

Scriptural Foundation and Basis for the Christian Day School

by

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Abstract/overview: At the invitation and request of Pastor Zwonitzer and for discussions that will be productive towards goals and decisions concerning our beloved Lutheran Day School, I have drafted this simple theological framework for a congregation's responsibility to establish a Christian Day School, extending these principles into a historical perspective that brings us up to date on our present school philosophies and challenges. This is not meant to be any kind of final word, but a discussion starter and educational tool whose aim is God-pleasing unanimity in goals and pursuit of the same. **As this paper concludes with some of the author's personal observations and suggestions, and is meant solely for discussion among the leadership, this paper is not to be shared with anyone by the recipient without explicit and written permission of the author.**

Theological Overview

The Fourth Commandment

In considering the roots of education and its relationship to God, family and society, there is not a better or more succinct set of statements than are found in Luther's Large Catechism, recognized by the Lutheran Church to be the correct explanation of the Word of God. These few paragraphs are worth noting:

In connection with this commandment there is more to be said about the various kinds of obedience due to our superiors, persons whose duty it is to command and to govern. Out of the authority of parents all other authority is derived and developed. **Where a father is unable by himself to bring up his child, he calls upon a schoolmaster to teach him;** if he is too weak, he enlists the help of his friends and neighbors; if he passes away, he confers and delegates his authority and responsibility to others appointed for the purpose. Likewise he must have domestics (man-servants and maid-servants) under him to manage the household. Thus all who are called masters stand in the place of parents and derive from them their power and authority to govern. In the Scriptures they are all called fathers because in their responsibility they act in the capacity of fathers and ought to have fatherly hearts towards their people. So from ancient times the Romans and other peoples called the masters and mistresses of the household *patres et matres familias* (that is, house-fathers and house-mothers).... *Tappert, p. 384 paragraph 141f*

And in relation to the church and the Preaching Office:

Thus we have three kinds of fathers presented in this commandment: fathers by blood, fathers of a household, and fathers of the nation. **Beside these, there are also spiritual fathers** - not like those in the papacy who applied this title to themselves but performed no fatherly office. For the name spiritual father belongs only to those who govern and guide us by the Word of God. St. Paul boasts that he is a father in 1 Cor. 4.15, where he says, "I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel." **Since such persons are fathers, they are entitled to honor, even above all others. But they very seldom receive it, for the world's way of honoring them is to harry them out of the country and grudge them as much as a piece of bread.** In short, as St. Paul says, they must be "the refuse of the world, and every man's offscouring."

Yet there is need to impress upon the common people that they who would bear the name of Christians owe it to God to show "double honor" to those who watch over their souls and to treat them well and make provision for them... *Tappert page 387 paragraph 387f*

It is as a spiritual father, or one holding the Office of the Ministry, that I would like to apply this doctrine and teaching to our present situation, also keeping in mind both a Biblical and (Emmanuel) Constitutional mandate to me in my office to be a spiritual overseer of the children of this congregation and to act in accordance with God's Word and their best interests, which two things (God's Word and a person's best interests) can never be in conflict.

Who is responsible for education and child rearing?

According to the Lord's doctrine under the Fourth Commandment, all authority in society is derived from parental authority. Education is, specifically, a father's direct responsibility and as such, if he needs help in educating his children he must secure himself a schoolmaster to help him. In the Commandment it is obvious that this requirement is placed by God upon all parents regardless of their faith or lack of faith. It is a parental responsibility. Although the state or other agencies may carry out some aspects of that in society that does not broach the direct responsibility of parents to be responsible to educate their children.

Who is responsible for Spiritual 'fatherhood'?

Besides (apart from and next to) the parental responsibility to teach is a 'spiritual fatherhood', which means that all other authority, necessary as it is, falls short of providing children what they ultimately need from God. For this purpose God, through his Son and his Gospel, has provided for our adoption into the family of God from which Adam and Eve fell in sin. This one office is necessary and instituted by God in the church by which children are adopted into Christ through the washing of rebirth, fed in faith through instruction, preaching of the Gospel, Christian admonition, Confession and Absolution, and holy Communion. Under this spiritual fatherhood under Christ family lines dissolve into fraternity, all are brothers of Christ; the Pastor is their servant on behalf of Christ to give them Christ through the Means of Grace.

