

Wilhelm Loehe as Religious Instructor

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Wilhelm Loehe considered a catechetical work to be the most important piece of writing that he left to posterity. This was the *House, School and Churchbook*.¹ In a letter, Loehe wrote: “The *Housebook* is the fruit of my life and work in the ministry; I have nothing better to bequeath.”² This opus represents the indissoluble nexus between life and doctrine that is essential for Loehe’s work. He understood Christian education as lifelong accompaniment and care of souls on the basis of baptism, beginning in the family, continuing during schooling, and culminating with integration in the life of the Lutheran church. This article follows the pattern of the three essential learning locations for Christian education by considering Loehe’s formative years, his educational praxis, and his concept of a comprehensive catechumenate.

Loehe’s Religious Development

1. Christian education in the Loehe family

Loehe’s family was not only church-minded, but exercised an active spiritual life, which was

1. Wilhelm Loehe, *Haus-, Schul- und Kirchenbuch für Christen des lutherischen Bekenntnisses*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Liesching, 1845; 2nd ed. 1851; 3rd ed. 1857, 4th ed. 1877); vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Liesching, 1859; 2nd ed. 1900; 3rd ed. 1928).

2. Johannes Deinzer, *Wilhelm Loehe’s Leben. Aus seinem schriftlichen Nachlass zusammengestellt*, 3 vols. (Neuendettelsau: Diakonissenanstalt 4th ed. 1935), 2:144.

informed by Lutheran as well as pietistic traditions. Barbara Loehe, in particular, exerted a strong influence on the religious development of her son. In reminiscing about his youth, Loehe reports that his mother lived in “daily preparation for her blessed homecoming; she is constantly in the house of the Lord: she reads, prays, and is increasingly receptive to and refreshed by God’s Word.”³ Loehe liked to sit at her feet and to learn and he “easily learned” what she said and sang to him.⁴ His abiding memories also included the daily evening prayers with his mother, who not only prayed with, but also over and for, the children. Equally important to him was the evening plea for God’s blessing and the experience of being blessed by both his parents. As well as instruction in fundamental practices of the Christian faith, Loehe’s experience of loving care by his mother, who was “a benefactress to the family at every opportunity,” was equally important.⁵

2. Encounter with Carl Ludwig Roth and Karl von Raumer

When Loehe attended elementary school, he was confronted with the rationalistic spirit of the time. Religious education was taught primarily as moral education in line with the utilitarian bias of the Enlightenment. Against this background, Loehe’s critical ap-

3. *Ibid.*, 1:10.

4. *Ibid.*, 1:12.

5. *Ibid.*, 1:10.

preciation of his years in elementary school does not surprise us: "I was annoyed by the religious uncertainty and turmoil; the evil spirit of that time had affected the schools of my homeland more than my family."⁶ The *Textbook for Elementary Level Teaching* introduced the schoolchildren to Jesus as "the most venerable teacher" whom they should follow on the path of virtue.⁷ That is why Loehle writes in his memoirs that religious education at school was "purely related to ethics" and "anything but evangelical."⁸

Loehle spent his most formative school years at the Melanchthon Gymnasium in Nuremberg. Here he met Carl Ludwig Roth, a teacher whom he held in high esteem all his life. Roth came from Stuttgart and was a representative of neo-humanism. In his pedagogy, he combined classical and pietistic traditions. His entire educational work aimed at the restoration of the image of God in the human person and thus communion with God. One of his guiding principles reads: "The only person educated for life is the one who is trained for eternity."⁹

Roth's educational praxis centered on the education of the will. Biblical anthropology through a pietistic perspective had taught him that the natural will of man does not seek to do good, but rather, if left to its own devices is attracted to evil. Education, according to Roth, therefore aims at nothing less than the total transformation of a human for the better. Thus, "the most educational learning material is that which, after having been

absorbed by man, has the facility to bring about this transformation. Religion is, as generally accepted, such a learning material and therefore is the only appropriate one."¹⁰

