

THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE
in respect to
USING GOD'S WORD IN THE SCHOOL

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Introduction

The theme of this convention is "The Truth Shall Make You Free". In this essay we shall look at that theme in respect to using the Word of God in the Christian Day School. Quite simply, God's Word is used in the school to relay the TRUTH of the freedom through Christ into every activity. Just as surely as everybody in high school smelled the "rotten eggs" when the chemistry class heated up the sulfur^u - the TRUTH of the Gospel of Jesus Christ must permeate the heart of the students in the school.

I. The Lambs Need the TRUTH

What is the situation of the student in our Christian Day School? Quite often the congregation has the mission aspect as one of its major objectives in operating its school. That may mean there are students walking in the room on the first day who are not Christians because they weren't baptized or previously instructed in God's saving Word. Koehler says: "He (the teacher) ought not to turn^{them} away; on the contrary, he should seek to win them for Christ. Let him teach them the knowledge of their sins and their responsibility to God in order that he may thereby lead them to repentance. But above all, let him teach them the love of God in Christ in order that through the operation of the Holy Ghost true faith may be wrought in their hearts." (Koehler, p. 115)

Others in the school have heard the emancipation proclamation of the Gospel but would be identified with "the Jews who had believed him" (John 8:31). Kretzmann describes the Jews: "The Jews thought the Lord spoke of the liberty of the body from the tyranny of an earthly despot." (Kretzmann, Vol. I, p. 458) Students in our schools, too, when hearing that Christ has set them free from sin and its dominion over their lives

often will miss the impact of the underlined part. They can so easily block it out of their thinking and replace it with free from hard school work, arguing parents, or brothers and sisters who always get their own way. Their minds can be held in the bondage of a delusion from which they should be freed.

It must not be ignored that the youngsters in the school have had the American ideal of "if you do enough it's yours" rubbed upon them a time or ten, also. "If you do all your work you can get into grade seven, begin on the next reading level, or maybe become President." This kind of reasoning produces a real contrast in thought to the free gift of eternal life as accomplished by Christ for all; yet, it is a prevalent philosophical attitude.

Christ said to those same Jews who didn't have the full scope of His redemptive work: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8: 31-32) As Christ's disciples, the youth in the school are to stay in the circle of God's Word, too! The Christian Day School provides systematic and regular instruction for that purpose in accordance with Scripture which states: "The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12) The use of God's Word in the school is vital in meeting the greatest need of the students.

II. Teach the Lambs to know the TRUTH

Due to the need stated in Part I it becomes important to teach the truth of Christ's sacrificial offering. It seems self-evident to do so;

yet, during this past year was heard the statement concerning the formal instruction in God's Word in a neighboring school that has Lutheran on its sign (not WELS) - "We don't have any religion class. We get the Bible out once in a while and read from it." God spare us of such shenanigans!

A. Clearly taught as divine truths

Not only is God's Word - especially the truth of Christ's redemptive work - to be taught through the Bible stories, catechism lessons, and hymn studies, it must be taught clearly as God's divine revelation. In the school God's Word can be used so that the students "know the truth." Yes, they must learn that they came into this world as prisoners of sin, but they are now free from the enslavement of sin. In addition, the use of God's Word gives the student continued strength and guidance in enjoying such freedom in a God-pleasing way. These are divine truths. Paul always made a big issue of the fact that his teachings came from God. He says in I Thessalonians 2:13 - "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe." The first sixteen questions in the catechism serve as an opportunity to teach the divinity of the Gospel message as found in the Bible.

