

## ***Luther's Large Catechism: Its Historical Context and Continuing Significance***

✠ *In Nomine Jesu* ✠

What if I told you that one out of every three pastors at this conference could not recite the Ten Commandments? What if I said that some of our schools were not teaching Bible History? What if I told you that some of the congregations of this district only had sermons during Lent? What if I told that not only do these congregations not have sermons for much of the year, but when they do, the pastors do not know (or care) how to preach or what to preach? What if I told you that there were called workers in this district without a Bible?

I think that no one here would believe me if I said that about the called workers of this district, or of any district in the Wisconsin Synod. We take for granted that we have pastors and teachers worthy of the name. We assume that our schools produce candidates prepared for their callings and continually working to increase their talents and abilities. But what if any of those things were true about even one called worker in our church body, let alone one out of every three? What if it were true about your pastor, teacher, or staff minister? What might your reaction be?

The reaction of our spiritual father, Martin Luther, was to write. What he wrote nearly five-hundred years ago remains in use throughout the Lutheran world – his *Catechisms*.<sup>1</sup> Odds are that most, if not all, of

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<sup>1</sup> The word “catechism” comes from a Greek word that means “to sound from above.” BDAG defines it as “to report, inform, teach, instruct” (p. 534). It can be, and has been, used with a variety of meanings: oral instruction; book instruction; a summary of religious doctrine, especially in the form of questions and answers; a

the pastors at this conference, and every conference of our Synod, were catechized according to Dr. Luther's *Small Catechism*, that brief little booklet made up of the six Chief Parts and their “What does this mean?” You could probably repeat almost word for word

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book of such instruction. E.G. Schwiebert cites this definition from Luther, “Catechism is a form of instruction in which persons are questioned and asked to recite just as a school teacher has her pupils recite their lessons to determine whether they know them” (quoted in *Luther and his time: The Reformation from a New Perspective*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1950. p. 642).

A definition quoted by Bente: “...catechism means elementary instruction in Christianity, conceived, first, as the act; then, as the material for instruction; then, as the contents of a book; and finally, as the book itself” (F. Bente. *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. 1965 (reprint). qtd. p. 63).

Prof. John Meyer writes: “Luther used the word ‘*Catechismus*’ (Catechism) not only for the two books that he published in 1529, but also generally for the body of Christian Doctrine in which the people were to be instructed, as well as for the oral instruction itself. It was in 1525, as far as I know, that Luther first used the word Catechism. (*Catechismus puerorum*—instruction of boys, or children). In 1526, in his ‘*Deutsche Messe*’ (German Mass) Luther uses the word catechism to denote the various instructional materials made available during the course of the Reformation, and recommended that the “chief parts” be made a regular part of the service, and that weekday services with a catechetical sermon be held” (John P. Meyer. “Luther’s Catechisms: 450 Years of them,” [Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary On-Line Essay File, accessed on January 26, 2008]; available from [www.wls.wels.net](http://www.wls.wels.net), p. 1)

much of what you learned from that short little booklet, the teachings of which you swore at your confirmations that you would be faithful to until you died. But did you notice the plural above? "Catechisms." The *Small Catechism* was not the only result of Luther's reaction to widespread ignorance and incompetence. He also wrote the *Large Catechism*, a more detailed explanation of the chief parts in a book that takes up about one hundred or so pages. And while all of our pastors subscribed to its teachings at their ordination, how much do they know about this book, and, more importantly, how much do our pastors make use of this book in their ministry? The goal of this essay is simple: to encourage greater use of this Reformation gem, a Reformation gem as vital today as it was nearly five-hundred years ago.

### **The Historical Setting of Luther's *Large Catechism***

The situation described above was not some fairy-tale. It was the situation of the churches in northern Germany in the late 1520s. Ignorance, gross ignorance, was the rule of the day among the clergy and the laity. Sermons were not preached. Children were not catechized. Why?

The people had no real interest in doing any of those things because for centuries they had been told to pray to saints, attend mass, buy your indulgences, do your acts of contrition and satisfaction, and make sure to go to confession and the sacrament at least once a year. The great adult catechuminate of the early centuries of the Church had become obsolete once more people entered the church as infants and not adults. With the rise of the popes, the priesthood, and the Roman sacramental system, the liturgical rites, symbols, rituals, and ceremonies began to mean more than the actual instruction in doctrine and theological meaning of the

ceremonies.<sup>2</sup> Not only did the mere performance of the rites overrule the theological content, but, of course, also the necessity of having the properly ordained priest to perform the rite, regardless of what he knew or did not know, believed or did not believe, so long as he was properly ordained. M. Reu, a Lutheran theologian of the early twentieth century writes: "Instead of being contented with the means of grace instituted by the Lord, recourse was taken to all sorts of human contrivances, which were deemed by many of more importance than indoctrination. So much is certain that the hierarchy found this mummery profitable: for the performance of these purifying and grace-laden acts was possible only through the services of the higher and lower clergy; and only through them as connecting link access could be found to the sacraments proper and, therewith, to fellowship with God."<sup>3</sup>

Base superstition, the rise of papal supremacy, and lazy sinfulness combined to create a situation of "deplorable, wretched deprivation,"<sup>4</sup> a situation Luther discovered for himself first-hand when he went out as a

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<sup>2</sup> To name but a few examples: making the sign of the cross, the exorcism, the laying on of hands, having something done on a certain day of the Church Year (and only those days if at all possible), use of consecrated salt, writing the names of the soon-to-be-baptized onto the church roster, afflation (blowing or breathing upon) and adjuration (casting out, "I adjure you..."), the touching of eyes and nose, or rubbing with oil and saying "Ephphatha! Cf. M. Reu. *Catechetics or Theory and Practice of Religious Instruction*. Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1918. pgs. 38-43.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42-43.

<sup>4</sup> From the opening words of Dr. Luther's preface to the *Small Catechism*, Kolb-Wengert 347:1. All quotations from the Lutheran Confessions are taken from the Kolb-Wengert edition of the *Book of Concord* and cited by page and paragraph number, unless otherwise noted.

congregational visitor during the Saxon Visitation of 1528-1529.

As the evangelical movement grew and spread, it became clear that some oversight needed to be practiced and the prevailing conditions in local parishes needed to be discovered. Since the pope and emperor were obviously hostile to the cause of the Reformation, local political leaders (princes, dukes, electors, city councils) and those religious leaders faithful to the cause took it upon themselves to undertake a visitation of local parishes. The visitors sought to determine the quality of pastoral care being exercised at each congregation. Was the pastor preaching and teaching in accord with Scripture? Was he instructing the young? Were his sermons adequate or not? They also sought to determine how well congregations were supporting and taking care of their pastors and their churches. One wonders with what sense of optimism or pessimism the visitors went out upon their tasks. One need not wonder how Luther felt upon his return.