Parents served by this spiritual fatherhood (that is, parents who are members of the church) are thus served by the Gospel to serve others, including their children. Thus such parents also establish a family altar to read and teach God's Word, to have family discipline, which is also Christian discipline; establish instruction not only in the passable knowledge attained by man, but the impassible knowledge of God in Christ; and, as they promised when they brought their children to Baptism, they bring them to their family gathering once a week to receive God's preaching and grace in the Divine Service.

But this responsibility is not the office of the Holy Ministry. It is the office of Christian parent, which sees the Word and Sacrament (as does every Christian) as their spiritual focal point since that alone is where Christ is present to give out public grace and where he has commanded them to come to receive it; the same Lord that will give out public judgement on the last day. Parents understand that if they have coldly shut Christ and his precious grace out of their lives here on earth, and taught their children to do the same, they and their children will be locked out of heaven forever. Christ will weep over them as he did over Jerusalem (Matthew 23.37-39): "O how I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. See! Your house is left to you desolate!" And (Hebrews 10.29-31), "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God under foot, counted the blood of the covenant (refers in the NT only to holy Communion) by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord,' and 'the Lord will judge his people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Thus all believing earthly fathers know the greater heavenly Father whom they acknowledge, serve and who gives them grace. To him they also gather their children. For his sake they as his children honor and support the Office of the Public ministry as they expect honor and respect from their own children.

What, then, is a Christian Day School?

From this it is philosophically straightforward to say what the Christian Day School is. It is a resource for Christian parents to help raise their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. If they send their children to a public school they will have the same relation to those teachers as they do with the

Christian day school teachers except for one thing; Public School teachers will not help the parents at all in bringing them up in the Word of God. Thus parents, by sending their children to public school, are saying that they need no help to teach their children devotion and service to God, but will shoulder it all themselves. In that, they potentially make themselves (2 Corinthians 6.14) "Unequally yoked". In a way it is like entering into a mixed marriage (with an unbeliever) where what is taught by the believing spouse has the potential of being snatched away by the unbelieving partner's words and deeds. It will be necessary for the believing parent to say to his children, "I am sending you to a teacher you cannot trust; a liar, in areas that deal with sin, virtue, origins, and other spiritual matters."

Spiritually, this means that a Christian parent is responsible to send their child to the Christian Day school and to seek one out for the sake of their faith, which is created and nurtured with the Doctrine of God and destroyed by the doctrines and wisdom which men invent. One must avoid being unequally yoked when possible in faithfulness to Biblical injunctions against the same.

What is a teacher? From whom does his authority derive?

Thus the relationship between the teacher and the parent is key. The teacher derives his authority from the parent, who decides to entrust his child to the instructional care of the teacher. The teacher must have every good characteristic of a parent, and since it is Christian parents sending their children to a Christian school, he or she must exhibit every good character trait of a Christian parent or risk offending one of Christ's little ones and teaching them wrong.

These characteristics in the classroom include leading the children at the family (class) altar, leading them in Christian discipline, and making them gather with Christ around Word and Sacrament each week as the focal point of their life as Christians in Christ's family, enjoying the foretaste of heaven together with all the saints (not just my family or my classroom). And thus, thankfulness for and dependence upon the Office of the Ministry and the grace given out publicly through Christ's servants set the tone for the child's life-long walk towards heaven. Teachers and parents are thus yoked as 'equal,' that is, both under Christ in his grace; and leading the children on the path of justification by grace.

The School: An extension of the church or the family?

Debate as to whether the Office of Teacher is an extension of the Office of the Ministry or something else is decided beyond dispute by our confession of the Fourth Commandment. It is not derived from the office of the Ministry of the Church. It is a churchly office which a congregation is not required, but may elect to use, when parents need help in instructing their children. As such, it would be hard, but not impossible, to envision a congregation who would not want, desire and support filling such an important office in the church. The necessity of this office is not based on the spiritual need to administer Word and Sacraments, crucial and constitutive of the church, but it is based upon the necessity of parents saddled with the huge and impossible task of 'bringing up their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord.'

