

# God's Blessings Upon His Church Through Luther's Catechisms

By Martin Albrecht

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When I was asked to present an essay on the above-named topic; I quite readily accepted. I had done some research for an essay that appeared in the April issue of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. However, that assignment was much narrower in that it was to cover only the effects of the Catechisms on the Church of the 16th Century. That portion will be a bit repetitious for those of you who subscribe for and read the *Quarterly*.

## Pre-Luther

In order to go back to the roots of the catechisms I feel one will have to consider what the early Christians did in the area of instruction. Jesus had told His disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations;" they were to teach them to obey everything I have commanded you." Those words must ring in our ears to this very day as we go about our work in our congregations. "To observe all things " *lehret sie halten alles,*" that is not easy. It calls for thoroughness, completeness.

As we observe the apostles on Pentecost day, we hear them preaching Christ crucified Christ who died for the sins of all, including many of those assembled before them who possibly had been among those who cried: "Crucify Him!" Then came the wonderful message: "Repent and be baptized." In brief, this content of their instruction was to be a preparation for baptism, which then would become a preparation for Holy Communion.

Among the early Church Fathers the procedure was on the whole the same. For example, in Alexandria, Egypt, Origen made the following arrangement for a graded catechumenate: Admission of catechumens was preceded by examination and instruction, with special efforts to impart general indoctrination in regard to Christianity and to inquire into the moral status of the persons who showed interest in the Christian religion. The catechumens were divided into two groups: the newly admitted, and those who had stood the test and had demonstrated by their lives that they had a sincere devotion to Christian ideals. After they studied the meaning of the Sacraments, they were baptized and admitted to partake of Holy Communion. The whole instruction often took two to three years. The procedure was not for children but for adults, young and old. What was the basis for the instruction? According to writings (Apostolic Constitutions) great stress was laid on moral discipline. Origen mentions repeatedly the study of Moses and his law he laid great stress on the reading of Scriptures.

After 450 a decay seems to have taken place. It strikes a person to see how with the upsurge of church hierarchy a decay of instruction took place. Submission to the hierarchy brought with it the feeling that thorough instruction was no longer necessary.

After 600 (Gregory the Great) strong efforts were made towards mission work. Augustine was sent to the British Isles in 596. What did he find? Evidently the Gallicans had already done mission work in Ireland and parts of Britain. Augustine did succeed in southeastern England, as did Boniface among the Hessians and Frisians on the continent. But what was the instruction? Practically none. Christianity was coerced upon whole tribes of people when and if the head of the tribe could be convinced to accept Christianity. Mass baptisms took place. People accepted the fact that submitting to the sacraments would take care of them, instruction or not.

In the 8th century there were efforts at revival. In that century men like Alcuin and Rhabanus Maurus used as the basis for their instruction the Apostolic Symbol, the Lord's Prayer and explanation, and the Decalogue with a preparation for Baptism and the Lord's Supper. So there we see how a return was made to the basics (the same that Luther used in his catechism). In 789 the *Weissenburg Catechism* appeared in German and Latin. The contents: Lord's prayer and explanation, an enumeration of mortal sins, the Creed and the Gloria in Excelsis. In 802 Freising's Explanation of the Lord's Prayer was written. In general we will have to say that the main thrust was memorization of the Trilogy. In addition to these writings one can sense that educators of that time also felt the need of Bible stories. So in 830 there appeared "Heliand," a life of Christ. Likewise in 860 another "Life of Christ," Weissenburg's "Krist," appeared.

In the years from 1200 to 1517 attention was again called to the training of the children. Sponsors were urged to see to it that children by their 7th year would be able to recite the Creed and the Lord's Prayer.

In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council ordered that all children from their 7th year be required to go to confession at least once a year. Can one imagine that children of that young age would be able to confess sins and that they would be far enough advanced in their knowledge of sin and forgiveness to make use of confession to their own satisfaction? However, the church had a good hold on her membership by demanding the recitation of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Ave Maria, and the Commandments. In other words, the church used the confession as a pedagogical device. In like manner the Sacrament of Baptism was used in that for this rite the children, the parents, and the sponsors were examined. This practice was called "catechismus," questioning and answering.

Another device to get the articles of faith to the people was the "prone." This was used in the 1400's; it was a type of prayer that the priests were to read every Sunday. It could include a bidding prayer, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Decalogue so that people would hear these articles regularly. The hope was that this repetition would help towards memorization.

