



The Church in an Era of Crisis (1933-41) — *A Case Study*

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Every century, every decade, perhaps every year has *some* claim to distinction. Few eras, however, have greater claim than the years from 1933 through 1941. During that time the nation was confronted with social, political, and economic issues that forced Americans to see themselves in new ways.¹ Among those issues/events were: the Great Depression; the repeal of Prohibition; racism; and the descent into World War II. One of the debates engaging the church in those years was whether or not the church should involve itself in the political, economic, and social concerns that dominated the era.

A survey of church convention reports and journals afforded Lloyd Svendsbye the data to draw some conclusions about the Lutheran church's social consciousness in the 1930s and 1940s. What he discovered was a church alarmed over the threat of war in Asia and Europe, and seriously concerned about the repeal of Prohibition. The response of the church to the Great Depression, racism, and particularly the plight of the Jews in Germany was, he concluded, timid at best.²

If Svendsbye's sources projected an image of the church as timid on some of the crucial concerns of the 1930s, and one of growing social consciousness on others, what sort of picture would emerge from a review of the Sunday School for that same period? Responding to that question is the basic purpose of this article. The first consideration in getting at that purpose was to find resources to which one could address the question. After considering several possibilities, the decision was made to review curriculum materials used during the 1930s, and to limit the survey to one curriculum—*The Augsburg Teacher* (subsequently

¹Richard S. Kirkendall, *The United States 1929-1945: Years of Crisis and Change* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974) 1.

²Lloyd Svendsbye, *The History of a Developing Social Responsibility Among Lutherans in America from 1930 to 1960, with Reference to the American Lutheran Church, the Augustana Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the United Lutheran Church in America* (Th.D. Thesis; New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1966) 179.

referred to as *AT*)—published by the United Lutheran Church in America and edited in the 1930s by Charles P. Wiles and D. Burt Smith. The primary reason for choosing this curriculum was its integrated format. Based on texts provided by the International Uniform Sunday School Series, it was published monthly with session plans for pre-school learners through adults. In addition, it contained articles dealing with a wide variety of issues. During the years 1933-1941 the *AT* filled over 7,000 pages of text. Those pages provided the data for responding to the question raised above.

Given the claims of Robert Lynn and Elliott Wright in *The Big Little School* that the Sunday School has traditionally avoided controversial issues, one might assume that a survey of the *AT* would result in a portrait of the Sunday School as even more benign than the image of the church in general that Svendsbye found.³ As the articles and lesson plans were read, however, a very different picture emerged. It's a picture of fidelity to Christ's command to love God, *and* to love one's neighbor.

I. THE GOSPEL, THE SOCIAL GOSPEL, AND *The Augsburg Teacher*

The realization that the *AT* dealt with the pressing issues of the 1930s is evidence, in and of itself, that its editors thought the church should be involved in them. Still, they were aware that such involvement was a matter of debate. The debate goes back at least as far as the question the Pharisees posed for Jesus: should the Jews pay taxes to Caesar (Matt 22:15-22)? It continues unabated today.

Throughout the years 1933-1941 the *AT* provided a context in which to carry on that debate, allowing for expression of different, and even opposing, viewpoints. For example, it reported a 1934 survey that bemoaned the fact that pastors were "concerned about little more than a social gospel for the here and now" (1934:326). The overall position of the editors, however, supported that social concern:

There is a gospel for the individual and a gospel for society, and the two are one and the same thing. We are prepared to say that where there is an individual and a personal gospel there is also a social gospel; and where there is a social gospel, there is by the same token a personal gospel. The New Testament speaks uniformly of one Gospel, and of only one Gospel, and it is to do for us as individuals and social groups all that needs to be done. (1936:425)

Space does not allow for a thorough analysis of the *AT*'s handling of this debate. Reasons for taking the position noted above can only be summarized here.

