REVISITING THE TWO KINGDOMS
An Alternate Model of Christian Education in the Lutheran School

INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest challenges facing Lutheran schools in Australia at the start of the twenty-first century is the question of how to communicate the gospel to young people. During recent decades the clientele of many of our schools has changed from being predominantly children of Lutheran families to a high percentage of people who are non-Christian. This has meant that the basic religious role of many schools has shifted from catechesis to outreach. Yet, we continue to operate with Christian education programs that are fundamentally catechetical through compulsory attendance at chapels and participation in Christian Studies or its equivalent academic subject.

PROBLEMS WITH THE CURRENT MODEL

This approach poses several serious problems to the effectiveness of mission and ministry in the Lutheran school. By closely aligning the institution of the school with the Christian faith we make it virtually impossible for the student to distinguish between the rules necessary to run a school and the freedom that comes through faith in the gospel (John 8:36; Althaus 1972:46). This becomes vitally important in our context of post-modernism where people, especially adolescents, are suspicious of established institutions. Through a compulsory Christian education program, we present teenagers with an image of God where he becomes our 'heavenly pedagogue' who is ready to issue consequences if we do wrong and who only accepts us if we fulfil the necessary criteria.

This is fundamentally a problem of making a proper distinction between law and gospel. Given we are saved by grace through faith alone (Eph 2:8; AC IV) and this faith is created by the Holy Spirit who works through the pure proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom 10:14,15; AC V; Gritsch & Jenson: 132), Lutheran schools which identify outreach as a priority need to present the gospel as clearly as they possibly can. A compulsory Christian education program cannot do this. Because context affects meaning, when we attempt to proclaim the gospel in a context of law by making participation compulsory, we compromise the gospel message, even to the point of losing it altogether. For the gospel to be purely proclaimed in a school setting it needs to be clearly independent and obviously distinct from the compulsory nature of the school institution.

A third danger that confronts Lutheran schools when we use the current model of Christian education is that many students identify the school as their church. This leads to difficulty in making meaningful connections with local congregations. When the students leave the school, too often very little or no contact exists between the former student and the church which could and hopefully would serve as that person's spiritual home. Again, this is partly because of the close connection made between the school and its religious program. When students are not integrated into a worshipping community during their time at a school, they are usually reluctant to return to the institution once they have graduated and left that stage of their lives behind.

THE TWO KINGDOMS

A way to overcome these, and other, obstacles to outreach in our schools can be found by re-examining Luther's understanding of the two kingdoms. While a full treatment of the topic goes beyond what is possible in this paper, a few elements need to be highlighted.

GOSPEL/LAW

Luther's distinction between the secular and the sacred realms, or God's left-hand and right-hand kingdoms, corresponds to his emphasis on the distinction between law and gospel (Braaten: 130; Lohse: 315; Hamann: 73). In its spiritual function, the law never creates life, but only kills us before God (2 Cor 3:6b). Through the gospel, the Holy Spirit creates faith in people's hearts to give them life and incorporates them into the body of the resurrected Christ (Hamann: 74). This is Luther's understanding of the church, which he also calls God's right-hand kingdom. On the other hand, the kingdom of the left operates with the law in its civil or political function as it maintains order and external peace between people in a fallen world (Bornkamm 1958:243; Lohse: 271). Just as law and

gospel need to carefully and strictly be kept distinct from each other for each to function properly, so God's secular and sacred realms need to be kept distinct. If they are not, the gospel is compromised and possibly even lost (Hamann: 71, 75; Janetzki: 113; Grane: 174).

FAITH/REASON
This also corresponds with Luther's distinction between faith and reason. The kingdom of the right is the realm of faith. It is only by faith that a person becomes a member of the body of Christ, the right-hand kingdom (Grane: 91; Gritsch & Jenson: 124). In the kingdom of the left 'reason rules' (Althaus 1972:58). Here God calls us to use our intellect and rational processes every day. What constitutes the school community is not the gospel but education. Pedagogy is a rational exercise, not one of faith. While faith and reason need not necessarily be in conflict with each other, the ideas that a school is a community of faith or that a person can come to faith through a rational process is inconsistent with Lutheran theology (1 Cor 1:20-25; Althaus 1963:67ff).

HIDDEN/APPARENT
All people are members of the secular realm as we participate in human relationships of one kind or another (Grane: 173). The left-hand kingdom is, therefore, apparent for all to witness through visible institutions (Althaus 1972:47). Only people who are in a relationship with Christ through faith are members of the right-hand kingdom (ibid: 45). This is a hidden, spiritual reality, evident only to God (Grane: 91). This becomes significant for the school because what is apparent is the visible institution which belongs to the left-hand kingdom. Yet, within its visible structures, there is another, hidden reality as the school provides the context for God's right-hand kingdom to work.

DISTINCT …
It is crucial for the proper functioning of the two kingdoms that they are kept distinct from each other (Bornkamm 1958:260). Luther stated that real boundaries exist between the two (Bornkamm 1966: 6f; 1983: 113; cf Althaus 1972:56, 60). Like law and gospel, if the two are confused, the gospel is compromised (Hamann: 71, 75; Janetzki: 113; Grane: 174). One of the biggest mistakes we make in Australian Lutheran education at the start of the twenty-first century is that by claiming that the 'school straddles the two kingdoms' (Janetzki: 110; Bartsch: 89) we fail to keep them distinct and end up confusing law and gospel. For our schools to be faithful to and consistent with Lutheran theology, we need to keep law and gospel distinct by distinguishing clearly between the two kingdoms in the context of the school.