Roth also introduced Loehle to pietistic circles in Nuremberg and Erlangen. Among their most important duties were mission and social welfare work as expressions of an active Christian faith. In these circles, Loehle met Karl von Raumer, an educator, as well as the Reformed theologian Christian Krafft. Both of them, together with their wives, had founded "salvation homes" in Nuremberg and Erlangen. In these homes they took care of neglected children and adolescents. The term "salvation home" hints at the religious objectives: both Raumer and Krafft were primarily concerned with the religious salvation of the children. For both of them the remoteness of God was the actual cause of all social problems, which intensified with the beginning of industrialization.¹¹

Using a revivalist pedagogy, children were to be trained for salvation through the restoration of the image of God in conversion and regeneration. In his first annual report on his educational work in the "salvation home" Raumer wrote programmatically: "Christian education leads through penance to faith; only this is truly educational, whatever else may be regarded as education in the world; because only Christian education...holds fast to the only means of restoring the likeness of God in man."¹² Like his friend Roth,

10. Carl L. Roth, "Erlebnisse" (1835), in Carl L. Roth, *Gymnasial-Pädagogik* (Stuttgart: Steinkopf, 2nd ed. 1874), 392.

11. Cf. Thomas Kothmann, *Evangelischer Religionsunterricht in Bayern: Ideen- und wirkungsgeschichtliche Aspekte im Spannungsfeld von Staat und Kirche* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund, 2006), 1:46–51.

12. Horst Weigelt, *Erweckungsbewegung und konfessionelles Luthertum im 19. Jahrhundert: Untersucht an Karl von Raumer* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1968), 53–54

6. Ibid., 1:19.

7. *Lehrbuch für den Anfangs-Unterricht in den königlich-bayerischen Volks-Schulen* (Munich: Central-Schulbücher-Verlag, 1810), 122.

8. Deinzer, *Leben*, 1:19.

9. Carl L. Roth, "Von der Erziehung im Unterrichte" (1822), in Carl L. Roth, *Kleine Schriften pädagogischen und biographischen Inhalts, mit einem Anhang lateinischer Schriftstücke* (Stuttgart: Steinkopf, 1857), 1:16.

Raumer was convinced that only the eternal purpose of human life and the revelation in Holy Scripture were the essential standards for all educational work. Since no one by one's own power has an awareness of salvation, children should be made familiar with the gospels and with the catechism, which should be learned by heart.

3. *The Comfort of the Holy Sacrament in Light of a Deist Confirmation Class*

Church instruction in Loehle's youth was mainly given in the form of confirmation classes. In Fürth the confirmation instruction lasted six weeks, from Easter to Pentecost. Every day, except Saturday and Sunday, the pastor would hold instruction for an hour. For Loehle, however, the confirmation instruction was "of no use." "All morals and deist instruction," he writes in his memoirs. What he had hoped for, "positive, historical instruction; teaching about the facts of salvation of the Lord, was never given..."¹³ Although the confirmation class was rather ineffective and did not contribute to making Loehle feel really at home, he was nonetheless greatly attracted by the liturgy of the Holy Sacrament each Sunday. Long before his confirmation, Loehle regularly attended the Lord's Supper service. In contrast to Pastor Georg Tobias Frommüller's moralizing preaching and catechetical instruction, his leading of the liturgy left a permanent impression on the young Wilhelm. Like his mother, who regularly attended confession and partook of the Holy Sacrament, he was attracted by the solemn sacramental celebration.¹⁴ Alongside the Sacrament of the Altar, the experience of being blessed by the pastor also made a lasting impression. Loehle later recalled the

blessing the children received before private confession on the Saturday before confirmation, which pierced him "to the heart."¹⁵

Loehle as Religious Instructor

1. *Loehle as Paterfamilias*

Before Loehle had to shoulder responsibility for the religious education of his own children, he commented on the education of his nephews and nieces. In 1828, Loehle wrote a letter to his sister, Dorothea, and her preschool-aged children in which many of the aspects we have already mentioned recur. Among these are the spiritual and moral example of adults, the unity of love to God and love of neighbor, and the importance of Bible-reading and prayer.¹⁶