As such the school is an extension of the Christian family, not the church. This black and white statement is meant to bring clarity to the issue. It can be muddied when it is stated that Christian families ARE the church and therefore it is an extension of the church. That is true! However, if there were a Christian congregation in which there were no Christian parents with children in the household being raised, the Christian church at that place would not have any parents who would seek out a schoolmaster. The teacher extends the ministry of parents, not that of the Pastoral Office.

The Lutheran Day School's Roots

True to Its Theological Foundations.

True to its roots, the philosophy of the Lutheran school has, for the most part, mirrored the model given above. Because of the great needs that parents felt to raise their children and especially to raise them in the faith, the Christian parish school has been advocated and supported by the church since Reformation days even in the powerful writings of Luther, who most unambiguously supported the maintenance of Christian schools.

As such, especially in our American context, congregations aided their parents by establishing and supporting the Lutheran parish school. It was a center of family activity. Sunday Worship and lifelong participation in the Means of Grace was everyone's focal point. Education goals were set high because the highest of all Wisdom, that of Christ and the Holy Scriptures, was the heart and center of the education. And the arts, sciences, and other useful skills flourished as they served the Glory of their Creator. Parents and teachers were equally yoked. They had the same theology and goals for theology. Such schools held great promise for the future of the church.

Who is responsible for funding; content; discipline?

Though parents are totally responsible for the education of their own children, grandparents also took an interest. Their (spiritual) brothers and sisters, with whom they gathered around Christ in worship, also saw the burden parents bore and 'bearing the other's burdens, fulfilled the Law of Christ.' Sharing our brother's burden is a part of the Christians life. "Let us do good unto all men, especially those of the household of faith." And thus the heavily burdened parent was given relief by his brothers and sisters in the parish who saw Christian education as necessary for every child whether he was his own child or not. They all took pity on the children and committed with the parents to support the teachers who would be called on behalf of the congregation to this sacred and important office. The funding is totally the responsibility of the fathers of the children. But the fathers always have had the help of their brothers in the bonds of Christian love.

A Board of Christian Education and PTL were typically put into place and an administrator where it was necessary. Thus behavior goals, curriculum and grading standards, as well as disciplinary (punishments) policies made the system kind and just as every Christian family must thus be administered. Thus parents and teachers remained 'equally yoked' and on the same page so much as is possible in a fallen world of sin.

What was the goal? Was it successful???

In assessing the success of the Lutheran Christian day school the nature of the original goal must be respected. The goal was that Christian parents wanted help bringing up their children with teachers that would affirm with them, the parents, the ultimate importance of the Word of God and the grace given by the Word and Sacraments in church so that they would enjoy that grace and God's favor in time and eternity.

Now if that is the goal, then its success will be the kind of success that God's Word always brings. That is, a success that defies measurement by reason and worldly standards, whose success looks like defeat in the world's eyes, and that follows Christ under a cross. As the Apostle says of our life under the cross "we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God."

This is what we see in terms of our Lutheran Grade Schools, if we look honestly on it, in the year 2006. After having a Lutheran Grade School for over 60 years, one would expect that most of the children that came through our grade school would be well indoctrinated and be glad and grateful for the church that gives them forgiveness and Christ through preaching and the Sacrament. Instead, many (most?) are unappreciative or even resentful that Lutheran Doctrine was ‘shoved down their throats.’ And, indeed, it was. Their teachers told them it was the only true and pure doctrine of the gospel. Swallow or die! Yet many hardened little hearts would not taste and see that the LORD is good. Many don’t think much of the great gift of true teaching that Christ died to give them and the grace given in Word and Sacrament and which their parents sacrificed to support. Whose fault is that? Does that mean we must change something to make it more successful? Or is that the nature of the Gospel and the way it works among sinners?