Other church bodies (Waldensians, Wiclifites, Hussites, Bohemian Brethren) showed great interest in the training of the youth. There seemed to be far greater interest in the training of the youth than in the Roman church. The Waldensians instructed their young in the Decalogue, the Lord's Prayer, theses on the Trinity, the Sacraments, and in deeds of mercy. The Bohemians developed catechisms in which they stressed living faith, the fathers participating in the instruction of their children. Such were the efforts to bring the articles of faith to the people. We noted that there were times in the history of the church when great efforts were made; on the other hand there were also times when practically nothing was done except that people were more or less demanded to attend the Mass. Certainly Luther was acquainted with these conditions. At least we can say that he was very much aware of the problem even before 1517.

### **The Time of Luther**

From his early labors one is certain that it was not Luther's aim to write a catechism, as we know catechism. Nor did he ever harbor the thought that his catechetical efforts would be embodied in the confessional writings of his church. One may ask then how he ever became the author of these two books.

When Luther in his earlier years used the term "catechism," he did not think of a book. Catechism meant instructing the people, especially by means of sermons. With that concept he used the term "*Katechismus treiben*" (do or carry on catechism). For him this did not mean questioning and answering, but it meant teaching by sermonizing, lecturing, and memorization especially of the

Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Decalogue (the "Trilogy"). At times, however, he did use the term catechism as instruction material.

What brought about his interest in catechism? Even before he nailed the Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, he preached several sermons on the Ten Commandments and on the Lord's Prayer. In 1518 his explanation of the Ten Commandments appeared in print. Likewise his explanation of the Lord's Prayer made its appearance in the following year. In the same year this was followed by the *Brief Form for Understanding and Praying the Lord's Prayer*. In 1520 he produced the *Brief Form of the Ten Commandments, Creed and the Lord's Prayer*. In this booklet he divided the Apostles' Creed into three articles according to the Persons of the Trinity, instead of using the twelvefold division as taught traditionally, with the supposition that each of the Apostles contributed a portion of the Creed. He deemed his arrangement necessary to simplify the understanding of the entire Creed.

An outstanding production appeared in 1522 in his *Bethuechlein*, a prayer book intended to lead a Christian to know his sins and to lead him to prayer. In the three parts, the Trilogy, were briefly explained. In 1525 he enlarged this booklet including sermons on Baptism, Confession and the Lord's Supper. By 1529 this prayer contained practically the entire contents of the Small Catechism. We take note of the fact that he also included the matter of Confession. Actually this was not new. As early as 1523 he taught that the Romish confession ought to be discontinued. It had been abolished during the Wittenberg disturbances, but instead of re-introducing it, he urged that the communicants announce their intentions to partake of Holy Communion, but that in doing so, they submit to a type of examination on the catechism. Notice again how Luther stressed the necessity of understanding the Trilogy.

Luther had felt for some time that some kind of "catechism" should be developed. In fact, he had made such an assignment to Jonas and Agricola, an assignment that they never carried out.

In late 1528 and early 1529 the Saxon Visitation took place. Luther also took part in this endeavor. What he and his co-workers found was most deplorable. In their ignorance lay people were living in profound sin, clergy were not able even to pray the Lord's Prayer or recite the Creed fluently. They were not "fit to teach." In some cases church services had not been conducted for longer periods of time the religious training of the youth had been utterly neglected by the church. We may say, however that it served a good purpose that Luther was involved in this visitation; he learned of these sad conditions not by hearsay, but he witnessed them himself. What was the result? No more hesitancy as to the developing of the catechism. He knew that something had to be done to instruct not only the laity, adults young people, and children, but even the pastors and teachers, and that this had to be done as quickly as possible. Evidently he never realized that the common people had been so totally neglected. He voiced his disgust in the following manner: "O you bishops, how are you going to give answer to Christ, when you have neglected the people and have not taken care of your duty! You give the laity communion in one kind, demand the keeping of human tradition, and don't even try to find out whether they know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed or the Commandments."