These principles also informed his educational praxis when he had to assume responsibility for his four children after the early death of his wife, Helene. "For the sake of Jesus and his Church he wanted to have them educated," his biographer writes; and he hints at Loehle's emphasis on Bible study and worship as well as morning and evening prayers.¹⁷ It was important to Loehle for his children to keep alive the memory of their mother in their prayers. To this end he wrote this text:

Good savior, I give you thanks, that you have given Your Holy Spirit to my dear mother and my grandmother and have made them blessed. I ask you, may you comfort them eternally and delight them with angels and elect ones and may you remind them of us through your Spirit that they may intercede for us in front of your throne. Please bestow your Holy Spirit upon me, my father, grandfather, grandmother, both of my brothers, all my aunts and uncles, the parish in Neuendet-

13. Deinzer, *Leben*, 1:24.

14. Cf. Klaus Ganzert, "Einleitung," in Wilhelm Loehle, *Gesammelte Werke* (Neuendetsau: Freimund, 1986) Henceforth cited as GW, 1:150.

15. Ganzert, "Einleitung," 150.

16. Cf. GW, 1:278 (12/24/1828).

17. Deinzer, *Leben*, 2:35.

telsau, and your whole church, that we, too, may believe and become blessed and may enter your presence, where my beloved mother already is. Praise to You eternally! Amen.¹⁸

In this prayer, the scope is broadened beyond the needs of the family. The parish in Neuendettelsau and the church as a whole are included. Loehe did that quite intentionally. This prayer says something about the importance Loehe ascribed to the life of the parish to which his children should feel connected. They should learn to regard themselves as living members of the church who also should take interest in what was going on in the parish. Thus, in February 1848, Loehe told his eight-year-old daughter that the village of Reuth had been incorporated in the parish of Neuendettelsau.

2. Loehe as Religious Instructor/Inspector of Schools and Teacher Training Instructor

In the congregations where Loehe served, religious instruction and continuing education of teachers played an important role. When Loehe began his curacy in Kirchenlamitz, he was also in charge of several schools.¹⁹ For him the most important means of education was the word of God, even if very few people possessed a copy of the Bible. Loehe intended to awaken the children and to convert them to an active Christian faith: "May God help the schools and awaken the children! Amen." he wrote in his diary.²⁰ Loehe considered repentance a necessary prerequisite in overcoming moral neglect. In his annual report on parish life, he gives a detailed account of

grievances and confronts them with Bible study and the changing power of conversion in the example of a young boy: "Impeding causes:...disgraceful roaming about by a great number of young people during the night...Sunday dances; the shameful lust with which brides are often being handed over into the homes of the men long before wedding...Sunday markets. Beneficial effects:...frequent reading of Holy Scripture; ...the good and respected example of people who have been finally converted..."²¹

In 1835, Loehe came to Altdorf, where he deputized the second pastorate. At the same time, he was responsible for the school as the local school inspector and he had to teach religious instruction in the teaching seminary. About twelve of these seminarians visited Loehe once or twice a week for counseling and private discussion and Bible reading. The prospective teachers found in Loehe a spiritual mentor. One of them later wrote, "His conversations had a bias to practical application. He talked to us about the inclination and aspiration to freedom and independence...about the sixth commandment...and about the attacks of the representatives of the spirit of the time against Christianity...He always dismissed us with his blessing."²²

When Loehe became pastor in Neuendettelsau, he was entrusted with the task of continuing education of the teachers in the church district of Windsbach.²³ In the speeches Loehe gave there, he outlined his understanding of the office of a teacher and his concept of education as primarily religious education.

Loehe was a pronounced opponent of the complete nationalization of the school system. Rather, he was convinced that "an

18. Ibid., 2:36.

19. Cf. Anne Stempel-de Fallois, *Das diakonische Wirken Wilhelm Loehes: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gründung des Diakonissenmutterhauses Neuendettelsau 1826–1854* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2001), 77–79 and 82–85.