Not only must the TRUTH be divinely taught, it must be taught clearly. "While the Word of God is indeed the only means of effecting a truly Christian education, it does not work like a charm or incantation, which when pronounced over the child, but not understood by

him, will produce this wonderful result. It is not the sound of the words we speak, but the ideas and truths these words express that possess power to influence and move the heart. However, the heart can be reached only by way of the mind. Hence we must teach clearly that our pupils may understand correctly." (Koehler, p. 10)

In his preface to the Small Catechism, Luther descriptively portrays the conditions which result when God's Word is used in a mechanical way. He makes several statements indicating that those responsible for teaching should teach. For instance, in referring to teaching the Ten Commandments he says: "Always adduce many examples from the Scriptures to show how God punished and blessed." (Book of Concord, p. 340, 18)

The same is true in teaching a clear understanding of the freedom in Christ. Such understanding will come as the Law is used as a mirror for the children in reminding them of their sins and as the Gospel is used in impressing them with the freedom Christ gained for them. Therefore, the Christian teacher digs into the Bible stories and passages and draws out the TRUTH. First the teacher must have a clear grasp and then relay that understanding - really teach it! A pertinent point here is the selection of material to be taught. The stories of the fall and redemption of man are of prime importance since the young who are in the school have need of "the sincere milk of the Word" (I Peter 2:2) Care must be observed as to putting them on "meat" so as not to smudge the importance of the "truth that sets them free!"

B. Purely taught

Also of importance when teaching the lambs of Christ is the purity of the teaching. John 8:31 says, "If you hold to my teaching". Matthew 28:20 states: "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." There is no room for personal opinion for Jeremiah 23:28 indicates: "But let him who has My word speak My word in truth." If the children are to be taught the TRUTH so that they have a "right Chirstian faith and lead a right Christian life" (Koehler, p.149), then philosophies of this world can have no part in teaching; we would be as guilty as the people of Isaiah's age: "They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules made by man." (Matthew 15:9 and Isaiah 29:13).

C. More than imparting the facts

The Word of God is indeed powerful and produces faith as we learn from Scripture. (Romans 1:16; Isaiah 55:11; Hebrews 4:12)

Teaching the lambs to know the TRUTH includes imparting the knowledge to them to make them "wise unto salvation". In the total training of the child in school we look to Jesus as the master teacher as opposed to the scribes who went through the motions: ^{We hear} "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matthew 7:28-29, also see Luke 4:32).

In encouraging teachers to follow the example of Christ in mastering the material and applying it to the needs of the child we hear: "Thus the impressiveness of our instruction depends not only

I am not ashamed My Word shall not return empty & powerful

on what we say, but also how we say it. The tonal expression of the voice must be adapted to the content of the words; it must be true, not feigned. Therefore, to speak and teach impressively and convincingly, the teacher must himself be impressed with, and convinced of, what he says." (Koehler, p. 154)

What is important here is that as we work on clearly and purely teaching God's Word we also reach the hearts of the students so that they willingly do and observe in their lives what Christ would have them do!

III. Impress the Lambs of Christ with the TRUTH

To impress the TRUTH of the Gospel the Christian Day School teacher has a multitude of avenues to follow while using God's Word.

A. Repetition and review

Deuteronomy 6:6-8 states: "And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up."

In the systematic and regular instruction in God's Word in the school the key stories of man's fall and redemption are repeatedly taught. In catechism and hymn lessons they are referred to in developing the lesson. Students many times retell them. It's not a "one-shot" effort in the total program.

The provision for review is to be a part of every lesson according to the student teaching lesson plan guides - and with good reason!

Teachers, too!

Children forget; children are absent; children have trouble determining the main idea or principal points in lessons. For all of these reasons it is good to review, and especially in the review to emphasize the redemptive work of Christ shown in the previous lesson or perhaps, the guidance and strength offered to the redeemed child of God in the previous lesson.

B. Application

The key to really "making it last", that is, to carry out the objective you had in the first place, is in applying the truth of the Gospel to the life of the child. Here again Koehler distinguishes between a mere head knowledge and a knowledge that permeates the very existence of the individual. In referring to John 17:3, "Now this is eternal life: that men may know you," the knowing includes "not merely a purely intellectual knowledge, such as an unbelieving scoffer may have acquired by diligent study of the Bible, but it is a nosse cum affectu, a knowledge which has affected the heart and the will, working conviction and confidence". (Koehler, p. 137)

The teacher, realizing the importance of this, will keep in his memory a store of incidents that he observed in the classroom, on the playground, at the home visits, at sporting activities, or at community activities. Likewise, he will lead children to search their own lives in applying the truths to their own life at school, home, and at play. Through questioning

Through good application God's Word becomes the redeemed child's guidance for living.