In 1526 Luther published his *Deutsche Messe* in which he strove for a simple German worship. In this treatise he wrote: "The German service needs a plain and simple, fair and square catechism." With catechism he again meant instruction in the Sunday sermons, in the discussions and sermons in the daily services. In all these the Trilogy was to be explained. The parts were to be repeated or read aloud evenings and mornings in the homes for the children and the servants "in order to train them as Christians." Notice that this advice was included in his treatise on the German Mass. In this treatise he not only showed how the Sunday morning service was to be observed, but also that he was interested in the training and in the Christian conduct of the children, the young people, and the adults--the common people. Since he sensed that the common laity did not

understand the meaning and the correct use of the Lord's Prayer, he included a paraphrasing of the prayer in the service. This paraphrase has a striking resemblance to his explanation of the petitions in his catechism.

In addition to preaching and reciting the Trilogy, Luther recognized the educational advantage of visual devices. He had placards printed, each placard having the text of a part of the catechism. These placards were made available to churches, schools and homes. In fact, the texts on the placards were the same as those printed later on in the form of the Small Catechism. The "placard catechism" was very popular. The first placards made their appearance early in January 9 1529. By February 12 the first printing was completely sold out. A second printing was ready on March 16.

We have said very little about Luther's Large Catechism. When did he write this catechism, before or after the Small Catechism? Actually he did them simultaneously. Some feel that his original intent was to write the Large Catechism, but as he was writing, he sensed that the children and uneducated needed something simple. Hence, the Small Catechism. The Small Catechism was to serve as a textbook for Christian instruction in the home and in the school. The treatises, or sermons, of the Large Catechism were designated in his preface as "an earnest exhortation to all Christians, but especially to all pastors and teachers, that they should daily exercise themselves in the Catechism, which is a short summary and epitome of the entire Holy Scriptures, and that they may always teach the same."

In his preface to the Large Catechism he deplores the fact that the pastors are not studying the Scriptures. Ever since they have been freed from canonical hours, which he calls "unprofitable and burdensome babbling," they should have had time to read a prayer or two in the Catechism, the Prayer Book, the New Testament, or elsewhere in the Bible, or pray the Lord's Prayer for themselves or for their parishioners. In his "short preface" to the Large Catechism he calls the preface "a sermon, designed and undertaken that it might be an instruction for children and the simple-minded." However, it soon became apparent that he must have had the pastors and parents in mind, giving them explanations, illustrations, suggestions for expanding the truths briefly stated in the Small Catechism. One may look upon each essay of the Large Catechism as a type of sermon. The manuscript of the Large Catechism was completed in conjunction with sermons preached from the 22nd to the 25th of March, 1529. After he had published the charts in book form and called them the "Small Catechism," the new title "Large Catechism" gradually replaced the original title *Deutsch Katechismus*.

Both catechisms served one purpose: to instruct the common man in the truths of the Scriptures, the Large Catechism giving more details as to application to everyday life; the Small Catechism to serve as a summary which could by repetition be memorized. Is it not remarkable that his Small Catechism contains absolutely no polemics? With all the problems Luther had, showing the laity the many fallacies of the Roman church, one finds not one word directed against that church. In his Large Catechism he does point out many abuses; for example, the dependence upon saints for any little trouble or ailment. In the Sixth Commandment he does call attention to the monastic system, which held that it was more blessed to live a life of celibacy than to live in wedlock. Yet all such discussions are brief; the real matter was not directed against Rome, but it concerns itself with leading the Christian into a deeper understanding of God's plan of salvation.

But Luther was also deeply concerned about the pastor. In 1527 he encouraged the pastors to teach the catechism by special sermons. He urged them strongly to preach the Trilogy steadily on Sunday afternoons, this to be done four times each year. "Preach the catechism," fitting the contents into sermons, so that the people will understand God's plan of salvation as summarized in the Catechism.

Furthermore, he encouraged the pastors to read the Catechism often. He indicated that for himself this was a regular procedure and that he derived much comfort from such constant review. Luther also zeroed in on

a big problem of our day: the lack of cooperation on the part of the parents in training their children. He pointed out that the children should be instructed individually, a procedure impossible for a large church but an obligation for the parents. He stated that every housefather should be considered a priest in his own home. His is the duty to instruct the children, to bring them to church to hear the catechism sermons, to have them know the catechism. He encouraged them to pray mornings and evenings, before the meal and after it. He urged the fathers to question and examine the family on the catechism at least once a week. He felt that the master of the house should also be concerned about holding the catechism before the servants.

