

Luther's Catechisms, 1529-1979

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I. How the Catechisms Came to Be Written

President Petersen chose an appropriate theme for our 1979 Synodical Convention: "Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her for she is thy life" (Proverb 4:13). It is appropriate because it is the 450th anniversary of the publication of Martin Luther's two Catechisms, what we today call the Small Catechism and the Large Catechism. Luther applied the word catechism to both of these works and he did not distinguish between them. He did not think so much of a particular book for teaching the young and uninformed as he did of a body of doctrine for the instruction in the principles of the Christian religion. Hence the theme for our Synod with the words "Take fast hold of instruction," fits very well with what Luther had in mind when he composed the catechism—Christian instruction.

But the Proverbs text is always most appropriate for our church as a theme, because Solomon personifies that which creates and sustains the church, namely, the divine instruction from the Lord God Himself, as revealed in the Scriptures. Hence Solomon exhorts us strongly: "Let her not go: Keep her (or guard her), for she is your life."

Instruction in the catechetical truths is as old as the church of God itself. When the Lord revealed to Abraham that "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him" (Gen. 18:17), the Lord added these significant words about Abraham, the Father of the Faithful, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, that they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19). The Lord speaks of instruction for both children and the entire household, all of which Luther had in mind when he wrote both catechisms. When we ponder the value of Luther's catechisms, we, too, need to keep in mind that instruction is not only for the young but for the entire church. When Moses sang his farewell song to the Israelites, his final word was to review God's Law and His Promise, His wrath and His mercy. Then Moses "made an end of his speaking" with these words: "Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of the law. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life" (Deut. 32:46.47).

It has always been that way in the church of God. The Apostles "ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:42). And we have the beautiful testimony of St. Paul of the household teaching of the catechism to a future minister of the Gospel: "When I can to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.... And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise until salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 1:5 and 3:15).

Here and in many other passages our church has both the command and the example from Scripture to make catechetical instruction the center of our life and work. May God's Holy Spirit bless us as we again contemplate the great heritage our church has in Luther's catechisms.

In the three essays for this convention, we shall look first at the origin of Luther's Catechism, secondly at its contents, and thirdly, its permanent worth.

Although a great deal of material on the composition of Luther's catechisms has recently been written and is readily available for nearly everyone, it might be helpful for us here to sketch some of the chief facts regarding their origin. The ten years following the posting of

Luther's 95 Theses (Oct. 31, 1517) were turbulent years in Germany. Luther was under the papal ban with a price on his head, and the Catholic princes and bishops were eager to see the ban carried out. However, the external conditions of the new church did become more settled, despite the opposition from the Roman church. Luther recognized that the next task was to build and strengthen the church internally. In 1526 he urged Elector John of Saxony to appoint visitors to examine the religious condition in the parishes within his kingdom. Luther recognized that the advent of the Reformation doctrine would call for a restructuring of the work on the local level. It was difficult to find clergymen who understood what the Reformation was all about, and there were laymen who misunderstood the doctrine of Christian liberty, thinking it meant freedom from all obligations to the church and to the pastors. Things began to get underway in 1528 when Melanchthon, with the aid of Luther, drew up a guide to serve as a doctrinal foundation for the visitation and inspection of the Saxon parishes. Luther wrote the preface, in which he states that he was asking the Elector to "call and ordain to this office [i.e., "the true Episcopal office and practice of visitation"] several competent persons" (LW 40,271). The Elector chose four persons who supervised and performed the task. Luther also took part in this general visitation and so he became personally aware of how serious the religious conditions were within Saxony. This galvanized him into getting out the catechism as quickly as possible. In his preface to the Small Catechism, he wrote about his experiences as a visitor: "The deplorable conditions which I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching. Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. ... I therefore beg of you for God's sake, my beloved brethren who are pastors and teachers, that you take the duties of your office seriously, that you have pity on the people who are entrusted to your care, and that you help me to teach the catechism to the people, especially those who are young. Let those who lack the qualifications to do better; at least take this booklet and these forms and read them to the people word for word in this manner, etc." (SC, Pref. 1, 2, 6).