Speaking for a moment of general attitudes towards the school on the part of parents, I would give a preliminary disclaimer that I am talking about general attitudes and trends and do not mean in any way to demean or not to acknowledge that there are and have always been excellent examples of exemplary support and good attitudes of parents towards the school. But the general atmosphere in the past 30 years has declined and is a reason for some disappointment. I am here describing only what disappoints.

Today there is a trend among member parents, some of whom may even have attended a Lutheran Grade School, who elect to send their children to public school. They are willing to shoulder all the responsibility for their children’s spiritual upbringing. They want help to teach them all other aspects but not this aspect. Why pay the extra just for daily Biblical instruction when you can get education ‘free’ without it? It is very seldom seen as a Christian duty worth our sacrifice to send children to the Christian day school. Those parents, then, must also answer for their stewardship and their teaching the faith to their children.

Today there is a trend among church member parents to pay a required tuition, which covers much less than half of their child’s education cost, but then to acknowledge no responsibility at all to tithe and regularly give an offering, even though the offering (not tuition) is the mandate given in Scripture and even though they are ultimately responsible for paying for all the services that their children receive. Instead of being thankful for the generous help of brothers and sisters in faith, many see it as their right to get that money from them. They have become like those habitually receiving welfare. They see it as a right instead of a gift. And, worse than that, many despise coming with their children to the Means of Grace every Sunday. Thus while they take the money their brother and sisters generously give they will not give as a brother or sister for the benefit of others, they disdain the family and its gathering around Christ and give no support to the public office of the ministry, to whom they owe “double honor.” “Give me the money, I don’t want Christ.” After they reap a benefit for their own children they will not support the attendance of other people’s children through their tithe. By their behavior they prove Christ’s love, that sacrifices for others and asks nothing for itself, is far from them. And we as a church have allowed that attitude and behavior to flourish for fear of offending them. To keep numbers we have not done our Christian duty to correct these attitudes and call to repentance. We’ve let it go on all too long. Now it seems impossible to confront it in a godly manner. How can we be helped?

The Spirit wrought faithful desire to tithe and to give first fruits of our earnings to the work of the Gospel has faded away to a selfish desire to have more of the comforts the world has to offer. Our church and school are not suffering from a lack of blessing. God has blessed our society more than ever. Our church and school are suffering from a lack of Christian love and generosity that selfishly will not tithe and sacrifice for the kingdom, but only wants to indulge our own material appetites and won’t find satisfaction in our greatest treasure, Christ and his grace.

And how strange when teachers who are called to be exemplars of parents may have become unequally yoked to hypocrites, members of the church who merely claim to be members but have no faith, no real need for Christ. What good does it do the children to have such a mixed message from those who are raising them?

With all that has been, most regrettably but necessarily, said we might measure the school as a failure. All the effort to found and support it has not strengthened the church. For all the good the church and God could have expected from these great gifts and sacrifices over the years, the church seems in worse shape than ever.

Yet that is not the measure of the Word's success. Many are called but few are chosen. Despite all the above, there will be souls in heaven, perhaps a very small percentage of those who have graduated from this school, who, despite all these sins and all these obstacles, have, by the working of the Holy Spirit, truly embraced the Gospel and in good and repentant hearts treasure the Word they received from their parents, teachers and pastors. In the end their salvation will measure the success of the school. And that will not be seen 'till the last day. But then we will see it has all been worth the effort.

What has changed and why?

In evaluating the past and present, we must acknowledge that things have changed in our congregational and school situation since the '50's and '60' when Christians flocked to Emmanuel to enroll their children in the school and when the pews were filling instead of emptying. Whereas in the past the principal never had to actively recruit students because families yearned for and valued the Lutheran School, our modern principals are 'under the gun' to recruit and advertise. Whereas in the beginning no tuition was charged but the fathers of the congregation were reminded of their responsibility to support teachers through their offerings, now we charge tuition and many school families put next to nothing in the collection plate. Whereas it used to be a rare exception that a student would be enrolled whose family did not belong to the congregation now 50 % of our small enrollment is from outside of our congregation.

