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A Pedagogy of Truth  
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Raising our Children in Truth  
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If we want to raise our children in truth we must first acknowledge that our children are not ours. They belong to the God who adopted them in Holy Baptism. They belong to him who is the truth. To raise our children in truth is to raise them as children of God.

We Lutherans learn to confess in Luther's Small Catechism in the Explanation to the First Article of the Creed, "I believe that God has made me." God did it. Mom and Dad did not do it. Mom and Dad receive the gift that God gives. They do not create it. Since God is the One who gives the gift of children, we must listen to what God says about the children he gives. We are not free to decide for ourselves who and what our children are, as if we created them. They are what God says they are.

Here we need to take just a little time addressing the popular notion that we choose who and what we are. It's really a childish notion. When our second son, David, was a little boy he was shocked and horrified to learn that his mother had no Norwegian blood in her. My wife calmly informed him that she wasn't Norwegian. David cried out, "Well, change!" That's the spirit of our day. Like the Caucasian lady with a lighter complexion than I have who passed herself off as Black, or the male Olympic Decathlon champion who now passes himself off as a woman, people choose their own identity. But that's not how it works. God is the one who chooses our identity and he does a much better job of it than we do.

Children are God's blessing to us. (Psalms 127 & 128) God identifies our children as blessings. He does not give us children to punish us or to hurt us. He gives us children because he is kind and generous and wants to bless us. My wife and I, who have been blessed by God with twelve children, will joke that God gives us children to keep us humble. Actually, that's no joke. Nothing will show you your limitations more clearly than trying to raise children as God instructs you to do. We see in our children a reflection of our own sins. We see in our children the sinful condition that we don't want to see in ourselves, and surely don't want to see in our children. God knows our children better than we do. He knows they are sinners. Their sin reflects ours. We listen to the words of God's law to learn what our children are. Yes, even when that knowledge is quite humbling.

We are not Manicheans. We are Christians. God created a good world. He created us to be very good. The value he assigned us in creation remains, even in our fallen condition. The blood of Jesus, the God-man, proves this is so. Children are not commodities. They are not burdens. They are not temporary inconveniences that we can pawn off to others to attend to so that we can make sure we make enough money to buy what they're selling on T.V. No! Our children belong to God, receive their identity from him, are blessings to us *from him*, not because we see it or feel it, but because he says so.

This is the foundational truth on which raising our children in truth rests. If you are wrong about this, you don't know what you're doing or why. Our children belong to God. God blesses us with children, not so that we can own them, but so that we will give them what God wants them to have: his holy and saving truth.

God's Word teaches us that the very first blessing our Creator gave to Adam and Eve in Paradise was the promise of children. (Genesis 1:28) After blessing us with children, God blesses our children. He baptizes them. Armed with the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, they can face anything life throws their way. Covered by the blood-bought righteousness of Jesus, they are his dear saints. God knows our children better than we do. He knows that they are saints. We listen to the words of God's gospel to learn what our children are.

When we know that our children belong to God, a load is taken off of our shoulders. We don't need to make them into good children. We need to give them the word of God. God will do it. The law of God that has crushed our pride and shown us our sin works in the hearts of our children. The gospel of Christ that has revealed to us the full forgiveness of all our sins is as powerful to comfort our children as it is to comfort us. Our children are God's children. This means they are God's blessing to us even when they don't appear to be. When we bring our children to baptism, we bring them to the God who made them, redeemed them, and sanctifies them as his very own through this holy washing. If God made them, they are his. If God redeemed them, they are his. If God sanctifies them, they are his. Our children belong to the God in whose name they were baptized. This is a truth we forget at our peril and the peril of our children. We cannot raise our children in truth if we forget whose children they really are. Our children belong to God.

Since our children belong to God, what we do as parents we do in God's stead. Do you feel adequate to serve as God's representative? Well, you're not. None of us is adequate. It is as Scripture says, "Our sufficiency is from God." (2 Corinthians 3:5) Nevertheless, if God has given us children, God has also made us his representatives. That is settled. The only question is what we will do about it.