He was strongly concerned about bringing the catechism to the children and to the young people. Servants and young people were encouraged to attend church services on Sunday afternoons, when they could be taught the Trilogy and the meaning of it. Already as early as 1516 he had said: "If ever the church is to flourish again, one must begin by instructing the young." What a truth which we should impress on our minds and hearts at this time!

Luther felt that it would be good to have the catechism in printed form, but that it was to be taught orally. He did not intend to have a book, which was to be the format for formal instruction. However, with the appearance of his catechisms there was a rash of other catechetical writings, both among the Lutherans as well as among the Reformed. Many of these expositions were intended for the higher classes of the Latin schools; they were written in Latin as well as in German. Before long Luther's efforts took precedence culminating in their being incorporated in the Book of Concord of 1580.

The Small Catechism was often used as a first reader, employing the simple text without Luther's explanations, as the children progressed they were taught to read and to memorize his explanations also. We see from this that Luther's Catechism became the basis for the instruction of the children and of the young people. In the higher grades there followed extensions, sometimes very lengthy, of Luther's explanations. One of the outstanding productions was Tetelbach's *Gueldene Kleinod* (Golden Treasure) in 1568. Actually Tetelbach did what we are doing in our present versions, namely, introducing and explaining nothing else but the contents of Luther's Catechism. So popular did Luther's Catechism become that it was carried to Bohemia, Denmark, England, Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Holland, Sweden, Norway, and Spain.

In his catechetical labors Luther also indicated the value of basing the teaching of catechism on Bible stories. He did this in an edition in which he had twenty Bible illustrations, one for each of the Commandments, one for each article of the Creed, and one for each petition of the Lord's Prayer. Although these illustrations were poorly drawn, the method indicated that he was urging the instructors to use Bible stories as a basis for teaching catechism. In many church services parts of the catechism with explanations were read from the pulpit after the sermon. This was encouraged especially for the rural congregations that did not have Latin schools. On Sunday afternoons catechism lessons were taught and discussed with the children and with the young people. Catechetical sermons were preached, especially for the children and young people also in the matins and vespers during the course of the week.

When children were thought to be ready for communion, they were examined on the chief parts of the catechism. It may surprise us that some pastors used the catechism for premarital counseling.

Since the Small Catechism was used so widely and since this included the memorization of the chief parts; Luther urged text uniformity lest the children become confused. Some have charged Luther with overdoing memorization without an understanding of the text. This charge is not true. In his preface to the Small Catechism he stated: "After the children have learned the text then teach them the sense also, that they know what the text means." Furthermore, at the beginning of each part he placed the statement: "As the head of the family should teach them (or it) in all simplicity to his household." The expression "in all simplicity" surely

indicates that explanations were to be given. As we indicated above he urged the use of Bible stories as examples, and he added biblical pictures to call attention to the biblical examples.

How did the Lutheran pastors and teachers accept his catechisms? Many expositions of the Small Catechism were written between 1530 and 1600. One that received general approval was the Nuernberg *Sermons for Children* by Osiander and Sleupner in 1533. These expositions of Luther's texts had a strong influence within and beyond the borders of Germany. *Sermons on Luther's Catechism* were written and published in the years 1565 to 1602 by Spangenberg. Musaeus likewise prepared sermons based on the Small Catechism from 1568 to 1589. It is noteworthy that in England Cranmer together with several coworkers prepared *The Bishop's Book* in 1537 with an explanation of the Apostles' Creed and with other treatises that indicate a strong dependence on Luther's catechisms. A catechism appeared in England in 1548 (the year after Henry VIII's death) which was definitely based on the Nuernberg *Sermons for Children*. These sermons Cranmer translated for the Church of England. So we see that for some years Luther's catechisms had an influence on England.

Other catechetical works based on Luther's followed. Georg Walther at Halle in 1581 used Lutheran hymns as explanatory material. Such a work surely used all of Luther's catechism hymns. In 1591 Victorius gave each part of the Small Catechism a corresponding Biblical picture; in addition to the pictures he cited appropriate Bible passages. In 1580 Rosinus arranged the six parts for the six days of the week and prescribed which psalms and hymns were to be used together with the recitation of the Small Catechism, both in the Matins and in the Vespers.