The need to respond to the Great Depression. Prior to 1929 the poor had been assisted by local charities, not least the church. Those resources were just not adequate to meet the demands created by *this* depression. This was already recognized in the *AT* by August, 1933:

We are now in times which call for the best of human thought to provide for the poor and needy....There has been a growth from individual charity to

³Robert W. Lynn and Elliot Wright, *The Big Little School* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971) 158ff.

state charity and some suggest that the day of individual charity is gone and that state provision is the only desirable method. (1933:461)

By 1940 the *AT* recognized that providing for the needs of the poor had passed, to a large degree, out of the hands of the church and into those of the state. The editors remarked: "We should welcome this as an evidence that the spirit of the Gospel is affecting group life" (1940:735). Of course, if the state was to care for the poor, then the church, because of its concern for the poor,

must attempt to influence the state by getting involved in politics. At least fifty references deal with the need for that involvement. One, from April, 1936, summarizes what the *AT* was after:

- full employment and the right to work;
- fair wages;
- better distribution of the nation’s wealth;
- universal education;
- job, health, and old-age security; and
- a society based on service, cooperation, and corporate well-being rather than acquisition, competition, and the individual. (36:249)

A biblical and theological commitment to be involved in social issues. The *AT* found reasons other than expediency for its position. For example, while the editors cautioned some about their tendency to identify the state with God’s Kingdom, the editors also wondered if Lutherans hadn’t gone too far in their separation of church and state (1934:151, 270). Six years later the *AT* claimed that “Protestants are all too lax in civil duty,” and suggested that the church’s confused notions about the two kingdoms were at fault (1940:102).

Social justice was an issue that arose in many of the *AT*’s Bible studies for high school students and adults, especially in those texts dealing with the prophets. In one session adults were informed that those who criticized pastors for their preaching on social issues would have to bring their charges against the prophets as well. Time after time students were asked to respond to questions such as: Does social justice belong to the doctrinal or practical side of religion? What are we to understand by social justice? Is our social injustice due to poor business or poor religion? (1939:556).

A concern for the witness of the church. The *AT* repeatedly expressed the concern that the failure to speak out on social issues was alienating the working class from the church. The editors wondered, for example, whether the church was really open to the laboring classes and to their just causes. Further, they speculated on the possibility of the church’s supporting laboring people by advocating a limitation on the “wealth which anyone should amass” (1935:491). In 1939 a writer in the *AT* commented that the masses were “estranged from the church because they think the church is not interested in promoting social justice.” He went on to argue that that image had to change (1939:557). Challenging laws that were unjust was apart of that changing image (1940:102).

While the foregoing has provided an introduction to the topic, the principal evidence that the *AT* was engaged in social issues is to be found in its discussion of the issues themselves. Attention is now turned to those discussions.

II. PROHIBITION, ITS REPEAL, AND *The Augsburg Teacher*

Because of its connection with the International Uniform Sunday School Series, the *AT* was committed to offering four temperance sessions every year, a commitment that the *AT* gladly honored by filling over 100 of its pages between 1933 and 1941 with information and exhortations on the “alcohol problem.”

Challenged in 1941 with regard to their stand on the issue, the editors made a vigorous

defense of their work with regard to the “enormous perils which inhere in the traffic in strong drink” (1941:67). Their overall view is summarized in a single sentence of encouragement to teachers of high school students: “If you are able to persuade your students to be temperate or even total abstainers, you have done a good work” (1941: 453). There was little else to do in 1933 but to accept the reality that the 18th Amendment had been repealed. Given that reality, the *AT* went on to address issues that arose out of that repeal, identifying many that have received increasing attention in the 1980s.

The need for a positive and educational approach in dealing with the problem.

Repeatedly the *AT* took the tack that the days of Prohibition and negatives were gone. If Prohibition had taught nothing else, it was that a positive approach had to be taken (1934:93). Part of that new approach included education. “Pronouncements against the liquor and drug traffic are in themselves futile,” it acknowledged. “The church, the synods, and most of all the congregations, must strive by educational and spiritual means and methods to eradicate the evils of the liquor traffic and the use of narcotics” (1941:324).

Accidents, death, and drunk driving. In 1935 the *AT* noted President Roosevelt’s concern over the increase in traffic fatalities. The cause was obvious, the *AT* claimed, though the president wasn’t likely to admit it—drunk driving. Laws, it was argued, were needed to protect people from drunk drivers. Guidelines were needed to determine if and when a driver was drunk (1935:426; 1936:654). Graphs and statistics, demonstrating the connection between alcohol consumption and traffic accidents and deaths, frequently found a prominent place in the pages of the *AT* (1936:10, 654; 1937:396, 397).

The sale of alcohol as a source of tax revenue. In almost every temperance lesson the *AT* challenged the notion that legalizing, and then taxing, the sale of alcoholic beverages was justified because it enriched the treasuries of the state and federal governments. It was argued: “That the welfare of millions of our citizens should be jeopardized for the purpose of turning millions of dollars into the state and national treasuries would seem to be expensive and unwarranted business” (1938:167).