But really from the very beginning of his career as a teacher and reformer, Luther was interested in getting both the laity and the clergy to be more firmly grounded in the Christian faith. In 1516 this young university instructor was asked by the parish priest, Simon Heinz, to preach in the city church on the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. He repeated this series several times, aiming the sermons especially towards the children and the unlearned, as he writes in a letter to his friend. These sermons culminated in the publication of several booklets used for prayer and private devotion. In 1523, Luther once more preached on these three parts of what eventually became his catechism, thus establishing the custom of annual catechetical sermons in the Wittenberg city church. In 1528, he preached three series of sermons (May, September and December), each of the series containing about ten sermons, on what we now call the five chief parts of the catechism. They were the essential, immediate source of the catechisms as we know them today. The December series of ten sermons has been translated into English and is available in LW 51, 137-193.

Luther began working on his two manuscripts for the Small and Large Catechisms late in 1528 or early 1529. He prepared them from the same material but they are independent works, written with different objectives in mind. Sometime early in 1529 he published part of the Small Catechism on posters or charts, so that they could be used by children in their own homes. Then he returned to his manuscript for the Large Catechism, completing it in March so that it came off the press about the middle of April, 1529. It had the simple title, "German

Catechism, Martin Luther." Luther then completed his Small Catechism and published it in May, 1529. It had the title, "The Small Catechism for Ordinary Pastors and Preachers. Martin Luther, Wittenberg."

The book was immediately a best seller for it undoubtedly filled a pressing need. It quickly went through several editions and was published in several cities of Germany. There were new editions in 1529, 1531, and 1542. At Hamburg there was a translation into low German, which was published in 1529. Since that time, both the Small and the Large Catechisms have appeared in hundreds of editions in the German language. (For detailed information see Bente, *Hist. Int., Trig.*, pp. 62-93.)

It might be of interest to know how Luther's Small Catechism first came to the Scandinavian countries. The first translation was made in 1532 at the official command of Knud Gyldenstjerne, a Catholic bishop in Odense, Denmark. The translator was Jørgen Jensen Sadolin; and probably to please the Roman bishop, he omitted Luther's name as the author on the title page, which read as follows: "Een Catechismus eller den sande hellige kirckes gamle Laerdom." In his introduction, Sadolin remarked that he had put the catechism in Danish from both the Latin and German forms. Scholars have traced the Danish translation back to the first Latin translation done in Wittenberg in 1529.

Sadolin later became the first Lutheran bishop in Fyen, Denmark. After the Reformation had been established in Denmark and Norway in 1536, there came out in 1537 two new translations of Luther's Small Catechism: the one was done by the first evangelical bishop in Lund, Frans Wormordsøn, and the second by the bishop of Sjaelland, Petrus Palladius. This latter was somewhat of an abbreviated version of Luther's Small Catechism. In the year following, Palladius came out with a new complete version of Luther's Small Catechism. It became the official catechism for both the Danish and the Norwegian churches because it contained, besides Luther's preface, a preface by Bugenhagen who had come from Wittenberg to inaugurate the Reformation in Denmark. He addresses the pastors both in Denmark and Norway and the bishops in particular. This version has Luther's baptismal service and the wedding service, which he had put in his German catechism, and thus these services became the official forms for baptisms and weddings, even as we have them today (somewhat modified). (This information is gleaned from Dr. A. Christian Bang, *Dokumenter og studier vedrørende Den Lutherske Katekismus' historie i Nordens Kirker*, Christiania (Oslo): 1893, Vol. I, pp. 97-269.)

Apparently the first translation of at least parts of Luther's Small Catechism can be traced to England when Thomas Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury, put part of it in English in 1548. What he had really done was to translate from Osiander's Nurenberg sermons on Luther's Small Catechism. So it was not in actuality a translation of the entire Catechism. Subsequently Cranmer drifted more towards Calvinism, with the result that the instructional catechisms and the Book of Common Prayer have Calvinistic teachings.

The first English catechism in America, printed in 1749 in Philadelphia, was probably published in Benjamin Franklin's publishing house. The translator was Peter Brunnholtz, a Lutheran pastor. No copy of this catechism has been preserved. The oldest copy of an American translation that has been preserved is one issued in 1794 by Dr. J. C. Kunze. From this time onward, many translations of the catechism by Lutherans have appeared. (Information from Theodore Graebner, *The Story of the Catechism*, St. Louis: CPR, 1928, pp. 114-123.)