In one of the *Kirchenordnungen* of 1578 a description is given, telling how the Small Catechism was to be used in the Sunday afternoon services. First a portion of the Catechism was to be sung (very likely according to Luther's catechism hymns); this was to be followed by the reading of the chief parts; after that a sermon was to be preached on one of the parts; two pupils were then to recite the catechism with the explanations; all children and young people were then to be catechized. The catechization was to be followed by a prayer and the Lord's Prayer, a hymn of praise, and the Benediction. Again we sense the great stress placed upon the contents of Luther's Small Catechism.

### The Post-Luther Era

**Pietism:** The Pietists had in mind "to bring the head down to the heart." Certain church leaders felt very strongly that catechism instruction had been on the main an effort to get the catechumens to recite the catechism word for word, and when that was accomplished, the catechumens surely "knew" the catechism. When we think of Luther and his times, we realize that he felt the great importance of getting the truths of God's Word to adults and children alike. For that reason he encouraged and practically demanded that the fathers "teach it with all simplicity, to his household." From other references we see that he did encourage memory work strongly; but with the "teaching" he also wanted explanation and application of the Bible truths which he so ably expressed in his catechisms. Coming back to the Pietists: Since their effort was to "bring the head down to the heart," many rejected entirely the effort at memorization, thinking that the most important thing was to bring about a deep, emotional feeling concerning the truths of Scripture without insisting on memorizing "dead formulas." They did have a point in that catechism instruction should affect the heart and not only the mind.

**Rationalism:** This presented a more serious problem. In that trend the instructor tried to develop biblical truths on the basis of human intellect. Catechetical instruction developed into a didactic conversation between teacher and pupil, leading the pupil from the known to the unknown by means of the developing question. The method was an improvement over previous methods that stressed chiefly memorization. The deplorable thing,

however, was that the so-called "known" was the ability to reason according to natural knowledge instead of drawing conclusions on the basis of Bible knowledge.

Rationalism is what forced many believing German Christians to leave their homeland and to emigrate to areas in this world where they would be able to teach and preach Bible truths and not pure human reasoning.

In the 1800's there was a re-awakening. The beginnings could be felt in Europe in 1817 when the 300 anniversary of Luther's Reformation was observed. One of the leaders, Claus Harms, made known his "Ninety-five Theses," in which he laid bare the many aberrations that had come into existence, especially through Rationalism. And so the people were led to count their losses in order to restore the blessings of the Reformation. Immigrants to our country brought with them their catechisms. One that should interest us who were members of the now defunct Synodical Conference, namely the *Dresdener Kreuzkatechismus* (1688), because this exposition was used both by the Missouri Synod and by our synod. Another exposition was one that had been made in Germany by Conrad Dieterich, superintendent and rector of the Gymnasium in Ulm. This exposition was written in Latin but was translated by Dr. Friedrich Wilhelm August Notz," professor of Northwestern University, Watertown, Wisconsin, in 1875, printed in St. Louis and in Leipzig. Surely the need for that exposition must have been felt, for it prompted Dr. Notz to make a translation that developed into a book of 505 pages of rather fine print. A look at the format with very detailed footnotes, often covering the great part of the page, indicates that it must have been intended for pastors and teachers a thorough preparation for discussions of the Enchiridion.

Both of these catechisms make extensive use of Bible material, the Dresdener limiting itself to Bible passages; the questions are often answered by longer paragraphs and by means of short lectures and Bible passages, whereas the Dieterich exposition is also in question and answer form, with further explanations in rather fine print the explanations are developed very thoroughly and include many examples from Scriptures--Bible accounts instead of the shorter Bible passages of the Dresdener book. Both works are thorough. The Dieterich catechism goes into such great detail that it evidently was intended for intensive study, whereas the Dresdener could be used by the average layman. The Dresdener catechism was in use for many years. The Wisconsin Synod edition has a copyright of 1881, printed by Northwestern Publishing House. A comparison with the edition that came from Germany shows that our edition was somewhat simplified. An added feature that should interest us is the addition of Bible Stories (B.G.= *Biblische Geschichten*) to be used in addition to the many Bible passages. The "B.G." follow the Bible passages, whereas in the Gausewitz catechism the Bible stories precede the Bible passages, putting additional emphasis on the use of Bible examples.