Other issues related to the use of alcohol. Though not receiving as much attention as the previously noted items, the following were identified by the *AT*. One was a concern for those who drank on the job (1941:437). Another was the influence of the media in determining attitudes and behavior, an influence for which the alcohol industry was willing to pay dearly (1940:324). Still another was the disproportionate amount of the nation’s wealth that was spent for alcohol (1941:84). All are concerns of today, but none so much as the last to be noted here—the matter of teen-age drinking, and the responsibility of parents to monitor the behavior of their children (1934:357).

One last dimension of this issue as reflected in the *AT* needs to be mentioned. Although the editors conceded that the consumption of alcoholic beverages had been declared legal, they did not accept the notion that it was right or good. Even more, the fact that the government licensed taverns and gained revenue through the sale of alcohol raised a serious question: did the government share in the responsibility when alcohol was abused? And if it did, what did that say about the Christian’s responsibility to the law and government? The apparent resolution of the question was in favor of obedience and respect for the law, consistent with the editors’

understanding of the Apostle Paul's position. But the difficulty of the issue was such that the reader of the *AT* was left with the impression that civil disobedience was a possible alternative (1936:657). It was the kind of question that would come again in the midst of the Viet Nam War and continues to trouble those who strongly object to any of their taxes being used for nuclear weapons.

III. RACISM, PREJUDICE, AND *The Augsburg Teacher*

Agreeing with a position taken recently by an urban newspaper,⁴ the editors of the *AT* believed that racism had to be combatted, finally, in and through education. Again, they were more than willing to offer the *AT* as a vehicle in which to carry out that educational purpose. There were several dimensions to their advocacy.

The breadth of the AT's concern. The *AT* recognized that prejudice was an injustice perpetrated on many. For example, it acknowledged that women had been discriminated against. Pointing out the contributions that women had made to church, state, and industry, the editors couldn't understand how anyone could question their place on church councils or in government positions (1938:431). Thirty-five years before the first woman was ordained in the Lutheran church, adults were asked to respond to the question: should women serve as ministers of the gospel? (1935:529). Foreigners, Native Americans, Chinese, Japanese—all received sensitive consideration in the *AT* (1933:457, 325; 1939:63, 137). Suggestions for a class project for children included making “friends with a family hitherto thought of only as ‘Italian’ or ‘mill hands’ ...or migrant workers” (1934:7ff).

Criticism of racism in American society. The *AT*, though generally reflecting a positive attitude toward America, recognized that there were glaring problems in the society. “Class prejudice, race prejudice, and lynching” were among the most oppressive in the editors' opinion (1935:601). Clearly they identified it as an evil that was one of the most destructive forces in America. Anti-immigration laws were one expression of this prejudice. In a September, 1938, article, the *AT* took supporters of those laws to task. Thirty thousand Assyrians, it was pointed out, were being persecuted in Iraq, but no nation would receive these people as immigrants. For that horrendous self-interest, argued the writer, the judgment of God would be upon the United States and the world (1938:523). Unfortunately, comparable strong advocacy for the Jews was not found in the *AT*.

⁴“Ruling on Race Law Pleases, Discomforts,” Editorial, *St. Paul Pioneer Dispatch*, May 25, 1937, 8A.

Anti-Semitism and The Augsburg Teacher. In spite of the above statement, anti-semitism, like all prejudice, was identified by the *AT* as an evil that had to be dealt with. As early as October, 1933, only a few months after the Nazi rise to power, the *AT* contained this statement:

The recent anti-Jewish activities in Germany offer a problem for us who bear the name of Luther and we are asked to explain the actions of our compatriots in the land of Luther. Here again the problem appears to be more simple than it actually is. Many loyal Christians in Germany have been interested in the preservation of the Christian faith and also of the culture of the Fatherland, and, hence, their enthusiasm led to unwholesome activities, if the reports we hear are well-founded.

Christian tolerance must replace hatred. The missionary spirit of Paul must lead us to foster enthusiasm for Christianity rather than enthusiasm against that which is not Christian. Racial hatreds and dislikes go deep in human experience and are hard to eradicate. (1933:595)

Germany's treatment of Jews continued to be a concern in the *AT* right up to America's entrance into the war. In 1935 adults were asked to discuss: "Is Germany's treatment of Jews fair?" (1935:153). A few months later they were asked: "How do you account for the anti-Jewish sentiment in some parts of the world?" (1935:411). However others might respond to those questions, the *AT* took the position that the church, the United States, and the League of Nations must intercede on their behalf (1936:441).