“The deplorable, wretched deprivation that I recently encountered while I was a visitor has constrained and compelled me to prepare this catechism, or Christian instruction, in such a brief, plain, and simple version. Dear God, what misery I beheld! The ordinary person, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about the Christian faith, and unfortunately many pastors are completely unskilled and incompetent teachers. Yet supposedly they all bear the name Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, even though they do not know the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments! As a result they live like simple cattle or irrational pigs and, despite the fact that the gospel has returned, have mastered the fine art of misusing all their freedom.

“O you bishops! How are you going to answer to Christ, now that you have so shamefully neglected the people and have not exercised your office for even a single second? May you escape punishment for this! You forbid the cup [to the laity] in the Lord’s Supper and insist on observance of your human laws, while never even bothering to ask whether the people know the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, or a single section of God’s Word. Shame on you forever!”<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Luther was, to say the least, appalled. And so he wrote. Luther took part in the visitations at the end of 1528 and the early parts of 1529 and by April 1529, the *Large Catechism* (originally entitled the *German Catechism*) hit the shelves in Germany. By 1530 it was already in its third edition, including new material Luther added, especially his exhortation to confession.

Like his *Small Catechism*, the *Large Catechism* was both successful and infamous. Both were eventually added to the pope’s *Index of Prohibited Books* and both became standards of Lutheran orthodoxy. In the 1530s already, church orders (rules handed down by the local leaders) required that instruction be according to Luther’s *Catechisms*. In some pulpits the *Large Catechism* was read as the sermon. In 1563, when the *Heidelberg Catechism* became the official catechism of those leaning to the left in the Reformation (the radicals who followed Karlstadt, Zwingli, Calvin, *et al.*) the *Catechisms* again grew in stature among Lutherans. In 1577 both *Small* and *Large Catechism* earned their permanent places in Lutheran theology when they were included in the *Book of Concord* as official expressions of Lutheran theology.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Preface,” SC 347-348:1-5.

<sup>6</sup> From the introductory statements of the *Epitome* of the *Formula of Concord*: “Concerning the division in matters of faith that has occurred in

The intent of the *Large Catechism* was to be a summary of the Christian faith, much like the *Small Catechism*. Only, unlike the *Small Catechism*, which was really an outline of basic Christian belief for the student or child, the *Large* was intended for the instructors. Yet it was not a complex theological tome filled with theological terminology that only an ivory-tower academic would understand. It was an exposition and explanation for parents, pastors, and teachers, so that they might learn the proper ways of understanding, explaining, and applying Christian doctrine to their children and parishioners. As Luther himself said, “[The *Catechism*] contains what every Christian should know. Anyone who does not know it should not be numbered among Christians nor admitted to any sacrament, just as artisans who do not know the rules and practices of their craft are rejected and considered incompetent.”<sup>7</sup> What every Christian should know is what we call the six Chief Parts: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Sacrament of Baptism, the Sacrament of Holy Communion, and Confession.

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our times, we regard as the unanimous consensus and explanation of our Christian faith and confession, especially against the papacy and its false worship, idolatry, and superstition, and against other sects, as our symbol for this time, the first, unaltered Augsburg Confession, which was delivered to Emperor Charles V at Augsburg in 1530 during the great diet of the empire, along with the Apology of this Confession and the Articles that were presented at Smalcald in 1537 and were signed at that time by the foremost theologians.

“And because these matters also concern the laity and the salvation of their souls, we pledge ourselves also to the Small and Large Catechisms of Dr. Luther, as both catechisms are found in Luther’s printed works, as a Bible of the Laity, in which everything is summarized that is treated in detail in Holy Scripture and that is necessary for a Christian to know for salvation” (486-487:4-5).

<sup>7</sup> “Short Preface,” LC 383:2.

The concept of such a catechism was not new. Luther’s interpretation of the concept was. Catechisms from as far back as the 700s are known and there were probably dozens or hundreds in the time between then and Luther. The contents of these catechisms, however, varied. By Luther’s time, you could find catechetical tables-of-contents that included some or all of the following:

- the Lord’s Prayer
- the Apostle’s Creed
- the Hail Mary
- the Seven Charisms
- the Seven Sacraments
- the Seven Works of Charity
- the Eight Beatitudes
- the Twelve Fruits of the Spirit
- the Ten Commandments
- the Crying Sins
- the Alien Sins
- the Five Senses
- Confessional and Communion Prayers
- Instructions on Repentance, Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar
- the Nine Foreign Sins
- the Six Sins against the Holy Ghost
- the Four Sins that cry to God for vengeance
- the Seven Mortal Sins (pride, coveting, gluttony, wrath, sloth, greed, lust)
- acrostic prayers to Mary
- invitations and exhortations to pray to, worship, and adore the saints
- and prayers and instructions for reduction of time in purgatory.<sup>8</sup>

And despite this, Luther proceeded as he usually did. He did not invent. He cleansed

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<sup>8</sup> cf. Bente, p. 64, 66-67 and Reu, p. 80-81.

and purged. He eliminated the superstitious, the idolatrous, the false, and the useless. He replaced rote memorization with explanation driving towards understanding and appropriation. For example, in the past, students only needed to know the names of the seven sacraments.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, strange as it seems to those raised in them, Luther's were not the first of the evangelical catechisms. At least thirty were attempted since the onset of the Reformation, with varying success. Luther, recognizing the need for such instruction among the laity, and the young especially, had been preaching catechetical sermons himself since 1516. In 1520 he published an embryonic catechism called the "Brief Form of the Ten Commandments, Creed, and Lord's Prayer." Philip Melancthon took two cracks at catechetical writing in 1524 and 1528. In 1525, Luther, sensing the need for something better, assigned Justus Jonas and John Agricola the task of producing a catechism (which they did not complete). John Bugenhagen, Luther's pastor, produced his "Booklet for Laity and Children" in 1525, which sounded a lot like things Luther had written and preached.

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<sup>9</sup> Again, from Luther's "Short Preface:" "However, it is not enough for them simply to learn and repeat these parts verbatim. The young people should also attend sermons, especially during the times when preaching on the catechism is prescribed, so that they may hear it explained and may learn the meaning of every part. Then they will also be able to repeat what they have heard and give a good, correct answer when they are questioned, so that the preaching will not be without benefit and fruit. The reason we take such care to preach on the catechism frequently is to impress it upon our young people, not in a lofty and learned manner but briefly and very simply, so that it may penetrate deeply into their minds and remain fixed in their memories" (LC, 386:26-28).