At the present time there is no single generally accepted English translation of Luther's Small Catechism, although many of those used fifty years ago are quite similar in their phrasing. The Tappert *Book of Concord* carries a new translation of both the Small Catechism and

the Large Catechism. An excellent new translation of the Large Catechism appeared in 1978 by F. Samuel Janzow, titled *Getting Into Luther's Large Catechism*, St. Louis: CPR, 1978. It is popularly priced, and it is hoped that many members of our synod will purchase it. It can well be used with No. 4 of the *I Believe* series, "A Study of Luther's Catechisms," which will appear in September, 1979.

But particularly of interest to our Synod at this convention is the publication by the ELS Board for Publications of Pastor N. S. Tjernagel's *The Lutheran Confessions – A Harmony and Resource Book*. This book contains both the Small Catechism and the Large Catechism in the English translation found in the *Concordia Triglot* (F. Bente, ed., St. Louis, CPH, 1921). Every ELS family could well have a copy of this book for the study of all the Lutheran Confessions.

II. The Message of Luther's Catechism

To summarize the content of Luther's Small Catechism for an audience composed of staunch, confessional Lutherans is to carry coals to Newcastle. There must be some better way to prepare for a discussion of the meaning of Luther's Catechism. At a convention where of necessity a large amount of time must be devoted to business transactions, it seems that the best way to approach the subject of the content of the catechisms is to select a few parts and then probe them more deeply than we otherwise could. The spade and shovel method can produce better results, I believe, than the scraper method, whereby we go over it all once lightly. The first topic would naturally be the First Commandment and Luther's explanation of it.

Most of the instructional manuals available to Luther had four parts: The Lord's Prayer, The Creed, The Decalog, and The Hail Mary. Luther finally dropped The Hail Mary and added two parts on Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Then he reversed the usual order of the first three parts. Luther's departure from the usual arrangement of these three parts was no whim but was the result of his search for a solution to a pedagogical problem. The Reformation achieved a fundamental change from medieval theology which had confused the Law and the Gospel. For Luther the Law, which teaches what man must do and not do, was no longer to be confused with the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins through the merits of Jesus Christ received freely by faith. A related problem involved a correct understanding of the Law and its various functions. It was apparent to Luther from the very beginning that he must provide the correct insight to the meaning of the Law for the Christian. The solution of this problem was no easy matter for Luther. Nor, for that matter, is it an easy matter for any Christian who must be concerned with it throughout his entire life.

Luther's problem was that God's Law serves several purposes simultaneously. Very early in his career as a Reformer, Luther was acutely aware that the Law of God serves an accusatory function (mirror). In the Foreword to his "Personal Prayer Book" (1522), he wrote, "Three things a person must know in order to be saved. First, he must know what to do and what to leave undone. Second, when he realizes that he cannot measure up to what he should do or leave undone, he needs to know where to go to find the strength he requires. Third, he must know how to seek and obtain that strength. It is just like a sick person who first has to determine the nature of his sickness, then find out what to do or to leave undone. After that he has to know where to get the medicine which will help him do or leave undone what is right for a healthy person. Third, he has to desire to search for this medicine and obtain it or have it brought to him" (LW 43, 13). Luther had learned well the truth of our Savior's words, "They that be whole need not a physician but they that are sick" (Matt. 9:12). This conviction runs through his exposition of all the commandments, both in the Small and Large Catechisms. He begins every explanation to each commandment by saying "We *should* fear and love God;" not

"We wish to fear and love God" ("*wir sollen*;" not "*wir wollen*"). Luther asserts that the Law of God is a hangman, whom if you do not obey, "then obey the grim reaper, Death!" (LC I, 135). The Law functions as an accuser of our conscience because it demands a complete and undivided love for God; "Above all, He wants our hearts to be pure, even though as long as we live here we cannot reach that ideal. So this commandment remains, like all the rest, one that constantly accuses us and shows just how upright we really are in God's sight" (LC I, 310).