Again, in 1937, a writer asked: "Are the Jews responsible for the treatment they receive at the hands of their critics, opponents, and persecutors?" It's the kind of question that allowed for a positive response in the adult class, but the writer would have argued if that "yes" had been given. Nowhere, he insisted, in the teachings of Jesus could justification be found for prejudice (1937:45). In 1938, in a reference to Kristallnacht, and again in 1940, adults were asked to wonder about the peculiar nature of the persecution of the Jews, and to respond to the cries of people who were "agonizing for a safe place...a dependable ally" (1939:159; 1940:247). About that time decisions were made in Germany that made a safe place a desperate need for Jews—a need that went unfulfilled for some six million.⁵

According to Helen Fein, there was considerable hostility to Jews in America from the 1930s to the close of World War II.⁶ In his study, Bernard Olson found that Sunday School curriculum material might have contributed to that hostility.⁷ Though the *AT* reflects, in some particulars, the evidence Olson found, it departs from it in some significant ways, and in those ways combatted anti-semitism. Perhaps the most noteworthy is the theme, repeated in many places, that Christians were deeply indebted to Jews. "Christ was a Jew," commented one writer. "All the great characters of the Bible were Jews. The first

⁵Saul Friedman, *No Haven for the Oppressed: United States Policy Toward Jewish Refugees, 1938-1945* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1973) 105.

⁶Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust* (New York: The Free Press, 1979) 176.

⁷Bernard Olson, *Faith and Prejudice* (New Haven: Yale University, 1963) 111.

missionaries were Jews. The promises of salvation came to us through the Jews. We are indebted to the people of this race" (1941:358).

Another way in which the *AT* departed from the findings of Olson was in its use of words other than "Jews" to describe the enemies of Jesus. There is good reason to believe that this was done deliberately. The editors, aware of the power of words, wrote:

The terms we apply to persons of other races will never help to build a world brotherhood. These uncomplimentary labels we affix to those who have been born under another flag and in another land than our own are, unfortunately, not generally employed in a playful manner. They are words and phrases into which

we crowd a good deal of malignity and venom....We shall have traveled a long distance toward the goal Jesus set for us if we learn to speak kindly of people of other lands. (1933:205)

Using words carefully was one way to combat prejudice, but it wasn't the only suggestion the *AT* had to offer in dealing with this evil.

Ways of combatting racism and prejudice. There were at least two additional ways the *AT* attempted to deal with prejudice. One was by asking open-ended questions such as: "What is a good way to overcome race prejudice?" (1941:342). The other way was by providing answers to their own questions. The following "ways" were selected from various issues: recognize that racism exists, not only in society in general, but in the teachers and students using the *AT* (1934:377); pray for the power of God's Spirit to overcome racism (1934:583); uphold the dignity of humankind by confessing God as the creator of all (1941:264); develop a spirit of neighborliness (1936:151); exhibit a spirit of sympathy and love, avoiding all "racial and religious prejudice" (1941:519); and acknowledge that the gospel is for all (1936:469).

IV. THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND *The Augsburg Teacher*

The Great Depression, wrote David Shannon, was "the greatest economic calamity...in the history of the United States. It is clear," he continued, "that the depression's impact on human beings was vast and horrible."⁸ The electorate, weary of Herbert Hoover's seeming inability to cope with the calamity, elected Franklin Roosevelt to the Presidency in 1932, and with him came the New Deal. The years from 1933 to 1941 were ones of continuing debate and struggle as the nation searched for away out of the devastating grip of the depression. Despite his re-election in 1936 by an overwhelming majority, the nation was hardly unanimous in support of Roosevelt's policies. (Interestingly, a survey of 15,000 pastors found that 70% disapproved of the New Deal.⁹) During those years the editors of the *AT* allowed their materials to be used as a context in which to discuss the issues related to the depression. At the same time, they took, with considerable zeal, positions with respect to those issues which they were convinced were compatible with the gospel.

⁸David A. Shannon, *Between the Wars: America, 1919-1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965) 116.

⁹Thomas Cochran, *The Great Depression and World War II-1929-1945* (Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman, 1968) 113.

If one searches for any sophisticated discussion of economic theory in the *AT*, however, the results will be disappointing. Again, the New Deal generated a flurry of legislation designed to set the economy aright. Both the legislation, and the president who sponsored much of it, were highly controversial. Neither is mentioned to any great extent in the *AT*. The editors of the *AT* were churchmen who saw the depression in all its aspects in biblical and theological terms. Certainly they addressed the issues—the cause of the depression, unemployment, hunger, labor and management disputes, and the distribution of wealth—but all from their perspective. In doing so, they raised questions that continue to challenge church and society today.