C. Integration

Closely allied to application would be integration. This term in this case would include working the TRUTH into the activities of the school. This is the daily task, duty, and privilege of the Christian Day School teacher. This is why we have our Dr. Martin Luther College for preparing Christian teachers.

Let's take a look at a few examples to show how integration of God's Word into the activities of the day can serve to impress the truth of the freedom of the Gospel as taught in the formal Word of God instruction.

Example: A child becomes angry and hits his classmate during a game at recess. The teacher breaks it up and determines that the child realizes fully that he has gone against God's will as indicated in the 5th Commandment. The teacher then, realizing the child knows his sin, assures him of the forgiveness in Christ and uses the reference of Joseph and his dealings with his brothers, or Jesus and his crucifixion, or Stephen and his "stoners" to serve as a guide and example in overcoming the temptation and motivating him to Godly living in the future.

Example: A science lesson includes readings with evolutionary statements. The story of creation has been previously taught; however, now is the golden opportunity to reaffirm God's loving hand in specially creating man - not causing him to accidentally happen - and then with a few

short questions to review that man spoiled that creation but God put it right again through Christ's atonement.

It is through situations such as these that the character of the child becomes molded. We have our Christian Day Schools so that the redeemed child of God is guided in his freedom in Christ throughout the activities of the school day. This is truly Christian education.

D. Personal attitude toward God's Word

A great deal of how the imprint of the TRUTH really is pictured by the child has to do with the personal attitude of the teacher himself toward God's Word. Is the teacher personally impressed by the love of Christ for man? Is he convinced Christ died for the ill-behaved in his classroom? Is he confident of the power of the Gospel such as Isaiah and Paul state? (Isaiah 55:11 and Romans 1:16) Does he exemplify the truths that he desires in the students? Is he a living epistle?

Koehler says: "They may forget many a lesson they have learned, but the impression of the personality and character of their teacher remains." (Koehler p. 70) Thinking back to teachers you've had - this is right, isn't it?

The Gospel is to make a lasting impression as day after day goes by. The things mentioned above are not new or unique - they are part of the "systematic and ⁱⁿ ^{structure} regular intention" the Christian Day School provides.

IV. Motivate the Lambs with the TRUTH

A. In the daily routine

Another use of the Word of God is in providing proper motivation. This is only done by starting at the source of all God-pleasing action in life.

In the school routine the Gospel's "gotta" shine! The Law is used to show the child the need for his Savior. The glorious truth of the Gospel follows and the load of guilt is removed. The child is so thankful he wants to please this "rich uncle" and do all to show him gratitude. The Gospel is now his motive for godliness of living. In the school day this includes emphasizing a number of things that run contrary to Mr. Average American. All things are to be done out of love for what Christ first did for us - not for prestige, money, or personal glory. Students are to be faithful in carrying out their duties as students so that their gifts and abilities are developed to the fullest for the benefit of the kingdom of God - not for some lucrative job or position as an adult. The child gladly hears and learns the Word of Truth because God thereby strengthens his faith - not because his teacher tells him to or because his parents say a little religion is a good thing.

Against such negative forces the Christian teacher continues to use the still small voice of the Gospel as Elijah of old did - assured of success.

