried out his work in the slums of Gloucester, where he hoped to educate the illiterate children of the criminal element there. From there it became a tool of beneficial use for churches throughout the world.

Yet, this new idea "the Sunday school," was looked upon as a threat to the educational system of Lutheran synods. Even in 1899 we find this fear in Dr. Franz Pieper:

It is absolutely wrong to speak of the Sunday school as progress. The Christian Sunday school is, of course, better than no instruction in the Christian religion at all. But compared with the Christian week-day school, the Sunday school is a great step backward. If Christian parents are satisfied with a Sunday school for their children, and do not strive for a Christian full-time school, the Sunday school owes its origin to the laziness and ignorance of Christian parents. Those who have a truly awakened conscience will constantly strive to give their children not only an hour of religious instruction a week, but to have them in a Christian school every day of the week.

The difficulty, however, with parochial schools was not so much a lack of desire, as much as either a lack of funds or of pastors. Many congregations were small, and several congregations were served by one pastor. Traveling to each of these congregations for a period of a few months at a time, made it nearly impossible to establish and maintain church schools. So the Sunday school became the answer to the problem of providing religious training for the children of the congregations. Constant warnings were given, however, lest the Sunday school become a substitute for the week-day school, or even a substitute for Christian training in God's Word at home.

If a congregation, or congregations, would be able to provide a week-day school, there was still at times another problem to deal with. Besides

4

all the regular pastoral duties, it would then be the sole duty of the pastor to teach these classes. Beck notes: "With few exceptions therefore, ministers spent much of their time in the schoolroom, particularly when teachers were not available or when the congregation was not financially able to support one."<sup>6</sup>

This apparently was the situation Jacob Sauer entered into in Milwaukee. Having been trained as a teacher, and having begun his own school in the area, he became a prime candidate to take over one of these week-day schools. So, it is understandable that Pastor Dulitz would approach him with an offer to become the teacher for his school.

The synod, as mentioned before, had made the ruling that pastors were to teach week-day school besides the Sunday school, or perhaps it was their 'Christenlehre' (Christian teachings), or what we normally refer to as catechism instruction. "The custom of 'Christenlehre,' or catechization of the youth of the church, was firmly established in these years as an extension of formal instructions for confirmation."<sup>7</sup> Obviously, the best answer to such a situation would be to find a teacher to take over this responsibility. Koehler mentions that it therefore was the custom for pastors to have candidates for the ministry assigned to this task. Or, they would recruit young men from their congregations for the work. When it was a candidate who was assigned, the situation served a double purpose. Not only did the pastor benefit from the help of the candidate, but the candidate also benefitted from additional, on-the-job training. Koehler lists these early pastors of the synod who served in this, shall we say, first vicar program: "Such service, at one time or the other, was performed by Sauer for Dulitz and Muehlhaeuser in Milwaukee, Bodemer for Bading in Theresa, Sieker for Streissguth in Milwaukee and for Reim in Ashford, Fack for Muehlhaeuser, Sausewitz and Schimpf for Koehler in Manitowoc (and Schimpf also in Hustisford), Jaeger and Dowidat in Watertown."<sup>8</sup>

It seems that Jacob Sauer never did receive formal theological training at a seminary. The only theological training he appears to have received was under the guidance of Pastor Dulitz. Although many may see this as an insurmountable obstacle to entering the preaching ministry, it obviously did not hinder Jacob Sauer. In fact, he appears to have been a faithful pastor from his ordination in 1855 to his death in 1889. He, with Philipp Koehler, was ordained at the 1855 Synod session, after being received for candidacy in 1853. Apparently he served under both Dulitz and Muehlhaeuser during the two years in between. There was some debate over Jacob's acceptability as Koehler indicates: "Likewise Elias Sauer who had been rejected by the Missourians, and Muehlhaeuser had to thresh out his case with Dulitz."<sup>9</sup>

It is understandable that there would be possible problems with a man of Jacob Sauer's background. It appears that he was a rationalist, having come from a rationalist background in Germany. This became apparent when he wrote his first catechesis for Pastor Dulitz. In his autobiography he writes: "He was satisfied with my catechesis as far as the form was concerned, but not with its contents. He showed me that I was a rationalist and gave me a copy of the Book of Concord, the Confessional Writings of our Evangelical Lutheran Church."<sup>10</sup>

Looking at Jacob Elija Sauer's ministry, it would appear that he was cleansed of the rationalist thinking which he had brought with him from Germany. At St. John's in Burlington, Wisconsin (then Slades Corners), he was forced to take a stand on the use of wafers (the Lutheran practice) in the Lord's Supper, the use of a crucifix and the use of the Lutheran liturgy. These things of course greatly offended the Reformed, who until that time had been worshipping with the Lutherans in common fellowship.

At Zum Kripplein Kristi, Iron Ridge, Pastor Sauer led the congregation into the Wisconsin Synod from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in 1866. But already at his first congregational meeting they decided to build a

church. In the one hundredth anniversary booklet of that congregation the statement is made of Pastor Sauer: "... his energetic leadership led to the erection of a new church and a new school within four years." The difficult times were also noted, for they were in the midst of a civil war that compounded any building problems.

So we see in the ministry of this man a continuing interest in the education of the congregation, the children specifically. We see in his entire life a desire for knowledge. Although formal education was not available for him in the mid-1800's, his thirst for knowledge, and the guidance of a faithful Lutheran pastor apparently carried <sup>him</sup> into the Lord's ministry. Hopefully, educational systems will not become what they were in that period, again, but, Jacob Elija Sauer would serve as a good example of what can be accomplished with limited facilities, but boundless desire, and the power of God's Word.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>John P. Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod, (St. Cloud: Sentinel Publishing Co., 1970. p 71.
- <sup>2</sup>E. Clifford Nelson, The Lutherans in North America, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975, p 296.
- <sup>3</sup>Max Lehninger, "The Lutheran Church and Elementary Christian Training," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, vol XXXV, July 1938, No. 3, p 176.
- <sup>4</sup>Martin A. Haendschke, The Sunday School Story. (River Forest: Lutheran Education Association, 1963, p. 1.
- <sup>5</sup>August C. Stellinghorn, Schools of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963, p. 303.
- <sup>6</sup>Walther H. Beck, Lutheran Elementary Schools in the United States. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1939, p. 64.
- <sup>7</sup>Haendschke, op. cit., p. 9.
- <sup>8</sup>Koehler, op. cit., p. 71.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 43.
- <sup>10</sup>Jacob Elija Sauer, "The Autobiography of John Jacob Sauer," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, vol XXII, no. 1, April, 1949, p. 29.

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