The relationship between labor and management. The National Recovery Act, which received favorable comments in the *AT*, provided for reducing the workweek, abolishing child

labor, providing minimum wages, and the right for collective bargaining (1934:55). Achieving each of these, however, came about only after a long struggle between labor and management. While attempting to maintain a dialogue between the two sides, the *AT* consistently took a position in favor of labor.

In 1936 the editors were alarmed at the extremely bitter feelings between labor and management. Though seeing problems on both sides, they claimed that the chasm between rich and poor was too large, and that it was time labor received its due (1936:674). A year later they took a similar stand, identifying labor as the “weaker” side in the dispute. One of the clearest examples of the *AT*’s attempts to be objective in its lesson material concluded with questions that challenged the basic nature of capitalism (1936:301).

Organized unions were necessary, it was pointed out in 1938, because employers were no longer individuals but large corporations. Collective bargaining, entered into in good faith by all parties, held, for the editors of the *AT*, the greatest hope against the exploitation of workers (1938:521). By 1941 the tension between labor and management had been reduced, at least in the opinion of the *AT*. “Each is beginning to see the position of the other....The laboring man is now recognized as a human being, to whom rights and privileges are to be accorded. As never before we have come to see that the laborer is worthy of his hire” (1941:94).

Unemployment during the depression. Unemployment as an issue closely related to the above. The *AT* addressed it on several occasions. It took issue with the notion that the unemployed were lazy and didn’t want to work. While that may have been true for a few, argued the editors, it did not apply to the masses (1936:518, 593; 1937:406).

The editors’ sensitivity to the plight of the unemployed, and the call of the church to reach out to them, is seen in this reflection from 1938:

This morning’s paper announces that with the first of January, 1938—in other words three days from this writing—a manufacturing concern will lay off 30,000 men. The lay mind simply cannot understand why it is not possible to maintain a normal standard of activity....But all that aside, the fact remains that there are swollen ranks of hungry fathers, mothers and children who need to be looked after. The church cannot take its stand on the sidelines...we cannot, we dare not, close our ears to the cries of the needy. (1938:161)

Compassion for victims of the depression, the unemployed, was a repeated theme in the *AT* throughout the years 1933-1941.

The inequitable distribution of wealth. The victims of the depression who suffered from inadequate food, clothing, and shelter did so, argued the editors of the *AT*, not because of insufficient resources, but because of the failure to distribute fairly the plenty that was available in America. While they questioned the burying of corn and the burning of cotton, they deplored a system that exploited people for profit. They wrote: “Only as we cease to exploit people do we approach to the fundamental Christian principles....We can no longer advocate saving money while at the same time blighting human lives” (1936:117). A new social order was needed. The first reference to that need was found in a Labor Day editorial for 1933: “We must have faith in the possibility of a new social order and we must work toward it.” A fuller agenda of that new

order was noted in the opening pages of this paper.

Causes for the lingering depression. Herbert Hoover had hoped the depression would go away quickly. Roosevelt worked hard to turn the economy around. Neither was altogether successful. The editors of the *AT* had their own opinions why the depression wouldn't go away. Until the conditions that had brought it on were changed, things wouldn't get better: exploitation, greed, and inequity in the distribution of wealth had to be dealt with. They agreed with President Roosevelt that fear of fear inhibited economic recovery, but they went further. Only faith in Jesus could overcome that fear (1934:729).

They noted that some were of the opinion that the depression was God's judgment upon America's sins. They weren't so sure. Sin was as likely to be present in bad as in good times. What they were sure of was the need for repentance, and a recommitment to the life God in Christ had called his people to live (1935:121). In all times it was the work of the church to preach repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

V. WAR, PEACE, AND *The Augsburg Teacher*

As Americans emerged from the tunnel of the Great Depression, they found World War II waiting for them. The editors of the *AT* had watched, with remorse, the gathering clouds of war. In their New Year's editorial for 1937 they wrote:

Not all is bright as we face the new year. We have come toward this same season many times with infinitely better hope than we do just now. It is futile to deny that the world is filled with pessimism and a sense of deep fear.... We sit almost breathless as the fearsome news comes in. (1937:2)

Three years earlier this same editor had written: "My first wish is to see the plague of war banished from the earth" (1934:611).