Closely related to this purpose of the Law is another, to restrain sin in man's external social life with threats of punishment and promises of mercy (a curb). By means of the commandments God has created dikes against gross outbursts of sin which pour from a corrupted mankind. God has intended the Law to serve as a bulwark against these unrestrained works of the flesh (I Tim. 1:9, 10). Luther applies Exodus 20:5.6 to all the commandments, and as a conclusion to the Ten Commandments he explains this passage by saying, "God threatens to punish all that transgress these commandments. Therefore we should dread His wrath and not act contrary to these commandments. But He promises grace and every blessing to all that keep these commandments."

But Luther recognizes a third purpose of the Law for those who have been justified by faith without the deeds of the Law. Christians are now free from the bondage of the Law (Rom. 6: 14), but they are servants of Jesus Christ, by grace living a new life of faith. Their desire is to serve their Redeemer, but with no thought of reward, content that their service pleases God. A Christian is through the Holy Spirit set free from the Law, but he does not become his own lawmaker (Rom. 3:31). The Ten Commandments show in a most concrete way how the regenerate are to live before God and man. "The Ten Commandments, however, do not by themselves make us Christians, for God's wrath and displeasure still remain on us because we cannot fulfill His demands. But the Creed brings pure grace and makes us upright and pleasing to God. Through this knowledge we come to love and delight in all the commandments of God because we see that God gives Himself completely to us, with all His gifts and power, to help us keep the Ten Commandments" (LC II, 68, 69).

In both Catechisms Luther is operating with this understanding of the threefold use of God's Law. He takes his audience to be Christians who have been baptized into Christ and have by faith put on Christ. They are now dead unto sin. Hence everything here has the presupposition of the forgiveness of sins, and the assurance that we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. Not to have this firmly fixed in our minds is to misread the entire Catechism.

The First Commandment

THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER GODS. "What does this mean?" – Answer, "We should fear, love and trust in God above all things."

The key word here is "trust." Faith is the fulfilling of the First Commandment; "The purpose of this commandment, therefore, is to require true faith and confidence of the heart, and these fly straight to the one true God and cling to Him alone" (LC I, 4). Already in 1520, when Luther had to answer his critics who charged that his stress on justification by faith alone must lead to total lawlessness and disregard of good works, Luther answered with his "Treatise on Good Works." There he asserted and developed these two theses: "The first thing to know is that there are no good works except those works God has commanded," and "The first, highest, and most precious of all good works is faith in Christ, as it says in John 6 [28.29], when the Jews asked him, 'What must we do to be doing the good work of God?' Jesus answered, 'This is the good work of God that you believe in Him whom He hath sent'" (LW 44:23). Luther then drew

the conclusion that "in this work [i.e., belief in the Savior] all good works exist, and from faith these works receive a borrowed goodness. We must make this absolutely clear so that men can understand it" (LW 44:24).

From faith flows "fear" and "love." Fear is the respect and awe of children for their parents in that they avoid those things that are displeasing to them (Gen. 39:9). Love is the inner, heartfelt attachment to God so that one gladly does His will (I John 5:3). The fear to do evil and the love that delights in the Law of God guard the Christian from a life of sinful rebellion. It should be noted, however, that when Luther says only "We should fear and love God," in the last nine commandments, he does not mean that trust, or faith, is omitted because it is of minor importance. Rather, once Luther has established that from faith all good works proceed and from faith our works "receive a borrowed goodness," then the motives for keeping the Law are fear and love. This is why for Luther the First Commandment is the chief commandment which comprises all the rest, "Let this suffice for the First Commandment. We had to explain it at length since it is the most important. For, as I said before, where the heart is right with God and this commandment is kept, fulfillment of all the others will follow of its own accord" (LC I, 48).