Finally, after seeing firsthand the doctrinal ignorance of clergy and laity alike in Germany during the visitation, Luther could wait no longer and produced full-blown catechisms of his own. The prime material for the *Large Catechism* was a series of sermons Luther preached in Wittenberg, filling in for Bugenhagen in 1528 and 1529.<sup>10</sup> As one student of the *Catechism* has written: "One might thus say that the Large Catechism was not written in Luther's study or in the library, but was produced in the pulpit by a pastor concerned for his people."<sup>11</sup>

While Luther did not reinvent the wheel, his *Catechism* was a pioneering achievement. He rearranged the Chief Parts, putting the Ten Commandments out front, followed by the Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, the Sacraments, and Confession. Thus, one can see what God requires (the Commandments) and just how high and out of reach His requirements are. Next, we find how God meets our needs through a meditation upon His Triune nature.<sup>12</sup> Then, in the Lord's Prayer, how we can approach God and speak to Him now that He has brought us near to Him. Finally, how God comes to us with forgiveness and grace as we struggle in our

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<sup>10</sup> The third of this series of sermons can be found in Volume 51 of the American Edition of Luther's Works, pages 133-193, cf. the Bibliography.

<sup>11</sup> James Schaaf. "The Large Catechism: a pastoral tool." Paper read at the Congress of the Lutheran Confessions, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, WLS Essay File #1572, 1979, p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> His organization of the Creed was itself innovative. Formerly it had been divided into twelve parts, according to the church tradition that says each apostle contributed one petition. Luther divided it into three parts, the better to understand God's saving activity among us as Creator, Savior, and Sanctifier!

saint-sinner lives – the means of grace in proclaimed and sacramental Gospel.

And while the theological content of the *Catechism* was innovative in the grand sweep of church history (that is, it was Scriptural), it was not innovative for Luther. In fact, when you read Luther's works from 1516-1529 you will find almost verbatim quotations that end up in the *Large Catechism*. Read Luther's "On Rogationtide Prayer and Procession" (1519) alongside his explanation of the Lord's Prayer. Check out his 1521 "Sermon on Worthy Reception of the Sacrament," next to his section on the Lord's Supper. Skim "How Christians Should Regard Moses" (1525) along with his words on the Ten Commandments.<sup>13</sup>

Before moving on to the continuing significance of this book, it should be noted that as calm as the tone of the two *Catechisms* are – both are noted for their lack of polemics, that is, fierce arguing against specific theological points and false teachings of the enemies of Luther and Lutheranism – you can see the various theological currents that were active at the time. You cannot help but notice Luther's reaction to John Agricola's antinomian ideas<sup>14</sup> – the same Agricola he

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<sup>13</sup> *Luther's Works* 42:86-92, 42:171-177, and 35:155-173, respectively. To get a sense of this theological unity, consult the referenced works by Prof. Forrest Bivens and Rev. Mark Bartling, both of which include reading lists that help you to see the development of Luther's *Catechism* in his other writings.

<sup>14</sup> John Agricola taught that the Law has no place in the life of the Christian. The Gospel is to be used to bring people to repentance. This could crudely be represented by saying, "Jesus gave His blood for you..." (as I once suggested for a Blood Drive theme at MLC) and intending to prick consciences with it. This controversy continued to rear its ugly head and was dealt with in articles V and VI of the *Formula of Concord*. You can see hints of this in Agricola's catechism, "One Hundred

asked to write a catechism – as he spends almost half his time explaining the Ten Commandments and their active role in the Christian life. When you read the sections on Baptism and the Lord's Supper, you will get a sense of some of the arguments of Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and the other Sacramentarians that would explode at the Marburg Colloquy later in 1529. Luther's quarrel with Rome's work-righteousness and the tyranny of Christian consciences that results is addressed repeatedly in Luther's discussion of the Ten Commandments and Confession. And throughout the entire book, there is always the fresh breath of grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone. Luther is always concerned with keeping Christ at the center of the Christian life, even as he hammers us with the Ten Commandments. And in so doing, Luther produced a book that remains on the shelves of Lutherans today, a book that is the basis and foundation of our Christian instruction, because it addresses the needs of the normal Christian, which was Luther's goal. As he writes in his "Treatise on Good Works" in 1520: "I will not be ashamed in the slightest to preach to the uneducated layman and write for him in German. Although I may have little skill at it myself, it seems to me that if we had hitherto busied ourselves in this very task and were of a mind to do more of it in the future, Christendom would have reaped no small advantage and would have been more benefitted by this than by those heavy, weighty tomes and those *questiones* which are only handled in the schools among learned schoolmen."<sup>15</sup>

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Thirty Common Questions by Johann Agricola" (cf. Bibliography).

<sup>15</sup> *Luther's Works*, 44:22. Luther writes in a similar vein in his 1525 commentary on Zechariah (published in 1527): "One ought, however, to regard those teachers as the best and the paragons of their profession who present the catechism well—that is, who teach properly the Our Father, the Ten Commandments, and the

## The Continuing Significance of Luther's *Large Catechism*

While Luther's *Large Catechism* so clearly encapsulates the theology of not just Dr. Luther and the Lutheran Church, but of the Bible itself, it seems to be a sad commentary on the sinful nature that this resource gets such short shrift. Without claiming to have the most exhaustive possible bibliography on Luther's *Large Catechism* that exists, it is telling that with but a handful of exceptions, most research or writing on the *Large Catechism* ends in 1979 – the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Catechism*. A Google search of "*Large Catechism*" leads to almost no worthwhile results. Even studies of the *Large Catechism* or of the *Catechisms* tend to spend more, if not most, of the time on the *Small Catechism*. One could say that the *Large Catechism* seems to have a similar relation to the *Small Catechism* as the Holy Spirit does to Jesus. It is nearly invisible, serving only to point to the other. It gets four weeks in the curriculum of our Seminary, while the *Augsburg Confession* and *Formula of Concord* each get a semester. It gets covered in a class on the Lutheran Confessions, but not as part of our teaching religion curriculum at New Ulm. It gets no

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Creed. But such teachers are rare birds. For there is neither great glory nor outward show in their kind of teaching; but there is in it great good and also the best of sermons, because in this teaching there is comprehended, in brief, all Scripture. There is no Gospel, either, from which a man could not teach these things if he only were willing and took an interest in teaching the poor common man. One must, of course, constantly prompt the people in these brief things—that is, in the Our Father, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed—and then insist on them and urge them upon the people in all Gospels and sermons. Even then, unfortunately, the people will learn little enough of these things and, as St. Paul says (2 Tim. 4:4), "will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths" (*LW*, 20:156).

time in our grade schools and confirmation classes, while the *Small Catechism* gets two to four years. And how many of our parents have ever cracked it as they taught their children the basics of the Christian faith? One might wonder in how many of our homes it has ever been used, or in how many homes people are even aware that here is a basic compendium of everything one needs to know about the faith. The *Large Catechism* seems to be relegated to the pastor's study, conference papers, and eager exhortations to add this to your "Read it every year list" along with about a hundred other books. To quote the Apostle James, "My brothers, this should not be" (James 3:10b).