### **The Present**

The Gausewitz catechism was produced by Pastor Carl Gausewitz, who was pastor of Grace Church, Milwaukee. In 1907 a synodical resolution read: "A double commission is to be appointed of which the one will have the assignment to provide a good English translation of this revised German catechism." (Wis. Proceedings, 1907, p. 92). The committee consisted of Prof. Ernst, Prof. J. Schaller, President Soll, and Pastor Gausewitz. The committee evidently moved very slowly (as committees often do. In 1910 the Synod seemed to be getting impatient. According to reports a Teacher R. Albrecht was added to the committee. This still did not help. The next move was that President Bergemann chose one man to carry on the work--Gausewitz. By 1917 the German-English catechism was available at the publishing house. When the book appeared, Prof. Schaller provided a review of almost 6 pages in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*. He wrote: "One could boldly claim that our publishing house has up to now not brought out any book that is of greater practical significance for the edification of the church than the explanation of the Catechism." This edition was used for 39 years until a revision appeared in 1956. Maybe one should call attention to the fact that when Gausewitz died in 1927, President Bergemann's comments on his death at the next convention did not mention Gausewitz's great work.

Prof. Fredrich, reporting the happening in the April 1979 issue of the *Quarterly* "forgives President Bergemann by stating that there were so many other good and important things to be said about the man at the time of his passing that the one item was not included.

The catechism which we are now using is the "revised Gausewitz" catechism, copyright 1956. The exposition is very strong on the use of "Scripture references," Bible stories to be used to develop the understanding of the questions and answers of the exposition. These Scripture references are followed by Scripture passages, basic proof passages, many of which form the memory course for our Christian day schools. The method we use at our Seminary to teach the exposition of the catechism is that we start as much as possible with Bible stories as a basis for developing the contents of a set of questions and answers. We feel that this approach makes the catechumens realize all the more that Luther's Enchiridion and the exposition are based purely upon God's Word.

At the present time a committee has prepared a new edition of the Enchiridion, modernizing the language, so that the language is just as true to Luther's German version as is the present text.

Another edition of the catechism exposition is in the making. One of the problems is that the language of the present exposition is that of the KJV. The new edition should have a simpler language. The assignment of re-writing the revised Gausewitz exposition has been given to Prof. David Kuske. The Bible passages will be in the New International Version (NIV).

We want to call attention to another catechism version. This is a version that has been written by Adolph Fehlauer, the assignment having been made by the Board for Parish Education. This edition will have a different approach, different from the one used in our present catechism. The version is intended particularly for the intermediate grades of our Christian day schools. We feel this is good. The format, which we hope will be very appealing, will do away with the old complaint of using the "same book for the entire day school." This version, we feel, will also be welcome to our pastors who are teaching children who have not had the advantage of the Christian day school. The language is modernized; the translation of the passages: NIV.

### **Appreciation**

When we think of the many efforts the Christian church has put into Christian instruction as weak as it might have been at times, stronger at other times, do we appreciate what we have in the two catechisms? We can safely say that already in the early church the study of the Decalogue and the Lord's Prayer was basic. As soon as the Apostles' Creed took on its form, it also became basic. The aim of instruction for the adult was preparation for baptism; once baptized the individual was considered ready for Holy Communion. This naturally pre-supposes that the instruction also included the meaning of the two sacraments. So there were the five parts: the trilogy and the sacraments.

Another thing we should keep in mind is that memorization was stressed. There were many who criticized Luther for stressing that aspect of instruction. But when one considers how Luther stressed participation and guidance on the part of the parents, then surely the memorized Enchiridion took on special meaning. Let us ask ourselves what is happening at the present time. Are our parents ready to help? Very likely they also will need a lot of encouragement.

Let us not forget what brought on the final impetus to get the catechisms written and published. It was the deplorable conditions Luther and his fellow-workers found when they made the Saxon Visitation. Possibly a few Saxon Visitations should be made in our day also. We may find a neglect of the Word, or at least a reluctance to give our children the needed encouragement right at home.

One hates to be too pessimistic, but is it not true that in our country a generation has been brought up that does not know and does not want to know God? And that generation is now bringing forth children who are also groping in spiritual darkness. Without the Word, without the Biblical truths as they are so wonderfully brought in our catechisms, what more can we expect? It is no wonder that our young people come to the conclusion that right is whatever we want. Why are there so many crimes being perpetrated in our day? It is because the multitudes don't know God or His will. May this spur us on to do all we can to bring the Biblical truths to our young with the hope and prayer that they will not be afraid to give testimony of God's truth. There is much that can be accomplished by means of Bible study. Have we considered a return to catechism study? Do we find it too difficult to preach a series of catechism sermons during the course of the year? The Trinity season lends itself very well to this. And let us not say that it won't help too much because church attendance is not too good during the summer months. That may be true, but don't overlook the fact that Trinity season runs to the end of November. The Sundays of the Lenten season would also be a good time, since we usually have our Mid-week Lenten services for the study and meditation on the suffering of our Lord.