… NOT SEPARATE
However, at no stage can the two be separated (Braaten: 134). Luther moved beyond the traditional Augustinian concept of the kingdom of God, the church, being in opposition to the kingdom of Satan, the world (Althaus 1972:52). Instead, Luther saw both kingdoms as being created by God which he gives to humanity for our good (Althaus 1972:44; Lohse: 319, 320; Grane: 173f). He reclaimed the left-hand kingdom from being seen as evil and emphasised that it is a gracious gift from God through which he blesses society. Luther taught that worldly institutions, complete with their rules and procedures, are essentially good as God creates them for the wellbeing of humanity.

Both the right-hand and left-hand kingdoms are expressions of God's love for his people (Althaus 1972:54; Bornkamm 1958:246; 1966: 9; 1983:115). God keeps human sin in check through the law to preserve society so we can live in peace with each other. There is nothing wrong with using the law in a Lutheran school as long as it is used with love. Just as discipline is an expression of a parent's love for a child, so God's gift of the law, and hence the left-hand kingdom, is an expression of his love for us (Heb 12:5,6; Althaus 1972:56), albeit a very different expression from the gospel.

AN ALTERNATE MODEL
Through the doctrine of the two kingdoms, Luther presents God's work in the world through two very different means. On the one hand, God keeps order and external peace between people through rules, regulations and laws, to keep sin in check and encourage us to live in peace. God maintains this order so that his church can do the work of saving souls through the proclamation of the gospel

and administration of the sacraments (Althaus: 59; Hamann: 86). Basically, God preserves a peaceful society with his left hand so that his right hand can gather people to himself.

When this is applied to the relationship that exists between Lutheran schools and congregations it presents an alternate model for Christian education. It is possible for a school to focus solely on its primary task of providing sound pedagogical instruction for its students, thus fulfilling its role as part of the left-hand kingdom. The formal Christian education can be removed from the school and placed into the hands of the congregation, the worshipping community of faith. It would then be the task of the congregation to provide relevant, intentional and voluntary outreach and discipleship programs for students and their families connected to the school community. How this could be done goes beyond the scope of this paper and would depend on different contexts. However, in this alternate model the two kingdoms are clearly distinguished – the school provides the environment in which the congregation can freely and creatively carry out its task of mission and ministry.

ADVANTAGES

An advantage of this model is that it sends a clear message regarding the function of each body. By allowing the school to be a school and to concentrate on pedagogy, and by giving the responsibility for spiritual development to the worshipping community of the congregation, there is less chance of students and their families confusing the purposes of the two bodies. A clearer representation of the two distinct ways in which God works in the world would be presented so that people, and in particular adolescents, can make the distinction between the roles of the school and the church.

By allowing the school to focus on pedagogy and the congregation to be seen as the worshipping community, a clearer distinction between law and gospel is made. The school would need to be clearly identified as a place of reason, with policies and procedures, expectations and consequences. The congregation could then work within that context witnessing to God's grace, mercy and forgiveness in Christ Jesus. The two would not be set against each other, but instead compliment each other as each presents clear but different expressions of God's love.

By giving the responsibility for Christian education to the congregation, it should be easier for students to continue to participate in the congregation once they have left the school. The stigma of returning to school after graduation could be overcome by integrating them into the congregation while they are still attending the school. Given that any sort of ministry is primarily about the relationships people build with each other and with Christ, there is no reason why, if students' relationships with the congregation are established and solidified while they are still enrolled at the school, it should be much easier to maintain these relationships after their graduation. Graduating from school should no longer mean graduating from involvement with the family of Christ.

CHALLENGES

This model places much more responsibility on congregations to establish and maintain intentional and deliberate outreach and discipleship programs for the youth and families who are involved in the school. Sadly, these are areas in which the LCA has not done spectacularly well in the past. It has been easier for some congregations to open a school in the name of mission, and then abdicate their responsibility to the school under the assumption that their work was being done through the school's Christian education program. In this alternate model, the work of mission and ministry falls squarely onto the shoulders of the congregation and would mean a large commitment of personnel, time and resources. However, neither could the school abdicate its responsibilities. It would need to work in a coordinated relationship with the congregation as it provided opportunities for them to do their work. In some locations, this in itself could also be a major challenge.

This model of Christian education would also challenge Lutheran schooling to review their identity beyond such phrases as being 'Christ-' or 'gospel-centred'. A more Trinitarian understanding of education needs to be explored which better reflects God's total revelation of himself. For example, it could be more fitting to describe a Lutheran ethos of education as one in which the totality of God's love is expressed through both law and gospel in the daily life of the school community.

Lutheran Education Australia needs to re-evaluate some of its fundamental theological presuppositions in order to present a more complete understanding of how God works in the world.

In this model it becomes vitally integral that the school to employs staff who are deeply committed to their Christian faith. the two kingdoms meet in the vocation of the Christian (Althaus: 61; Bornkamm 1966: 8f; Grane: 174, 202; Gritsch & Jenson: 182; Lohse: 320). It follows, then, that for the school to effectively witness to the faith on which it is based that staff members need to be living out their faith in their relationships with each other, the students and families of the school.

CONCLUSION

God is presenting the LCA with amazing opportunities for outreach and evangelism through the schools with which he is blessing us. In order to make the most of those opportunities, we need to stop running our schools like we did when their purpose was to catechise the children of Lutheran families. By re-examining our theological heritage, by struggling with the tough questions, by thinking outside of the proverbial box, we need to be looking for and exploring alternate methods to proclaim the gospel to a new generation. This presentation is not meant to be a definitive answer, but an attempt to look at the challenges we face by re-examining our theological basis. It is not the only way. It is probably not the best way. It is merely an effort to more effectively communicate the grace of a loving God to a generation which is in such desperate need for its help.

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