Why these changes? They came about so that the school could survive and try to maintain the size and staffing 'successes' that were experienced in the past. In order to fund the school, since historically a trend was noted that school families did not contribute, they were charged tuition. Since enrollment was declining and we want to maintain a 'critical mass' necessary to have a school program we opened enrollment to anyone who wanted to come, of course, making the parents sign a promise that they will take their kids to church, and that they will participate in our services when their class or choir sings. But since these promises are wrung out of most of them unwillingly they signed knowing they would not carry through. And we had no leverage to force them.

These changes are not good, but have been deemed necessary for 'survival.'

Is it now successful? Present challenges...

The measure of success in the world is not the measure of success in God's kingdom. If we see success as something which we must secure, we will be caught up in asking (in the words of that famous short story book designed to get people to create new paradigms) "who moved the cheese?" This would invite us to assume that we ought to find a new paradigm and that since 'the system is broke' we need to fix it. Things have changed. But some things haven't.

The need for parents to raise children spiritually in the Word of God has not changed. God wants that for all children. The question is will we honor that need or shift away from the Word of God, which will offend reason. And what is this education worth? Is each person willing to sacrifice, that means go without something they want, in order to have it for them?

The need for God's grace given through Word and Sacrament hasn't changed. But do we want to teach that peculiar Lutheran Doctrine, or is it the generic protestant, "All I need is me and my Bible (that is, no church / means of grace, is necessary)" doctrine we will support and nurture in order not to offend and thus make such generic protestants comfortable among us? And perhaps we will do it to survive by getting their money while we make them comfortable with what God would have us turn them from in repentance.

Since the main problem and (I hope) goals haven't changed, it must be asked, "why should we change our original principles?" If we do we will merely be inventing something other than a Christian school that grew out of these principles. Principle-wise, what is our school? Is it a place our Lutheran parents have chosen to find Lutheran teachers to grow mature Lutheran Christians, which is what a Lutheran School is, according to the Fourth Commandment? Or do we want to invent something else because we are looking for someone else to pay for it?

Our challenge is, therefore, one of faith. Should we change the faith in order to succeed? Or will we, as did past generations, cling to this Gospel faith in the midst of our trials and trust that even if it gets worse will we abandon it for us or for our children? The challenge is not to become successful. That's not typically what happens by reason's standard when the Word is preached. The challenge is to remain faithful.

Present Purpose?

That being said, I will take a few minutes to help you consider some changes that could, or even some would say must be made, and to comment on some possible directions that this would take us, also in relationship to our goals and the spiritual principles of Christian Education.

Church School?

There are some facts that may lead us to believe that we are, at this time, no longer a church school. The following bullet points might lead to that conclusion and some are probably worth arguing about:

- Many school families are not members.
- Many member families have not sent their children. They don't want the help..
- Many school parents do not contribute to church, they "pay tuition" and will stop support on the day of graduation.
- Many parents do not have reception of God's Grace as the goal for their child rearing.
- Parents and teachers are thus unequally yoked.

Much of what drives our compromising of principles, our lack of confronting the wrong patterns that have developed among our members, and the acceptance of those who in no way can agree with our principles is the decline of church membership, of school attendance, the attrition of both. One solution is to intentionally lower school standards, change operations and just honestly say, "You aren't going to send your kids to church anyway and we know it, so we aren't going to bother you about it anymore." "You are a member of the Community, or the Baptist, or Methodist Church, and you are never going to believe in the means of Grace anyway, so we will never teach about it nor against your non-Sacramental faith. You will

feel welcomed and comfortable in your sins against the Second Commandment (false teaching in God's name)." That solution is, essentially, in the next section "Community School."

But what would happen if we went back to the original principles upon which the school was founded? That is, that it exists because Lutheran parents want help teaching their children. It would be returned to a parish school. What would that look like?

- Parents would be reminded of their obligation to send kids to Parish rather than Public School.
- Funding and staffing would drop to what parents and congregation can afford. Funding would be capped by offerings presently being spent on the school plus current church member tuition which the congregation would expect to come in through the offering plates.
- Enrollment would drop and more combining occur. The only reason this would be tolerable would be the reason for the school, for an education centered in God's Word. The families would be expected to sacrifice worldly glitter and opulence only for that.
- Only those in active church membership would be permitted to enroll. Vacant desks could be filled by 'evangelism prospects' tuition free or kids from neighboring congregations, whose parents and/or congregation would pay for their entire cost of education.