Part of the problem is that the *Large Catechism* went from being a supplemental text book to aid pastors, teachers, and parents, and therefore a handy resource, to a symbol of the Church and a confession of faith in the *Book of Concord*, placed alongside other such heavy theological statements as the *Smalcald Articles*, the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, the *Epitome and Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord*, the *Augsburg Confession*, and the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*. As it should be, as it testifies to the truths of Scripture. However, in being placed in such a book, it inevitably (if unintentionally) became part of history and theological controversy, a musty book with a scary name, no longer simply the layman's Bible that it is, perfect for parents, pastors, and teachers to use with beginning students (whether children or adult). This problem is partially solved by such handy resources as Philip Pederson's *Luther's Catechism's Today* and F. Samuel Janzow's contemporary-language translation of the *Large Catechism*,<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Pederson's book is published by one of the ELCA pre-cursor church bodies. It puts the texts of both *Catechisms* side-by-side, a very handy way to use them together. Janzow's is an LC-MS

both of which retain this Scriptural diamond while eliminating the intimidating look of the whole *Book of Concord* (which is, admittedly, not pocket sized – though Concordia Publishing House has now released that!).

The sad result of this misuse and disuse of Luther's *Large Catechism* is that its continuing significance is not fully appreciated by those for whom it was intended – pastors, teachers, and the laity – that is, the Holy Christian Church. I would like to suggest five ways in which the *Large Catechism* of Dr. Luther is, should, and ought to be continually significant for you in your daily life.

### **It continually reminds us what it is to be a Christian**

“Thus we have, in all, five parts covering the whole of Christian teaching, which we should constantly teach and require recitation word for word....Thus young people will be led into the Scriptures and make progress every day.”<sup>17</sup>

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product and contains only the *Large Catechism* (though in a quite readable translation) along with some study questions for use in, for example, home devotions, Bible classes, Elder Bible studies, faculty studies.... Both were published, you guessed it, to celebrate the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Catechism* – 1979 and 1978 respectively. Rumor has it that CPH is considering producing something similar to Pederson's in the near future. Keep your eyes peeled.

<sup>17</sup> “Short Preface,” *LC* 386:24-25. Prof. Robert Kolb quotes one Lutheran theologian's thoughts on the *Large Catechism*: “It can be used for prayer, against sin, and in all trials and troubles, for it contains in a few words powerful and rich instruction on God, His gracious will, and eternal salvation. Secondly, the catechism indicates what form the basic structure of the entire Christian faith takes. Thirdly, a knowledge of the catechism makes it possible to benefit greatly from reading the Scripture and listen to sermons with greater understanding. Finally, the

You cannot read Luther's *Large Catechism* without growing in the grace and knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). If only because through the genius of organizing it into the six Chief Parts, Luther has required us, when we have finished this small book, to have covered the basics of the Christian faith as taught in Scripture. We will understand what God requires of us – perfection, holiness, righteousness – and we will understand that we have not and cannot meet this requirement. Then, we will see our Maker, our Savior, and our Sanctifier meeting our needs. After seeing our Savior, we will be given the words with which we can go to our LORD in thanksgiving, praise, and supplication, remembering always our needs, and seeing always our glorious forgiveness won by Christ. More than that, we will see the means which God our Savior has provided to meet this need in our daily lives – Water, Meal, and the comforting Word of forgiveness offered in confession and absolution. Always in the center, we find Christ, Christ, Christ!

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catechism helps the Christian evaluate what he is taught” (quoting Tileman Hesshusius [1527-1588] in “The layman's Bible: the use of the Luther's Catechisms in the German late Reformation.” WLS Essay File #1562, no date given, p. 17).

Bente writes: “Above all, Luther endeavored to acquaint the ‘dear youth’ with the saving truths, not merely for their own sakes, but in the interest of future generations as well. He desired to make them mature Christians, able to confess their faith and to impart instruction to their children later on. In particular, the two Catechisms were to serve the purpose of properly preparing the children and the unlearned for the Holy Eucharist, as appears from the Preface to the Small Catechism and from the last paragraphs of the Large (536, 21ff.; 760, 39ff.); for both end in admonitions diligently to partake of the Lord's Supper. The Sacrament of the Altar, in Luther's estimation, is the goal of all catechetical instruction. For this reason he added to the ancient chief parts those of Baptism, Confession, and the Lord's Supper” (*op. cit.*, p.80).

If only for this, the *Large Catechism* remains continually significant, for as Luther writes in explaining the Fifth Petition: "Let none think that they will ever in this life reach the point where they do not need this forgiveness. In short, unless God constantly forgives, we are lost."<sup>18</sup>

### **It continually reminds us what it is to be a Lutheran**

"And that is what our confessions are all about – the Gospel! Our great Lutheran Confessions were written for the sake of the Gospel. The Augsburg Confession, Luther's catechisms, the Formula of Concord were not written just to blast or correct abuses in the Roman Church, or to defend Lutheran theology against the attacks of the papists, or to perpetuate party spirit. These Confessions were all prompted by a faith in the Gospel, a love for it, and a determination to teach and confess it according to the Scriptures."<sup>19</sup>

Reading the *Catechism* of Luther will not only help you grow in the grace and knowledge of your Savior Jesus Christ (though that is certainly more than enough reason to commend it to you). But you will also find yourself understanding what it is to be a Lutheran and what a joy and privilege that is. The *Catechism* highlights, teaches, and reinforces the key truths of Scripture which are the key truths of the Lutheran Church. To be Lutheran means

- that we know that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, by Christ alone,<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "The Fifth Petition," LC 452:91.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Preus. *Getting into The Theology of Concord*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1977, p. 24-25.

<sup>20</sup> "Second Article," LC 435:33: "Indeed, the entire gospel that we preach depends on the

- that we know that we live in the Gospel, but not without the Law, and how to properly divide the two,<sup>21</sup>
- that we know that the Christian vocation, the calling which we follow, is one primarily carried out in our daily lives as we give glory to God by following His will as living sacrifices to Him (Romans 12:1, 1 Cor. 10:31), not merely by performing some invented, man-made, evangelically counseled works of popes and priests,<sup>22</sup>
- that we know that the means of grace occupy a place of central

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proper understanding of this article. Upon it all our salvation and blessedness are based, and it is so rich and broad that we can never learn it fully."