20. Ibid., 83.

21. Ibid., 84.

22. Deinzer, *Leben*, 1:217.

23. Cf. Stempel-de Fallois, *Wirken*, 169–172.

unchristian government in charge of the whole education system would surely neglect the impulses necessary for an education from the point of view of faith. Thus, the child would be exposed to a one-sided education of reason. But an education reduced to the common public interest, which disregards religious concerns, would jeopardize the human being and ultimately would harm public welfare." For this reason, the church had to insist on the mandate for education: "The church is the master of education."²⁴

Loehe emphasized that education on earth takes place in relation to eternity. Therefore, it cannot be taken out of the context of the church. Any theory of education that is constructed separately from the doctrine of the church is condemned to failure. Concretely speaking, the confessional writings of the church carry normative weight for any system of education. According to Loehe, in a theory of education even if only "one of the basic doctrines of church" is abandoned, one will easily find the reason for its ultimate failure.²⁵ Thus, Loehe was very much concerned with unfolding the teachings of the church in the advanced education conferences as far as they had educational value.

In addition to the educational mandate of the church, Loehe emphasized the religious dimension of education in his teachers' conferences. Human beings should be considered primarily as God's creatures. As such, each person is destined to eternal communion with God, even if they are under the power of sin. True education therefore is always aware of its religious dimension. "If anyone were to be educated only for this time and not also for eternity, they would rather be defrauded

of their education."²⁶

Thus at the heart of education is the restitution of the image of God in humankind, which is why human relatedness to God always has to be borne in mind. The task of education *sub specie aeternitatis* therefore has a much broader horizon than social and economic applicability. That is why Loehe always warned of a one-sided usurpation of school through social and political force. Repeatedly Loehe fundamentally challenged compulsory education by the state. In this respect, he referred to Norway and Iceland where parents would instruct their children themselves with the support of peripatetic teachers. The state should have the right to ask for:

"...a certain level of knowledge" from all, "and those who aspire to a certain profession should be rigorously examined, to see whether they have it at their disposal. But apart from that, it should be up to the father of the house how he attains the necessary standard and how he accounts for that. That means that both would be necessary: the provision of learning opportunities for adults and the establishment of private schools."²⁷

3. *Loehe's Instruction in the Pastoral Office*

When Loehe walked through Neuendettelsau, quite often children playing in the streets would go up to him and shake hands with him. Sometimes Loehe would be drawn into conversation with a child and he would ask them, "Are you baptized?" The answer, "Yes, of course!" "Who baptized you?" There would be bewilderment in response to this question, no answer or a shy response such as, "You did, Pastor!" Next question: "Were you there, when you were baptized?"

24. Wilhelm Loehe, "Einige Worte zum Anfange der Windsbacher Schullehrer-Konferenz" (1838), in *GW* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund, 1958), 3/2:374.

25. *Ibid.*, 374.

26. *Ibid.*, 373.

27. Anne Hammer, "Wilhelm Loehe und die Volksschule," in *Schule und Leben* 9 (1958), 166.

Again, there would be great bewilderment or embarrassment: how should the child respond? Then Loehe said, "Of course, you cannot know anything about your baptism, because you were too little then. But I know that you were baptized, for I performed the baptism. And your Godfather also knows it. Go to him and let him tell you about it and be glad that you became a child of God through baptism."²⁸ This little story says something about the foundation of religious education in the home, school, and church. It has its roots in baptism and therefore is the responsibility of the church to ensure that every baptized child responds to this gift by living an active Christian life and making a mature profession of faith.

Just after he assumed office in Neuendertelsau, Loehe established a childcare facility where children were taken care of, so that their mothers could attend Sunday worship.²⁹ The local kindergarten later grew out of this facility. It made it possible for mothers to work in the fields unhindered. In the kindergarten, the children were not only taken care of, but they also received basic Christian instruction, which was intended to complement their mothers' instruction. In the booklet, *On Infant Schools*, Loehe drafted a concept of religious instruction in such institutions. He writes about the importance of familiarity and about obedience and tidiness, teaching as the mother teaches—with the intention of teaching and practicing prayer, observing the feasts of the church-year, singing together, and leading them to confess their sins and to take part in church worship.³⁰

Christian religious instruction on Sundays played an important role. This class lasted for two hours and was intended to

expand and revise the knowledge the children had acquired at elementary school.