Luther in the Large Catechism takes up the practical question of "What is it to have a God?" He defines a "god" in the broadest of terms as "that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in him with our whole heart" (LC I, 2). Luther did not limit religion or having a god to a belief in a supernatural being, as is so often done today. Rather, he goes unerringly to the gods which occupy the minds of men in this universe and are very much in this world, also among the children of God. They are not supernatural at all, although they may today be disguised in high-sounding terms as "ultimate concern" or "ultimate commitment." Some modern theologians, such as Paul Tillich, who have rejected a personal god, such as the Lord Jehovah of the Scriptures, but have some kind of ultimate concern, are free to say that every man has a god. Every man has a religion; no man is in fact an atheist. Luther would easily understand such a statement, and he would agree on that point with such a modern theologian, "If anyone boasts of great learning, wisdom, power, prestige, family, honor, and trusts in them, he also has a god but not the one true God. ... Therefore, I repeat, to have a god properly means to have something in which the heart trusts completely" (LC I, 10).

It is here that modern man, living in an affluent society where values are turned upside down, must examine himself in the light of God's serious warning: I THE LORD, THY GOD, AM A JEALOUS GOD, VISITING THE INIQUITY OF THE FATHERS UPON THE CHILDREN UNTO THE THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATION OF THEM THAT HATE ME. Our "ultimate concern" here must be that the god of this world has not blinded our minds so that we are sacrificing to devils and not to God (II Cor. 4:4; I Cor. 10:20), but rather that we are among those of whom the Psalmist says, "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy" (Psalm 147:11).

The Creed

By way of introduction, Luther, in the Large Catechism, explicitly shows that the difference between the Decalog and the Creed is the fundamental difference between the doctrines of the Law and the Gospel: "Thus far we have heard the first part of the Christian doctrine. In it we have seen all that God wishes us to do or not to do. The Creed properly follows, setting forth all that we must expect and receive from God; in brief, it teaches us to know him perfectly" (LC II, 1). Luther then briefly gives the relationship between the Law and the Gospel. The Gospel is given "in order to help us do what the Ten Commandments require

of us. ... Therefore it is as necessary to learn this part as it is the other so that we may know where and how to obtain strength for this task" (LC II, 2).

I BELIEVE. Before one can begin to consider the contents of the three articles, it is important to have a fundamental understanding of what "I believe" means. The word "creed" comes from the Latin *credo*, which translates into "I believe." Paul confessed, "I believed, and therefore have I spoken" (II Cor. 4:13). From Paul's words, it is evident that the individual must have the correct saving faith. Luther knew that very often one's confession of faith gets watered down so that it is a confession with the mouth and not with the heart (see Rom. 10:8-10). Therefore he was at great pains to set forth the Biblical content of faith: "We should note that there are two ways of believing. One way is to believe *about* God, as I do when I believe what is said about the Turk, the devil, or hell. This faith is knowledge or observation rather than faith. The other way is to believe *in* God, as I do when I not only believe that what is said about Him is true but put my trust in Him, surrender myself to Him, and make bold to deal with Him, believing without doubt that He will be to me and do to me just what is said of Him. ... This faith which in life or death dares to believe that what God is, what He is said to be, is the only faith that makes a man a Christian and obtains from God whatever it will. This faith no false and evil heart can have, for it is a living faith" (Luther's "Brief Explanation," Phil. ed., II, 368). Note how Luther with great skill in teaching, converts the Creed's "I believe *in*" to "I believe *that* God has made *me*, redeemed *me*, called me by the Gospel.

THE SECOND AND THIRD ARTICLES

For Martin Luther the doctrine of justification by faith was the chief article by which the Christian church stands and falls. After the translation of Romans 3:28 appeared in his New Testament, he was charged with mistranslating because of the insertion of the word "alone:" "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith *alone* without the deeds of the Law." Luther vigorously defended his translation: "Actually the text itself and the meaning of St. Paul urgently require and demand it. For in that very passage he is dealing with the main point of Christian doctrine, namely, that we are justified by faith in Christ without the deeds of the Law. And Paul cuts away all works so completely, as even to say that the works of the Law – though it is God's Law and Word – do not help us for justification [Rom. 3:20]" (LW 35, 195).

An examination of Luther's exposition of the Creed in the Small Catechism, however, reveals the striking fact that when Luther explains the Second and Third Articles he never uses the expression "justification by faith." As a matter of fact, one does not find it even in his explanation of these two articles in the Large Catechism. And yet Luther's exposition of these articles achieves the high point in both the catechisms. Everything previously expounded has led up to this part, and everything that follows rests upon it. Once again, the skill of Luther as pastor and teacher reveals itself as he unfolds the central doctrine of Scripture to the young and the uninformed. With brilliant strokes he sets forth "the entire Gospel" (LC II, 33) in simple progressive steps. It is of great value to examine how he does it.