New parents learn (often with a sense of surprise) that the Fourth Commandment places a greater responsibility on them than it does on their children. Children are to honor their parents as God's representatives. Parents are to be worthy of that honor. The problem is that they are not. This should not prevent them from doing their jobs, however. Consider those who represent God in the civil government. Many of them don't even acknowledge that their authority comes from God. But it does. They are God's servants whether they admit it or not, as St. Paul teaches us in Romans 13. If civil authorities remain God's servants even when they reject the truth of God, how much more are Christian parents who are devoted to God's truth his representatives! All civil authority derives from the Fourth Commandment.

This is not an academic detail. It is vital to understanding how parents can raise children in truth. In giving us children, God has called us to exercise his authority over their bodies and souls. Neither Wyoming, nor Montana, nor the United States of America has any

authority over our children than that which is derived from the authority granted to parents under the Fourth Commandment. I am not saying that the state has no interest in the instruction of children. I am not saying that the church has no interest in the instruction of children. I am saying that the primary responsibility belongs to the parents of the children. God said to Moses, as recorded in Deuteronomy 6:6-9,

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

This parental duty is not limited to ancient Israel. St. Paul repeats this command in his Epistle to the Ephesians 6:1-4,

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Children are to honor their parents, not because they have earned it, but, as Luther reminds us in the Large Commandment on the Fourth Commandment, because of the "majesty hidden within them." It is the majesty of almighty God! We parents hold an office of trust. God has entrusted to us the office of father or mother. This office requires us to teach our children to honor us.

Parental authority doesn't come from a belt on the bottom. It doesn't come from pleading with your child to get his permission to be his father or mother. It comes from God. It is expressed in Christian conviction. You know that God himself has given you the duty to raise your child to learn and to know his saving truth. You may not do this duty without requiring your children to honor you. Putting up with expressions of disrespect from our children is to deny that hidden majesty. Christian parents get psyched out by the assaults against their authority. The spirit of democracy has rendered impotent every kind of authority beyond that of popular opinion. This is a false spirit. Christian parents don't need their children's permission to raise them up in the nurture and instruction of God's Word. They have God's command.

There is great comfort in knowing that we fathers and mothers represent God as we carry out our parental duties. When we know our office is divinely established, we also know that it has the divine blessing. The God who gave us our children is the God who has made us his representatives to our children. He is the God who governs our children through us. God's government in Christ is one of everlasting peace. (Isaiah 9:6-7) When we, as Christian fathers and mothers, give the gospel to our children, Christ himself governs them with his grace. From the manger where God incarnate was laid, to the cross where he was nailed, he was establishing peace with us by his holy obedience as our substitute. He is the One whom we represent to our children.

We teach our children right from wrong. They learn to acknowledge their sin. We teach our children about their Savior. When they learn from us the gospel of the forgiveness of sins, they learn from us about the true God. This endears us to our children. This is how God confirms in them the certainty that we really do represent God. We don't promote our own personal authority over our children. We simply act as God's representatives. Luther said that the Christian father is the pastor of his own home. That means he represents Christ. Christ's authority can only be exercised by serving, as Jesus demonstrated by washing his disciples' feet. So we – fathers and mothers – serve our children in Jesus' name as representatives of God. It is far more important that we know we represent God than that our children know it. We don't need to remind them of our divine authority. We need to remind ourselves. We need to use this authority with patience and persistence, never forgetting that all the authority in heaven and on earth must give way to Christ's divine authority as the Savior of sinners. (Matthew 28:18-20) When we do this, our children will recognize God's hidden majesty in us. They will see the God we reveal to them.

We are not adequate to the task, but our Lord Jesus, who speaks through us to his dear little ones, is more than adequate. He is our children's Savior!