The culmination of catechetical instruction for Loehe was the confirmation class, which he taught from Ash Wednesday until "Low Sunday" for one hour per day. This class was based on the catechetical instruction in schools and in a pastoral way introduced the children to the sacramental life of the church. In terms of content, the classes dealt with the important themes in the context of confirmation: baptism, confession, absolution, and communion. In addition to that, Loehe inculcated in the young people the importance of prayer for an active Christian.³¹

At the beginning of a confirmation class, some hymn verses were sung, followed by a prayer. A brief homiletical introduction to the topic of the Holy Sacrament followed next; then a brief lecture on the catechetical contents; then the corresponding paragraph in the catechism was read; then exposition and questions and answers tested by questions and answers from Loehe (which are also included in the *House, School and Churchbook*). A summary, admonition, and closing blessing completed the class. For the female confirmation candidates, Loehe scheduled a "silent half-hour" during Lent (between 12:00 and 12:30 p.m. on Saturdays) for meditating on God's word.³²

Loehe's Concept of a Comprehensive Catechumenate

Loehe compiled the *House, School and Churchbook* in 1845 for the sake of brothers and sisters in the faith overseas. It was not only in the context of the situation in the North American colonies that Loehe was convinced that Christian education in the family was of fundamental importance to the religious and social development of the

28. Deinzer, *Leben*, 2:140.

29. Cf. Stempel-de Fallois, *Wirken*, 161–169.

30. Wilhelm Loehe, *Von Kleinkinderschulen* (1868), in GW 4:554–578.

31. Cf. Deinzer, *Leben*, 2:147–152.

32. Deinzer, *Leben*, 2:148.

children. Just as he criticized the emancipation of school from church, he found fault with the delegation of the task of education by the parents to schools. He was convinced that this contributed to the decline of the general level of education. This is why he considered the *Housebook* to be helpful for training teachers for the colonies. His major intention was to bring together for Christian life and worship those fundamental materials most useful in uniting home, school, and church. One can learn from the materials, Loehé asserted, that some parts could be learned at home, some could be used in Christian religious instruction, and some could be used in schools. While he regarded his *Three Books about the Church* as a casual work, he considered “the explanations and questions on the catechism” to be the *summa* of his pastoral work.³³

1. Christian Education in the Family

The focus of “religious instruction for the little ones” is the biblical story, along with prayers taught by the mother and the first verses of the catechism.³⁴ These biblical texts should follow the pattern of each day, week, and the church year. They should be illustrated through appropriate pictures.

For Loehé, learning throughout the day meant learning the daily verses, along with specific morning and evening hymns. “The specific Christian sanctification of the day” occurred, while “remembering the last day of Jesus’ life.”³⁵ That means he assigned each of the seven hours of Christ’s suffering to one of the seven last words: for each of the words the corresponding story should be told, so that each word might be understood

correctly. Loehé also considered the Christian week from two perspectives: first, the children should learn each of the works of creation so that they would be able to say “what happened on each day.” As soon as this aim was achieved, parents should allocate the events of Jesus’ last week to each day of the week and impress them on their children.³⁶ The course of the Christian year should be made accessible to the children from two points of view: first, they should experience Christian feast days in terms of the life of Jesus; and second, they should become acquainted with the “story of his saints,” which Loehé assigned to individual months.³⁷

An important prerequisite for the success of the educational efforts in the home is the mother’s love for her child. In his “Prayer Booklet for Childhood” addressed “To the Parents, Particularly the Mothers,” Loehé put together a collection of prayers and biblical prayer verses for children. He wrote:

Love awakens and educates children to love. The love of the mother, the first love which a child can understand, is imperceptible, awakening and educating the child to childlike and any kind of love, even the love of God.³⁸

Loehé goes on to speak about the necessity of the mother’s praying over and with the child and emphasizes the mother’s prayer “makes the child recognize the path to God, yes, even to walk on this path. In the mother’s path to God, the child finds its own way to God. The prayer over and in the presence of the child leads to the child praying with [his/her] mother” and ultimately to the child praying autonomously.³⁹ Although the child

33. GW 3/1:718

34. Cf. Wilhelm Loehé, “Aphorismen über die Schule und Schulunterricht” (1854-59), in GW 3/2:392.

35. Loehé, *Haus-, Schul- und Kirchenbuch*, 4th ed., 1877, 1:311.

36. *Ibid.*, 1:312–315.

37. Cf. Loehé, *Haus-*, 315.

38. Wilhelm Loehé, “Betbüchlein für das kindliche Alter. Eltern und Kindern gewidmet” (1845), in: GW 3/1: 354.

39. *Ibid.* 354.

should be introduced to the prayers of the church, a child also should be encouraged to pray with its own words, to pray from the heart. In any event, the child should not be forced to pray.⁴⁰

2. Religious Instruction at School

According to Loehe, Bible instruction in schools should start with the “story of the Lord and his apostles” for logical reasons.⁴¹ In the second edition of his work on “The Protestant Clergyman” (1866) and in accordance with the catechetical theory of his time, Loehe places more emphasis on the salvation-historical direction of biblical teachings than in his earlier writing (in line with the influence of the salvation-historical theology of Erlangen). Loehe now emphasized that Bible stories should be selected in a manner that would later enable the salvation-historical connection to be illustrated. From an early age, children should be told “history in the form of stories.”⁴²

Catechetical instruction begins with the memorization of the text of six sections according to *ipsissima verba* of Luther, which Loehe considered to be the “clear reflection of the divine Word.”⁴³ Subsequently, the questions and answers should be read and then memorized.

When the child has reached the point of being able to prove the statements of the catechism in “lucid and clear” biblical words, there is just one more level left for the child to attain: the introduction to the harmony between the individual chapters of catechism. However, the systematic interpretation of the

catechism on the basis of the central principles of Lutheran theology is assigned to the catechetical instruction in the confirmation class, which should especially point out:

that the first chapter deals with the law and brings about penance; the second concerns the gospel and brings about faith; the third demonstrates the human means of grace in prayer; and the fourth to sixth deal with the divine means of grace in Word and sacrament. A child who recognizes the harmony of these chapters in addition to the knowledge of the texts has without doubt achieved a level of Christian knowledge which not many adults achieve.⁴⁴

3. Religious Instruction in the Congregation

Learning does not come to an end when schooling ends. Adults should also accumulate a store of memorized texts, especially the prayers and hymns that are used in church. Loehe writes that in fact “...one should memorize everything liturgical and be able to use it without a book. That includes primarily everything concerning the ultimate needs of the heart, the various forms of confession and absolution.”⁴⁵ Moreover, adults should memorize the liturgical parts of the Eucharist and the prayers for confirmation, wedding, and burial services. Loehe says that this is a recommendation for those who are willing to learn and have the ability to do it. What matters is active participation in the life of the church and the fervent desire “that all individuals consider themselves in union with the whole congregation, feeling and praying together.”⁴⁶ Wherever and whenever this occurs, religious instruction in the union of the home, school, and church has achieved its goal.

40. Cf. Loehe, “Betbüchlein,” 357.

41. Wilhelm Loehe, “An die Freunde!” (1844), in GW 3/1: 145.

42. Wilhelm Loehe, “Der evangelische Geistliche” (1858), in GW 3/2:228.

43. Wilhelm Loehe, *Drei Bücher von der Kirche* (1845), Study Edition 1 (Neuendettelsau: Freimund 2006), 192.

44. Loehe, “Aphorismen,” 396.

45. Loehe, *Haus-*, 321.

46. *Ibid.*, 322.



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