Luther selects several building blocks to instill an understanding of this chief doctrine. He picks the first one by saying, "We shall concentrate on these words, 'In Jesus Christ our Lord' " (LC II, 26). Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity, equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost, "the true and only Son of God, begotten from eternity in one eternal divine nature and substance" (Phil. ed., II, 370). The word "Lord" is an attribute of divine majesty. But Luther does not direct our eyes to the pre-existent Christ in His bare majesty as our Redeemer. It is the incarnate Christ upon which we should fasten our eyes, He who is also "true man, born of the Virgin Mary." From a practical pedagogical point of view, Luther recognized that an instruction

book intended for children is not the place to explain in detail the doctrine of the person and work of Christ. That is more appropriately done in longer sermons on the great festival days of the church year and in doctrinal expositions (LC II, 32). But the union of the divine and human natures in the one person Jesus Christ is so fundamental that one must believe it for his salvation. One of Luther's most significant confessions on the necessity of believing in the personal union of the two natures in Christ has found its way into the Formula of Concord: "Here you must take your stand and say that wherever Christ is according to the deity, He is there as a natural, divine person and is also naturally and personally there, as His conception in His mother's womb proves conclusively. ... No, comrade, wherever you put God down for me, you must also put the humanity down for me. They simply will not let themselves be separated and divided from each other. He has become one person and never separates the assumed humanity from Himself" (SD VIII, 81-84). And Luther did expect the average parishioner to know and confess this fact, not only formally in the Apostolic and Nicene Creeds but also in congregational song, as in his "A Mighty Fortress." Here he describes Jesus Christ as *der rechte Mann*, "For us the one true Man doth fight, The Man of God's own choosing."

As a second factor, to demonstrate that we are justified by faith alone without our deeds, Luther graphically and precisely describes what Jesus Christ did as our Lord and Redeemer. All of mankind, of which I am a part, was "lost." That is easy to understand. I am a "lost sheep" (Luke 15:3-7; Matt. 18:11, 12; I Pet. 2:25). But we are more than "lost." We are not merely little lambs who have lost their way in this world. Just because Luther in summarizing Christian doctrine in these explanations has used many striking, balanced phrases ("guards and preserves me," "purchased and won," "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies"), we are tempted to overlook the specific meaning of each of these parallel sets of words, and we tend to regard these phrases as units. A case in point for close examination is Luther's phrase, "A lost and condemned creature." We have not only lost our way in this world, but we stand condemned before the holy and righteous God who has said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). And God has Himself enlarged the scope of that judgment by declaring, "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26; Rom. 3:9). In the Large Catechism, Luther declares, "We lay under God's wrath and displeasure, doomed to eternal damnation, as we had deserved" (LC II, 28).

But now our Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed mankind from this hopeless situation, "who has redeemed me." Luther treats the redemptive work of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, very briefly in the Large Catechism: "Let this be the summary of this article, that the little word 'Lord' simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, He who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and now keeps us safe there" (LC II, 31). Christ's work is truly substitutionary. He kept the Law perfectly and suffered the punishment of sin, not only for our benefit but also in our stead. On Isaiah 53:4 Luther comments, "This states the purpose of Christ's suffering. It was not for Himself and His own sins but for our sins and griefs. He bore what we should have suffered" (L W 17, 22). The Small Catechism builds solidly on the Scriptural foundation of texts such as these: Gal. 4:4,5; II Cor. 5:14; Rom. 3:25; Rom. 5:10; I Pet. 3:18. In his famous commentary on Galatians, Luther says on the words of Paul, "loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20), "In these words Paul gives a beautiful description of the priesthood and the work of Christ, which is to placate God, to intercede and pray for sinners, to offer Himself as a sacrifice for their sins, and redeem them" (LW 26, 177).