That major change would either prune the school back to allow it to return to its original principles, educate our church and parents again of what the school is, in repentance for past policies, and become, if God so blesses us, vibrant again in a few years; or it would be so major a disruption that it would not survive. What would God do with our returning to Godly principles in a spirit of repentance and trust? I guess that would be up to Him! But if we let it go on as it is can we expect God to be pleased by our compromising his way and choosing our own?

Community School?

Some Lutheran Schools in the area have sold out to community schools that have been quite successful. This keeps an educational presence in the area and makes the church visible to the families who attend but it also relinquishes the opportunity to share the Gospel with the children.

The Christian version of this is to become 'non denominational.' By widening the road of salvation to approve or silently ignore false doctrine, more will walk on the path. Such a solution would desecrate the faith and intention of our fathers and would be a compromise of the truth of God's Word.

Mission Field?

This is a popular paradigm for the school. "If you get the kids, you get the parents." However, the arrangement of the teachers with the parents is to educate their children for a year, not to baptize and teach them their whole lives. Are we honest and equally yoked with parents if they come wanting the children to be educated, maybe even with some Scriptures, while the teachers have getting the children baptized and integrated into the lives of the Baptized community as their goal? The teachers are not preaching; they are being paid by the parents to help raise their children. If the parents are unbelievers they are not on the same page as the teachers. They are unequally yoked.

Secondly, the Gospel is never something we sell for money (remember indulgences?). If we charge tuition to an unbeliever we are not giving him the Gospel. It costs them something which they have no choice but to pay. Is that mission work? No, it is a confusion of Law and Gospel. And if a child does come to faith

and is separated from the church by his parent's example and authority, it is a wonderful thing. But it places him into a situation of persecution in his own home. I'm sure this has happened by the richness of God's grace, but one must also wonder if, in that situation, the seed that is sown is not most likely to be snatched away again, or whither under the sun in that thin soil or choked by the cares of the world in his own home. They would be put in the dubious position of being brought to faith with no church to be a part of. That is a terrible situation for anyone, let alone a child. Can you think of a single Biblical example of a family being brought to faith by a child's conversion (Ok, I know, Naaman)? There are many examples of households being baptized by conversion of adults. Parents are responsible to provide for their children, not the other way around.

Parental Resource Center?

Finally, acknowledging the times in which we live, we must not be oblivious to directions in our own community, so far as parental choice in education is concerned. Some who seem most concerned about good education for their children are home schoolers. Though they are often looked down upon, we must say that if anyone takes seriously their responsibility to educate their children it is they. It also has been reported and observed that many home schoolers are Christians. These home schoolers are well aware of the difficulties of running a school 'below the critical mass' which allows sports, band, and other extra curricular activities to provide socialization which is rare in the home school environment.

One could envision a church or parish school being a Parental Resource Center for home schoolers. While not covenanting to teach their students, it could provide curriculum, guidance, sound orthodox materials for them to teach; an open door to the pastor to nudge them towards the necessity of church and means of Grace involvement and an organizational bridge head for coordinating larger activities among home schoolers such as sports and extracurricular activities that could be primarily funded by the parents and coordinated through the parish resource center.

The commitment of these parents, if not to Lutheran education, but to the best education they can secure for their children, would be a connection that, if not identical to the Lutheran concern for education is most akin to it and might make this connection one worthy of pursuing.

Conclusion

Those are my thoughts about our situation. It calls for much discussion in the near future. Are there points where you strongly disagree? Are there solutions that you do not see here that you would like to have considered? What are your thoughts as leaders as to what direction we need to go and how we can involve all the people who need to be heard to benefit education and the welfare of God children and families here at Emmanuel?

Please get back to me with your reaction to this paper after you have given yourself some time to chew and digest it.

Respectfully submitted,

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