It has become a cliché to note that we are living in the post-Christian era here in America. But it's true. The popular culture is utterly corrupt. It is literally godless. The most perverted forms of immorality are celebrated, and woe to those who refuse to join in the celebration. Blasphemy is comedy. Things are bad. Bible-believing, Catechism-memorizing, liturgy-loving, chorale-singing, church-going conservative Lutherans complain about how bad things are. And guess what? Things are getting worse. The voices advancing visceral hatred of the Christian church and her claims are getting louder and more persistent. It will get worse. Christ's church has survived such conditions before. The church of the first century grew quite rapidly during a time of openly accepted depravity even worse than what we witness today. She had the truth and she confessed it.

To raise children in truth you must talk the truth to them. God wants us to talk theology! Theology is God-talk. God wants us to talk about him and what he says. If God and the teaching of God's word are the topic of conversation in our homes, then our homes will be the dwelling place of God. If children have to leave home – to go to school or to church – in order to hear things about God, they will learn that theology does not bear directly on their lives. The truth claims of the Christian religion are irrelevant. Oh, they'll learn to affirm them. It's their duty as Christians. But they know that theology has no practical value because its truth is ghettoized to formal structures outside of the home. That's a truth that will pass away when children grow into adulthood and leave the home. Talking theology should be the natural course of events in the Christian home.

The most natural place for these conversations is around the dinner table when the family gathers for daily devotions. The leader should ordinarily be the father because God has made the father the head of the family. Of course, if the father cannot or will not do it, the Christian mother must do it. Devotions should feature a recitation of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the praying of the Lord's Prayer. The father should read

from the Bible or, if the children are very small, from a good Bible story book. A Child's Garden of Bible Stories is good for little children. CPH has several other fine Bible story books for older children. Do not buy what's for sale in Walmart or Sam's Club. Popular Bible story books rip Christ right out of the Old Testament. Home devotions should always feature the singing of a good Lutheran hymn. For more on this, attend my son Mark's lecture on Lutheran hymnody. When he was four years old he would walk around the house singing "Salvation Unto Us Has Come." For him, it was a kiddie song.

To raise your children in the truth, you should attend an orthodox Lutheran congregation. Your children should be taught to pay attention and participate in the service. Don't skip church. When you skip church for sports you are teaching your children that sports are more important than God's word. Whatever you skip church to do is more important than gladly hearing and learning God's word. This is what you're teaching your children. And that is false teaching.

Our topic is raising our children in truth. The central truth of the Christian religion is that we cannot be justified before God by our strength, merits, or works, but we are justified freely by God's grace when we believe that we are received into God's favor and that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake who has made satisfaction for our sins. God forgives us freely for Christ's sake. This is not only central to a system of theology taught in a classroom. This is the central truth of our lives. It is particularly vital when raising a Christian family.

Parents fail in their duties. What do you do with failure? Change the rules? Go along with your daughter who is shacking up with her boyfriend and insists that marriage is just a piece of paper? Acquiesce to your son's insistence that he doesn't have to go to church to be a Christian? Change what is good, and right, and true so as to make it conform to the behavior of your children? Oh, what a pathetic and futile attempt this is to cover up our failings. To live under the forgiveness of sins is to live a life of repentance and faith.

My father had two doctor's degrees, taught at a seminary, wrote scholarly articles and books, and was widely regarded as a very fine theologian. But I will tell you something about him that gave him more credibility to me, his son, than all of the academic credentials he had and contributions he made. When he was wrong he would admit it. He would apologize. He would ask for our forgiveness.

The gospel is true. We cannot prove it. We cannot falsify it. The gospel has its own inherent power. In raising our children in truth, the central truth of our faith must be put into practice. We confess our sins to God and God for the sake of the passion and mediation of Jesus forgives us. We confess our sins to one another, and as royal priests in the household of God, we exercise our Christian authority to forgive. We forgive our fathers and mothers. We forgive our children. We confess our sins to one another and we forgive those who confess. This is what children learn to do from parents who show them how to do it. Here the truth of the gospel is manifested. God forgives us our failures. They don't identify us and they don't discourage us. After we have fallen down, he lifts us up by his grace and shows us what a wonderful blessing our children are and what a privilege it is to be entrusted by God with the sacred task of raising them in his saving truth.