<sup>21</sup> "The Ten Commandments," LC 386-431.

<sup>22</sup> "Conclusion to the Ten Commandments," LC 428:313-314: "It seems to me that we shall have our hands full to keep these commandments, practicing gentleness, patience, love toward enemies, chastity, kindness, etc., and all that is involved in doing so. But such works are not important or impressive in the eyes of the world. They are not uncommon and showy, reserved to certain special times, places, rites, and ceremonies, but are common, everyday domestic duties of one neighbor to another, with nothing glamorous about them. Those other deeds captivate all eyes and ears. Aided by great splendor, expense, and magnificent buildings, they are so adorned that everything gleams and glitters. There is burning of incense, singing and ringing of bells, lighting of candles and tapers until for all of this nothing else can be seen or heard. For when a priest stands in a golden chasuble or a layperson spends a whole day in the church on his or her knees, that is considered a precious work that cannot be sufficiently extolled. But when a poor servant girl takes care of a little child or faithfully does what she is told, this is regarded as nothing. Otherwise, what should monks and nuns be looking for in their cloisters?"

importance in our life, for here Jesus says, "I am here that you may live." These are not merely rites and ordinances we do at God's command because we are so worthy; they are the life-blood of our daily walk in a sinful world, graciously, excitedly, frequently, and repeatedly received because we need them so much,<sup>23</sup>

- that we know that our life is a daily confession of sins, a daily turning to our Lord in repentance, a daily run back to the waters of our Baptism, and daily being refreshed with the incredible news: "Forgiven!"<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "The Sacrament of the Altar," LC 473:61: "People with such misgivings must learn that it is the highest art to realize that this sacrament does not depend upon our worthiness. For we are not baptized because we are worthy and holy, nor do we come to confession as if we were pure and without sin; on the contrary, we come as poor, miserable people, precisely because we are unworthy. The only exception would be the person who desires no grace and absolution and has no intention of improving."

<sup>24</sup> "A Brief Exhortation to Confession," LC 479:25-27: "In the same way the pope's preachers have in the past kept silence about these wonderful, rich alms and this indescribable treasure; they have simply driven people together *en masse* just to show what sort of impure and filthy people they were. Who was able under those conditions to go to confession willingly? We, on the contrary, do not say that a person should look to see how full of filthiness they are or should reflect on their condition. Rather we give this advice: If you are poor and miserable, then go and make use of the healing medicine. Those who feel their misery and need will no doubt develop such a desire for confession that they will run to it with joy. But those who ignore it and do not come of their own accord, we let go their way. However,

Where Luther's *Catechism* (both *Large* and *Small*) has been remembered and used, there Lutheran identity has remained. Consider the words of Theodore Graebner, as true now as they were in 1928: "In many places in the Lutheran churches that wanted to be like the other churches around them, it went entirely out of fashion. It was no rare thing to find people who had grown up in an English Lutheran church who had not seen a copy of Luther's *Catechism*. The results, as may be imagined, were disastrous. When people know of no difference between the Lutheran Church and others, why should they love or sacrifice for her? If one is as good as another, it is foolish, it is wasteful, if not sinful, to build up Lutheran missions where there are other churches."<sup>25</sup>

### **It continually challenges us to dive deeper into the Word**

"But this I say for myself: I am also a doctor and a preacher, just as learned and experienced as all of them who are so high and mighty. Nevertheless, each morning, and whenever else I have time, I do as a child who is being taught the catechism and I read and recite word for word the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Psalms, etc. I must still read and study the catechism daily, and yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the catechism—and I also do so gladly."<sup>26</sup>

When the guy who writes the book says, "I read the book every day because I can't ever know it well enough," you stop and

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they ought to know that we do not regard them as Christians."

<sup>25</sup> Theodore Graebner. *The Story of the Catechism*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1928, p. 123.

<sup>26</sup> "Longer Preface," LC 380:7-8.

pause. Who among us would claim to be on a level with Luther? Who among us would dare to say we know enough about the Scriptures, we can put them aside now and move on to other things? And yet, we find ourselves and our people doing exactly this, as Luther, in his discussion of the Third Commandment, describes happening in his day.<sup>27</sup> We (or those under our care) take advantage of God's grace and say, "Everything I need to know I learned in confirmation," or "Every week it's the same old thing," or "It's just so boring."

The sinful nature is at work in our own corner of the Holy Christian Church. The evidence is in church attendance far below fifty percent, Bible class attendance just barely more popular than Congress, and our inability to confess "Because the Mass is for the purpose of giving the Sacrament, we have Communion every holy day..."<sup>28</sup> The devil works to take the Word from us, and we cooperate. God Himself rightly warns us as He warned the people in Amos' time, "Watch out, or there will be a famine of the Word" (cf. Amos 8:11). The Christian is called to grow in grace and knowledge, to dive ever deeper and further

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<sup>27</sup> "The Third Commandment," LC 400:99, "In the same way those conceited spirits should also be punished who, after they have heard a sermon or two, become sick and tired of it and feel that they know it all and need no more instructors. This is precisely the sin that used to be numbered among the mortal sins and was called *acidia*—that is, laziness or weariness—a malignant, pernicious plague with which the devil bewitches and deceives many hearts so that he may take us by surprise and stealthily take the Word of God away again."

<sup>28</sup> *Augsburg Confession*, Article XXIV, "The Mass." Paul McCain (General Editor), Engelbrecht, Edward (Associate Editor), Baker, Robert, and Veith, Gene Edward (Assistant Editors), *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, Second Edition, 2006.

into the Word of God, which is, as Gregory the Great once said, so shallow any child can wade in, yet so deep that an elephant must swim. And Luther's *Catechism* takes us there. On page after page you will drink sweet, refreshing milk, and at the same time chew on some of the most delicious steak as you ponder anew the applications, understanding, insights, and revelations that the Spirit gave to Luther, and then marvel that those insights could well be yours, for you have the Spirit's tool right beside you – Holy Scripture!