Take note of the order of the first three parts of the catechism. Luther purposely used the Decalogue, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer in that order. He explained: "Three things a man must needs know to be saved. First, he must know what to do and what not to do. Secondly, when he recognizes that by his own power he cannot do what he should, nor leave undone what he should not do, he must learn where to receive, seek, and find such power and strength. Third, he must know how to seek and obtain it. Accordingly, the Commandments teach man to know his sickness, so that he may see what he can do and what he cannot do, and to acknowledge himself as a sinner and a wicked man. After that the Creed teaches him where to find the remedy that helps him to become godly and to keep the Commandments, it shows him God and His mercy, revealed and offered in Christ.

Finally, the Lord's Prayer teaches him how to seek, fetch, and obtain such mercy, namely, through proper, humble, confident prayer."

One of the most outstanding things about Luther's Small Catechism is its simplicity. One can sense that he had in mind the children and the unlearned. And notice the simple approach to the meaning of each commandment: "We should fear and love God" etc. The Third Commandment: "That we do not despise preaching the His Word." How different from what the Roman church required: an enumeration of sins committed. Who can do that with a good conscience? Yet it was required even of the children. Certainly that was putting the wrong kind of fear into their hearts; it made them afraid of God.

We stated before that in his explanation of the Commandments Luther does not once mention other church bodies that are teaching false doctrine. This is certainly outstanding, especially when one considers the fight he was engaged in. However, when one reads the Large Catechism, we find that he does go into polemics, but mildly. Example: "I used to be thought that Sunday had been properly kept if one heard a Mass or the reading of the Gospel; no one asked about God's Word, and no one taught it either." Then he comes to the real issue, not by continuing his opposition to the Roman church, but by giving advice to his own people: "Now that we have God's Word, we still rail to remove the abuse of the holy day, for we permit ourselves to be preached to and admonished but we listen without serious concern."

There is simplicity also in the Large Catechism. The intent of it seems to be the instruction of "all Christians, but especially to all pastors and preachers, that they should daily exercise themselves in the catechism, which is a short summary and epitome of the entire Holy Scriptures, and that they may always teach the same." Notice again how he stresses the "daily exercise." Let us apply that to ourselves. Is it not true that we limit ourselves mainly to the exposition of the Small Catechism? Let us not overlook Luther's "sermons," which formed the substance of the Large Catechism.

Notice how Luther uses the word "grace." "He promises grace and every blessing." "So that by His grace we believe His holy Word." "The gracious good will of God is done indeed without our prayer." Will the children understand "grace?" We will very likely admit that such a concept may for some time be difficult to grasp. But does that mean that we will simply give up? Certainly not. It should not be too difficult for children to understand that when the Bible speaks of grace, it is the feeling that God has for us; it brings us an undeserved blessing. It is an attribute of God; we call Him gracious for all He has done for us.

See what Luther did with the Apostles' Creed. It had been divided into 12 parts with the supposition that each apostle contributed one part. The logical arrangement brought by Luther, namely Creation, Redemption, sanctification, was a great improvement. With such an arrangement the believer is led to realize that his creation and preservation come from a loving Father; in the Second Article he is led to confess faith in the human and divine person, namely Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us, so that we may live with Him in all eternity. The Third Article shows us that our faith in Christ is the work of the Holy Ghost alone; by that faith He has made us members of the Holy Christian Church. The simplicity of the language in the explanation of the three Articles again reveals Luther's genius in that he was able to condense the "What does this mean?" so that the answers clearly show God's plan of salvation, covering every doctrine necessary for our salvation.