With the proper motives firmly entrenched, the child of God thrills again and again at the thought of pleasing his God in positive ways such as: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micha^{ah} 6:8) "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word." (Ps. 119:9) "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.")Ps. 119:105)

B. In special situation

There are special situations where the Gospel must serve as motivation for correct action. In the Christian Day School as well as any other school, children turn around to visit; talk out of turn; leave work incomplete. The root of these problems is very simple - sin! The teacher here must remember the source of all true motivation. "The law brings wrath." (Rom. 4:15) The law can't instill the proper incentive for a truly Christian life. The Gospel is the source of help. "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Phillippians 3:14)

Some children in our school will have learning problems due to poor eyesight, poor hearing, brain damage, etc. These children can so easily become discouraged. They, too, are in need of that same motivating force - the TRUTH - Christ died for me, too! As they become discouraged and disappointed in their daily struggle with learning, the Gospel becomes a rich source of guidance and comfort - the one sure thing they can cling to!

V. Offer opportunities to respond to the TRUTH

Scripture is used in the Christian Day School to offer opportunity to respond to the Truth.

In school devotions the child joins classmates in praising the God of their Salvation in songs, hymns, psalms, scripture readings and prayers that say "thank you" or serve to further impress the basic truth of their redemption in Christ!

Classroom groups and school choirs share with the congregation the truths of their salvation and give praise for it.

In creative expression of art and poetry the child finds yet another way of his own to illustrate or say that "Jesus died for all". (I'll never get sick of seeing that displayed!)

Here the Word of Truth serves as the reservoir from which the students express in their own way that they are God's.

VI. Encourage Students to Continue in the TRUTH

A. Grateful remembrance

Scripture can be used in the school to encourage the students to stay in the circle of God's Word which they've come to know, live in, and cherish. Children forget and should be frequently reminded of what they are, what Christ has done for them, and what there is in store for them: (I Peter 1:18-19; II Cor. 8:9-12; I Cor. 3:16;

*If you know the
those happy ones*

- John 13:17)

*Not redeemed with
corruptible - but
with blood*

*You know the
grace of our
Lord*

Temple of God

B. Memory work

you must be rich

Memorization of the main truths of Scripture as revealed in passages, chief parts, and hymns are priceless gems for the youngsters to refer to both now and as adults. Here a word of caution is in place so as not to equate memorization with torture. Also, do you yawn after hearing John 3:16 for the 895th time in your teaching career? If you are thrilled at hearing their memory work, won't it already seem more of a gem?

C. Meditation

As the child builds up his stock of passages, Bible stories, and hymn stanzas it can offer him opportunity for personal meditation upon the goodness of God. Deut. 6:6-7 (cf. p. 6) seems to indicate God's Word was a rather vital part of family life in Old Testament

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times. Certainly the reflective thoughts of men of the Bible on sal-
vation as God promised and carried out can be an example as they are
explored in Scripture. Men such as Moses, Jacob, King David (his
reflective psalms), Simeon, Paul (his amazement at the mercy of God
in sending salvation), are examples for them to search out. Medita-
tion itself can be suggested in school - especially before devotions
and at home personally.

D. Personal use of the Bible

The child's personal use of the Bible can be fostered without
force. Discussion can be held concerning times in the school day when
the Bible could be read personally. If worksheets are used, a sugges-
ted short correlated reading connected to the main topic can be used.
(Kramer's Devotions for Lutheran Schools is a good source for related
readings to Bible History and Catechism lessons.) The upper graders
might be encouraged to follow a "Great Chapters of the Bible Series."
Of course, getting the Bible in the hands of the youth' with its use
by all the class in Scripture readings for devotion and catechism
lesson development will make it more of a friend - like your first
baseball cap! In the upper grades, following Bible stories in the
Bible and seeing if other information is included can help to develop
the searching habit.

Conclusion

In conclusion - it is my prayer that God's Word continues to be used in
our schools. Like the smell of the little girl's spilled, cheap perfume seems

to hang in the classroom endlessly, so the Gospel is to permeate the school and the activities therein - that's the way it's "sposed to be"! God's Word with the emphasis on the truth of the Gospel shall make you free!

When the child leaves the Christian Day School at the end of a day, or week, or school year he'll still sing: "School's out; school's out; teacher let the monkeys out," but only after he's joined his classmates in singing "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow!" and may we say of each precious lamb in our schools: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." (Colossians 2:6-7)

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