### **It continually finds itself relevant in the lives of pastors, teachers, and laypeople**

"Therefore, I beg such lazy bellies and presumptuous saints, for God's sake, to let themselves be convinced and believe that they are not really and truly such learned and exalted doctors as they think. I implore them not ever to imagine that they have learned these parts of the catechism perfectly, or that they know them sufficiently, even though they think they know them ever so well. Even if their knowledge of the catechism were perfect (although that is impossible in this life), yet it is highly profitable and fruitful to read it daily and to make it the subject of meditation and conversation. In such reading, conversation, and meditation the Holy Spirit is present and bestows ever new and greater light and devotion, so that it tastes better and better and is digested, as Christ also promises in Matthew 18[:20\*], 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'"<sup>29</sup>

I challenge you to embark upon a reading of Luther's *Catechism* and see if at the end of the day you can honestly say, "I knew all that before" or "He's not talking about today." To read Luther in his *Catechism* is to see that the

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<sup>29</sup> "Longer Preface," LC 381:9-10.

needs of Christians do not change all that much over the years. To read the *Catechism* is to very nearly exclaim, "Luther, get out of my head!" It is not abstract applications to non-existent life situations that Luther describes in his *Catechism*. It is the day-to-day struggles with which you and I, twenty-first century Christians, deal and struggle. As Prof. Steve Geiger writes, "Bottom line? The Catechism addresses reality. It rebukes, encourages, guides, reassures. It considers the day-to-day issues every Christian faces and makes it clear that God has exactly what we need for such challenges."<sup>30</sup>

Incredibly, much as your reading of Scripture is ever relevant to your current life situation, you will find in Luther's breakdown of the Chief Parts new and ever greater wonders in the insights he chose to include and the pastoral applications he makes as he preaches to us from nearly five-hundred years ago. And this mostly because Luther deals with the bare texts of Scripture. He is not trying to write a textbook of educational theory or make party propaganda; he simply lets God speak.

And so the *Catechism* cannot help but be relevant to all of us. If it is true that every renewal of the Church's spiritual life begins in the pastor's study<sup>31</sup> then the *Catechism* will be part and parcel to that renewal, as, for example, the pastor in his study mines the depths of Scripture through Luther to learn how to better preach his people to the sacrament, or to be reminded that even telling the truth can be an Eighth

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<sup>30</sup> Response to *Large Catechism* Questionnaire, received 9/14/2008.

<sup>31</sup> Said by Prof. August Pieper. Forrest Bivens. "Luther's Large Catechism," Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Pastor's Institute (available from Prof. Bivens at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary), quoted on p. 36.

Commandment sin, and so strengthen his catechesis and counseling.<sup>32</sup>

If the education of our children is the key to the health of the Church,<sup>33</sup> then we find the *Catechism* relevant in the classroom as well. It guides the teacher trying to explain to his class that we pray to exercise our faith, even though God already knows everything, including what we are about to pray, what Baptism is, what the Lord's Supper is, and why

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<sup>32</sup> I challenge you to read Luther's treatment of the Eighth Commandment and not be cut repeatedly by the surgeon's knife but also wowed by the breadth of insight.

<sup>33</sup> "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools," *Luther's Works* 45:350: "Again he does the right and smart thing to preserve his kingdom and by all means retain his hold on the young crowd. If he can hold them, and they grow up under him and remain his, who can take anything from him? He then maintains undisputed possession of the world. For if he is to be dealt a blow that really hurts, it must be done through young people who have come to maturity in the knowledge of God, and who spread His word and teach it to others.

"No one, positively no one, realizes that this is a despicable trick of the devil. It proceeds so unobtrusively that no one notices it, and the damage is done before one can take steps to prevent and remedy it. We are on the alert against Turks, wars, and floods, because in such matters we can see what is harmful and what is beneficial. But no one is aware of the devil's wily purpose. No one is on the alert, but just goes quietly along. Even though only a single boy could thereby be trained to become a real Christian, we ought properly to give a hundred gulden to this cause for every gulden we would give to fight the Turk, even if he were breathing down our necks. For one real Christian is better and can do more good than all the men on earth."

Or, "Sermon on the Estate of Marriage," *Luther's Works* 44:12: "If we want to help Christendom, we most certainly have to start with the children."

we believe in them. So much so is the Christian classroom the third level of defense (home and Divine Services rounding out the trio) against unbelief that we cannot afford to not arm ourselves with the best weapons available that speak at the level of our children. And making adequate, consistent use of the *Catechism* in not just our undergraduate training, but also our daily preparation as teachers, and perhaps even in our curriculum strengthens the argument we should be making about our schools – “This is a House of God, not just some fancy private education.”

And if God commanded parents to be the first level of defense, if He said to them, “Talk about my Word wherever you are and whenever you have the chance. I’m holding you personally responsible for how they turn out” (and He did by the way – Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Ephesians 6:4<sup>34</sup>), then, again, we find daily relevance in Luther’s *Catechism*. For here we find the basics of the faith, as mentioned above. Here parents help raise up their children in the training and instruction of the LORD, for here they find the warnings against apathy and lethargy and sluggishness in the faith (Third Commandment), warnings against greed and materialism (First, Seventh, Ninth, and Tenth Commandments) and that ever

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<sup>34</sup> From Deuteronomy 6: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” And, from Ephesians 6: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

helpful explanation to help their children (and all of us) see why it is not just an annoying extra fifteen minutes when the communion vessels are on the altar each Sunday (the Sacrament of the Altar). It was not an overstatement for our Fathers to say that in the *Catechism* we find the Bible of the laity. No finer, more relevant summary of Scripture exists outside of Scripture itself.

Most crucially, we find the *Catechism* relevant yet today for pastors, teachers, and the laity because it is not merely a thick book of complex theological sentences and doctrinal discussions able to be understood by only the elite few. The *Catechism* of Luther does not exist merely to fill our head with knowledge so that we might with the right words and phrases discuss our faith. We find this text relevant because it takes our head and heart faith and brings it into our lives. Again, I challenge you to read it and disagree.

### **It continually emphasizes the Church’s true vocation**

“These are the most necessary parts that we must first learn to repeat word for word. The children should be taught the habit of reciting them daily, when they arise in the morning, when they go to their meals, and when they go to bed at night. Until they recite them they should be given nothing to eat or drink. Every head of a household is also obliged to do the same with the servants, male and female, and should dismiss them if they cannot or will not learn them. Under no circumstances should those people be tolerated who are so crude and unruly that they refuse to learn these things. For in these three parts everything contained in the Scriptures is comprehended in short, plain, and simple terms. Indeed, the dear Fathers or apostles (or whoever they were) thus summed up the teaching, life, wisdom, and learning that constitute the

Christian's conversation, conduct, and concern."<sup>35</sup>

Maybe you find Luther's words quite harsh. "No food until memory treasures are recited and understood." We would not find it so if we continually kept before us the true and actual purpose and calling of the Church: that through the Gospel in Word and Sacraments unbelievers are made believers who believe that Jesus is the Christ and thereby have life (John 20:31), that these believers grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18), and that they are equipped to protect themselves against the devil's wiles (James 4:7) – and this is done as believers are baptized and taught everything Jesus commanded (Matthew 28). In other words, the purpose of the Church is, to use a word considered pejorative: indoctrination.