What did he do with the Lord's Prayer? That this prayer caused difficulty for the average laymen of his day shows itself in the fact that he annually preached sermons on it. When one reads his "*Deutsche Messe*," one runs into his paraphrasing of the Prayer. He knew what had been encouraged by the church for a long time--the praying of the Lord's Prayer as often as possible, with the intent of gaining God's favor thereby. Notice how masterfully he stresses life of sanctification as a result of our faith in His Word. The First Petition: "When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as children of God lead a holy life according to it." But not without God's help: "To this help us, dear Father in heaven!" The Second Petition: "And lead a godly life here in time, and hereafter in eternity. The Third Petition: "But strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in the faith unto our end." The Fourth: "That He would lead us to appreciate and to receive with thanksgiving our daily bread." In the Fifth Petition he shows how freely and graciously God has forgiven all our sins and then adds: "So will we surely also heartily forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us," teaching them the importance of "loving our neighbor as ourselves." The Sixth: "That still we may finally overcome and obtain the victory." The Seventh: our goal: "Grant us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven." Each one of the explanations breathes the spirit Christ put into the prayer He gave His disciples to pray.

This motivation for a sanctified life is also embodied in his Fourth Part Baptism. After a simple description of what the sacrament really is, he shows how this sacrament will affect the Christian: "The old Adam is to be drowned by daily contrition and repentance and is thus to die with all sins and evil lusts; the new man then will live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

So also the Sacrament of the Altar, which contains the gospel of forgiveness, and it promotes godly living. Luther points out the benefit of partaking of the Sacrament: "That is shown us by these words, 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.'" This Luther expounds in the Large Catechism as follows: "On this account it (the Sacrament) is indeed called a food of souls, which nourishes and strengthens the new man. For by Baptism we are first born anew; but (as we said before) there still remains, besides, the old vicious nature of flesh and blood in man, and there are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and of the world that we often become weary and faint, and sometimes also stumble. Therefore it is given for a daily pasture and sustenance, that faith may refresh and strengthen itself so as not to fall back in such a battle, but become ever

stronger and stronger. For the new life must be so regulated that it continually increase and progress; but it must suffer much opposition. For the devil is such a furious enemy that when he sees that we oppose him and attack the old man, and that he cannot topple us over by force, he prowls and moves about on all sides, tries all devices, and does not desist, until he finally wearies us, so that we either renounce our faith or yield hands and feet and become listless or impatient. Now to this end the consolation is here given when the heart feels that the burden is becoming too heavy, that it may here obtain new power and refreshment."

### **Conclusion**

Since the middle of the 19th century there seems to be general agreement that in the Lutheran Churches Luther's Catechisms should be the basis for religious instruction. One will have to admit, however, that the rationalist can still induce his catechumens to use human reasoning and speculation. Strictly speaking, to the liberal theologian, to the freethinker, to the skeptic it is an offensive book. On the other hand, to the humble believer it is a precious gift of God.

It is the only confession, outside of the Creeds, that has universal use as a catechism, is regularly committed to memory, and is the basis for instruction in preparation for communicant membership. It allows for no compromise, as do the 39 Articles of the Anglicans, it is not a set of decrees as the decrees of Trent or Vatican II. It is simply and clearly a devotional confession which can be used even as a prayer book.

*The Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books* in the *Triglot* lists five services rendered by the Catechisms of the 16th Century:

1. They brought about a revival of instruction in the catechism of the ancient church;
2. They completed the ancient catechism (Decalogue, Creed, Lord's Prayer) by adding Baptism, Confession and the Lord's Supper;
3. They rid the teaching of falsehoods;
4. They eliminated Romish interpretation in the interest of work-righteousness;
5. They refilled the ancient forms with their evangelical and scriptural meaning.

When one considers the above named points, one can certainly sense the great impact Luther's catechisms had on the Church. There is no doubt that the church had neglected the instruction of the people, children as well as young people and adults. One can also be certain that during the many controversies that raged during the years soon after Luther's death, our gracious God preserved His Church through the thorough study of the Biblical truths as summarized in the Catechisms.

When one thinks how God blessed the Church through the works of Luther, one marvels how God led a man steeped in Roman theology and brought about a complete reversal in what Luther had planned when he was being trained to become a priest in the Roman church. One is led to compare Luther with Paul, who was bent on destroying the Christian religion but was completely turned about, becoming the great apostle of the Gentiles. All thanks to God!

(In conclusion I wish to say that I did not intend to say anything on the "Ministry of the Keys and Confession." I understand this was treated in your conference in an essay by Prof D. Kuske two years ago.)

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Martin Albrecht

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