From their desks in Philadelphia in 1939 the editors pictured for their readers a not-so-pretty world. "Japan, China, Russia, Germany, Ethiopia, Italy, Spain, Great Britain" all were at war. One of the greatest burdens for these men was that many of these nations were Christian. How was one to account for that? Further, they were concerned that Lutherans in America had not taken "a sufficiently definite stand on war and peace issues." There were two other con-

cerns on the minds of these men as the war continued on its destructive course up to 1941: the first, assuming the financial and personnel responsibilities for world missions that churches in Europe could no longer handle; and second, providing for the needs of those suffering from the war (1933:655; 1940:314, 587, 638; 1941:37).

The *AT* took up many questions related to war and peace during the years from 1933 to 1941. Among them were the questions as to whether or not Christians should bear arms or even sing hymns like "Onward Christian Soldiers" (1936:665; 1938:441; 1939:673). The greater amount of space, however, was reserved for reminding readers of the *AT* that Christians were called to serve the cause of peace, and identifying the causes of war.

The motive for striving for peace. First and foremost, Jesus was the reason for, and the way to, peace. Throughout the eight years under study, those using the *AT* were reminded that

Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and that those who follow him are called to be advocates of peace. Peace would come, argued the *AT*, when persons and nations were submissive to God for Jesus' sake. It was the mission of the church, so read the adult lesson for December 7, 1941, to bring this gospel of peace to the world (1941:741). Consistent with its emphasis upon submission, the *AT* urged its readers to pray for, labor in the cause of, assist in forming public opinion in support of, and join groups that work for—peace. And, not least, identify and strive against the horrendous evils that led to war (1939:673; 1940:232, 236, 389, 544).

Striving for peace. Identifying the evils that led to war, and those who were behind those evils, was one way the *AT* worked for peace. Leading the list of those perpetrators were the communists and fascists of Europe and Asia, with the manufacturers of armaments and munitions coming in a close second. While admitting that there may be reasons for preparing for defensive action against an aggressor, the editors argued that the very existence of the armaments create the conditions necessary for war. In several places, the dependence upon weapons was seen as a lack of confidence in God (1934:526, 326; 1933:728). “When,” they asked, “shall we have done with the worship of ships and armaments, guns and gas, the tramp of marching armies and the hum of mills that manufacture death-dealing munitions?” (1934:243).

Other factors that contributed to a climate conducive to war identified in the *AT* were: intolerance, overcrowded populations, competition for trade and raw materials, materialism, and jingoistic nationalism. (With respect to the latter point, the editors of the *AT* were strong advocates of a global vision and believed that the “shrinking” world made the pursuit of peace an absolute political necessity as well as a religious one.) Last, but not least, one writer noted that hate was the great enemy of peace. He then related a story as to how Mussolini explained the failure of his troops to defeat the British. It was because they didn't hate enough. The writer went on to say that Mussolini then exhorted his people: hate more! (1936:263; 1938:524, 745; 1939:233; 1940:107, 237; 1941:341).

VI. THE SUNDAY SCHOOL AND *The Augsburg Teacher*: 1933-1941

Enough of the material from the *AT* has now been presented to sketch in the content, colors, and main features of the picture of the Sunday Schools where it served as the curriculum between 1933 and 1941. To begin, it must be noted that in the center of the picture are the Scriptures, the teaching of the Scriptures, and the prayers that those who taught and learned them would be continuously confirmed in the gift of their faith in Jesus Christ. Central, also, to the picture would be the mission of the church to love others for Jesus' sake. Unmistakably, one can see in the picture that this love called Christians to engage in the political, economic, and social concerns of the day. Further, one can see that the colors and tones depicting this aspect of the picture are amazingly clear and exciting. They depict the features of:

- a dialogue (participants were presented with a variety of viewpoints and expected to express their own views and convictions);
- heated conversation (the issues of the 1930s were profoundly complex. Old ideas were challenged, and new ideas presented);
- a biblically based, theologically oriented commitment to the church's engagement in social issues (participants were challenged to reflect on the Christian faith, and to

act in society in ways consistent with that faith); and
–an educational ministry that was dynamic, focused on both the biblical world and the world of that day (in contrast to the view that some seem to have of the Sunday School—that it is nice, but essentially benign).

Charles Wiles and D. Burt Smith, the editors of the *AT*, were fond of concluding session guides and articles with open-ended questions. It's only appropriate that I should do the same: What is the picture of the Sunday School and/or Christian education in your congregation?