There is, however, a disturbing tendency (not new, and neither foreign to nor exclusive to the Wisconsin Synod). This tendency is to make the focus, purpose and goal of our training and instruction not indoctrination, but activism.<sup>36</sup> The goal seems to be (or

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<sup>35</sup> "Short Preface," LC 385:15-19.

<sup>36</sup> This is not an insight original to me, but one that, as I think on it more, I agree with more and more. It was an insight recorded by Prof. Irwin Habeck in an essay from 1979 available on the Seminary's online essay file. He writes: "The time was when one of the best accolades which could be given to a congregation was to say that it was well indoctrinated. One may wonder at times whether the emphasis has shifted in the direction of activism. If activism were to be the main thrust in the individual and corporate life of Christians, there would be little need for indoctrination. Then efficient organization and functioning ought to be our main concern. But if activity is to be a fruit and not the essence, then the tree on which the fruit grows needs to be nurtured and pruned. For this, indoctrination is needed. Furthermore, while Christians are to be led, they are not blindly to follow leaders. They need to be able to test the

seems to shift towards) not thorough, complete, and continuing growth in depth of knowledge and understanding, but rather on creating, seeing, getting, and using fruits of faith, that is, upon the organization proper and the activity within that organization, more than being connected to Jesus through the means of grace (not that fruits of faith are unimportant). The evidence for such an activist tendency is found in a variety of places, for example:

- a willingness to dumb down confirmation and catechetical instruction to the very basics, to reduce the memory treasure load, to eliminate or replace public examination, and to require almost none of this memorization or examination from our adult confirmands
- the temptation to shorten our adult instruction courses to remove burdensome obstacles (like lots of time and work) that

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orthodoxy of their leaders, following the good example of the Bereans, of whom we are told: 'They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so' (Ac 17:11). Indoctrination produces such Christians. Finally, indoctrination which relates all doctrines to the grace of God in Christ Jesus, our Savior, will increase the joy and peace and power and hope which a knowledge of the truth brings. This does not mean to say that indoctrination can be furthered only by preaching on the catechism. 'All scripture...is profitable for doctrine' (2 Tm 3:16) and all scriptural preaching will therefore promote indoctrination. But preaching on the catechism is one means by which it can be fostered" (Irwin Habeck. "Profit and Peril in Preaching on the Catechism," (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary On-Line Essay File, accessed on July 16, 2008); available from [www.wls.wels.net](http://www.wls.wels.net), p. 2).

might “turn someone off,” so that we can more quickly assimilate new members (defined as: getting them involved), and hopefully teach more later

- a focus on methods, especially as espoused by so-called Church Growth theology
- a focus on numerical growth and available and actual programs as a marker of success
- the sad truth that giving kids a Christian education by sending them to available Lutheran Elementary Schools, high schools, and colleges is not a slam-dunk case
- the ever-growing apathy towards creeds and confessions, theology and “book larnin” (found even among classmates at the Seminary), evidenced so well by Rick Warren’s proclamation that the next Reformation will be about deeds, not creeds
- the false dichotomy presented by some that it has to be about either missions or doctrine, it cannot be both
- the trend towards de-emphasizing denominational associations, making doctrines and confessions and creeds more low-key, more comfortable, to appeal to those disenchanted with church or organized religion
- the worship wars that exist even among us (Contemporary vs. traditional? Which Lord’s Prayer is the right one? Holy Communion – when to offer it, how much to offer it?)
- subtle tendencies to judge the strength of a congregation by the number of programs it has, how many are involved, who’s involved,

and thus also creating the subtle tendency for our members to judge their own, and others, spiritual strength based on their activity in the church, not by God’s work through the means of grace

This is not to say that we do not want to see fruits of faith or growth or activity. Paul tells us that one of the end results of the work of pastors and teachers is that people, empowered by the means of grace, are now equipped themselves to perform works of service (Ephesians 4:11-14). Jesus too says that connected to Him, we will bear fruit (John 15). And James says that a faith that does not produce deeds is dead, and so good works are necessary (James 2:14-24). But, to focus only on activism is to miss the point of the Church’s work.

Are we guilty of this? The answer is, of course, yes. Not everyone, not always, not everywhere, but yes, we too are guilty of, at times, focusing on deeds and not creeds and of making the work of the Church producing not indoctrinated Christians but busy little Jesuses running around doing so many pretty works of service.

And the danger is twofold. As noted above, we run the risk of dumbing down the faith and losing touch with what it is to be Christian and Lutheran. Keeping the *Catechism* close at hand will protect us from this. But almost greater than this (because dumbing down the faith occurs in so many other ways and under so many devilish guises) is that if we let ourselves get bogged down in activism and ignore or downplay indoctrination, then we run the risk (and more than the risk – it is a guarantee) that we will be right back where Luther was in 1529. We will walk ourselves back into the Antichrist’s kingdom by another path. For we will have created our own new

monasteries – our congregations and their programs.

If activism becomes the main draw, the main work of our parishes, the essence of who we are and why we gather, then whether we teach it or not, the message will be communicated, “The only work worth doing is church work, and I’ll be flipped if I’m going to miss out on that, because I want to go to heaven.” And so, rather than monks and nuns we will have (or do have) Evangelism Committees and Worship Committees and Banner Brigades and Altar Guilds and Ladies Fellowship and Youth Group and Usher Teams and Greeters and Mowing Committees and Blood Drive Coordinators and Food Pantry Organizers and.... Again, not that any of those things in and of themselves are wrong, but when they become the be-all end-all of our classes and the defining characteristic of what it is to be a proper Christian (“Okay, you’ve been confirmed, now what team are you signing up for?”) we run the risk of losing everything Luther and we have fought for.

But, if we turn our eyes, with Luther, back to indoctrination, we find that through the means of grace the Holy Spirit creates Christians, not just worker bees: people ready to deal with the challenges life throws their way; people ready to judge the teachings of their pastors and their Synod; people ready to see through the lies and deception of the devil and the world; people constantly prepared for life as it is lived in an end times world; people who will, of course, by nature bear fruits because that is just what Christians do, even without having to be told; not people who live or die by whether or not this program and that club is still available for them to be in when they get confirmed, or if it is available at all, thus making them wonder if perhaps it is time to join another church. Because the Church is not about keeping busy and having

the right programs and activities and meeting every felt need and making sure you are involved in x number of church groups and special fruits of faith initiatives. The Church is about the care of souls through the means of grace. To say otherwise runs the risk of dimming the light from the central focus of the cross and minimizing the valuable contributions that daily life at home and work provide for the Christian. It is no mistake that Paul considered this of first importance: “...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). And again, the happy side effect of keeping what is of first importance first is active Christians – active not just at church, but in their home, at work, in their world.

As many have said, and the people of Israel taught us (cf. Judges 2:10-15), we stand only one generation away from losing Jesus, which means losing heaven. It can happen that quickly, or it can happen slowly, over decades and centuries, as it happened in the early church through the Dark and Middle Ages. By God’s grace, He woke up men like Luther to see the trap in which Satan had set the Church through his ally the Antichrist and provided us with tools to avoid such a trap again, tools to keep us strong and fresh and firm. God grant that we would never let ourselves fall so low again. May He give us the wisdom evidenced by the great poet Coleridge, about whom Reu relates this story: “‘Let a child wait until he is grown and then choose his own religion,’ said an English statesman in the hearing of Coleridge. Coleridge made no reply, but led the speaker out into his garden. Looking around upon the bare ground he said quietly: ‘I have decided to wait till August and let the garden decide for itself whether it prefers weeds or

strawberries."<sup>37</sup> To put it in more colloquial terms: "Use it, or lose it!" This is God's own warning to us (cf. Amos 8:11 again), one which Luther echoes mightily throughout his writings<sup>38</sup> and throughout his *Large Catechism*. And by God's grace, in Luther's *Catechism*, we have a mighty tool, written in war-time, relevant still today to arm ourselves for battle, relevant to strengthen our faith in weakness, relevant to raise up generations to follow, and relevant to do that mighty work our Savior promises accompanies the end of times: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). That said, it is entirely fitting for Luther to get the last word today (did you think it would end any other way?).

"For this reason alone you should gladly read, recite, ponder, and practice the catechism, even if the only advantage and benefit you obtain from it is to drive away the devil and evil thoughts. For he cannot bear to hear God's Word. And God's Word is not like some idle tale, such as about Dietrich of Bern, but, as St. Paul says in Romans 1[:16\*], it is 'the

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Reu, *op. cit.*, p. 5-6.

<sup>38</sup> "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools," *Luther's Works* 45:352: "O my beloved Germans, buy while the market is at your door; gather in the harvest while there is sunshine and fair weather; make use of God's grace and word while it is there! For you should know that God's word and grace is like a passing shower of rain which does not return where it has once been. It has been with the Jews, but when it's gone it's gone, and now they have nothing. Paul brought it to the Greeks; but again when it's gone it's gone, and now they have the Turk. Rome and the Latins also had it; but when it's gone it's gone, and now they have the pope. And you Germans need not think that you will have it forever, for ingratitude and contempt will not make it stay. Therefore, seize it and hold it fast, whoever can; for lazy hands are bound to have a lean year."

power of God,' indeed, the power of God that burns the devil's house down and gives us immeasurable strength, comfort, and help.

"Why should I waste words? If I were to tell all the benefits and advantages that God's Word accomplishes, where would I find enough paper and time? The devil is called a master of a thousand arts. What then can we call God's Word that routs and destroys such a master of a thousand arts along with all his cunning and power? Indeed, it must be master of more than a hundred thousand arts. And should we so flippantly despise such might, benefits, power, and fruit—especially we who want to be pastors and preachers? If so, we deserve not only to be given no food to eat, but also to have the dogs set upon us and to be pelted with horse manure. For not only do we daily need God's Word just as we do our daily bread; we also must have it every day in order to stand against the daily and incessant attacks and ambushes of the devil with his thousand arts."<sup>39</sup>

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**Southeastern Pastoral Conference**  
**Michigan District (WELS)**  
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<sup>39</sup> "Longer Preface," *LC* 381:11-15.

## **Appendix: What can I do with my *Catechism*?**

### **1. Pastor**

- read it for personal growth/devotional reading
- use it for sermon studies when the text calls for it
- use it for catechism class prep
- use it as the basis for discussion questions in catechism class
- assign as catechism homework
- use as the 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbook after a three year Bible History course
- give a copy to confirmands as a gift
- use as basis for Elder Bible Study
- use for Sunday or midweek Bible study course
- use as opening devotion at congregational meetings
- make it the basis for a sermon series or series of series – Preach the catechism!
- emergency sermons!
- give to elders when they have to read a sermon
- study it in circuit/conference/district level (either through papers or devotions)
- use as a group study with other pastors outside of circuit
- outline and main text for a Bible Information Class
- insert devotional paragraphs into newsletters or bulletins
- read a paragraph or section at the beginning of Bible class
- sermon illustrations – “quotable quotes!”

### **2. Teacher**

- read it for personal growth/devotional reading
- use it for prep for Bible History/catechism teaching
- assign to parents to read as you assign children the Chief Parts
- use as faculty Bible study/devotion
- study it in teacher’s conferences or use as basis for devotions
- read it and discuss it with spouse, friend, family member
- read portions for your daily classroom devotion
- use quotations as discussion or thought questions

### **3. Laity**

- read it for personal growth/devotional reading
- use as family devotional book for a time
- read and discuss with your spouse, friend, family member, pastor
- take on vacation as your “church on the road”
- use it to help you teach your children the catechism before they get it from the pastor
- read it along with your kids as they study that portion of the *Catechism*
- something to share with people who ask, “What do you believe?”

- **Others?**

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  - "Sermon on Worthy Reception of the Sacrament," 42:171-177
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  - "Receiving the Sacrament in Both Kinds," 36:235-266
  - "Personal Prayer Book," 43:3-45
  - "Eight Sermons at Wittenberg," 51:67-100
  - "Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed," 45:77-129
  - "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," 53:11-13
  - "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," 53:17-40
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  - "How Christians Should Regard Moses," 35:155-173

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### **Large Catechism Electronic Questionnaire**

At the beginning of the summer, 2008, I sent out a questionnaire to about 20 professors and teachers at colleges and seminaries in the WELS, ELS, LC-MS, and ELCA seeking input on various issues surrounding the *Large Catechism* and its use. Unfortunately, I only received a handful of responses to the survey itself (see below).

A couple of professors demurred due to lack of insight or directed me to other sources of information. It was in this way that Prof. John Brenner (WLS) directed me to Prof. Bivens Pastors' Institute course.

Steven Geiger, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI; 9/14/2008

Robert Kolb, Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, MO; 6/30/2008

Mark Zarling, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN; 9/23/2008

*All Scripture references are from the New International Version 1984, unless otherwise noted.*

*All references to the Book of Concord are from the Kolb-Wengert edition (2000), unless otherwise noted.*