The third part in Luther's presentation of justification as the center of all Christian truths, demonstrates that Jesus is my Lord who has triumphantly conquered my enemy, the

devil, "Even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity." The Large Catechism expands this truth in the words, "Afterward He rose again from the dead, swallowed up and devoured death, and finally ascended into heaven and assumed dominion at the right hand of the Father. The devil and all his powers, therefore, must be subject to him and lie beneath His feet until finally, at the last day, He will completely divide and separate us from the wicked world, the devil, death, sin, etc," (LC II, 31). Our Savior declared to Mary Magdalene on the first Easter morning, "I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God and to your God" (John 20: 17). Christ's resurrection guarantees to me that He has reconciled me to God, and that He is exalted also according to His human nature and now rules with the almighty power of God, and "therefore He can help me and all believers in all our necessities against all our adversaries and enemies" (Phil. ed., II, 372). Luther built this confession on such texts as Isaiah 25:8, Rom. 4:25; Heb. 7:25; I John 2:1; Eph. 1:22.

As the final building block to be set in place to teach the truth that we are justified by faith alone without the deeds of the Law, Luther directs us to the work of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies us. In the Large Catechism he points out that "the work is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by His suffering, death and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost" (LC II, 38). Already in his explanation of the Second Article, Luther has directed us to the work of the Holy Spirit in bestowing faith on the individual sinner. He does this by transforming the generalized "I believe in Jesus Christ" of the Apostles' Creed to the personalized "I believe that Jesus Christ is my Lord, who has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature." But even more specifically, he points to the life of the Christian under the Lordship of his Savior Jesus Christ, "In order that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness." The blessed state of the Christian is the result of Christ's victory over Satan. He has the forgiveness of sins, guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ, and with it a new life of faith, love, service, and hope. But this fact needed further development in the Third Article.

For Luther, the Holy Spirit is, as in the Nicene Creed, "the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son." "God's spirit alone is called Holy Spirit" (LC II, 36), and "His office is to make holy or to vivify" (LW 51, 156). The Christian's entire life of faith from the beginning to the end is a work of God: "He alone has sanctified [made holy] and still sanctifies" (LC II, 36). The reason for this is "that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him." That it is impossible for a person's sanctification to come by means of his work and merits was already assumed in the First Article which confessed that God gives me everything out of "divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me." As a further step, Luther explicitly states in the Second Article that I am "a lost and condemned creature." And now in the Third Article he nails down once and for all that my reason can achieve nothing good in the spiritual realm, nor do I have any power or strength by which I can come to my Savior. This is "The Bondage of the Will" which enslaves mankind. Luther's entire theology is sharply differentiated from the humanism he attacked in Erasmus and which is still current in modern man's rejection of the supernatural and in his belief in the capacity for his full self. realization through his reason.

The Holy Spirit gives faith but only through the Word of the Gospel: "The Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel." In the Large Catechism Luther elaborates, "In order that this treasure [i.e., the finished work of Christ] might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which He has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation. Therefore to sanctify is nothing else than to

bring us to the Lord Christ to receive this blessing, which we could not obtain by ourselves" (LC II, 38f). It should be remembered that for Luther the "Word" includes Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution. For Lutheranism there is no room for the Holy Spirit to work in man apart from these means of grace. He does not come through some mystical feelings, or through a special "baptism of the Holy Spirit," or through tortured wrestlings with God by incessant prayer, etc. So important was it for Luther that Christians acknowledge that it is God's Word alone that creates believers and establishes the church, that he climaxes the last stanza of "A Mighty Fortress" with the line, "Still must they leave God's Word its might."

The Lord bestows faith not only on the single, individual Christian, but "He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." The personalized "I" and "me" of the Creed has now become a member of the household of God, one of the fellow citizens with the saints (Eph. 2:19-22), or, as the Creed says, "THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS." For Luther, the holy Christian church is the assembly of believers only, always hidden from sight but known to the Lord of the church (II Tim. 2:19).

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer, Luther says in his "Treatise on Good Works," is a special exercise of faith, and faith makes the prayer so acceptable that either it will surely be granted or something better than what we ask will be given in its stead (LW 44, 58). Since prayer is an activity of faith, Luther as a preliminary to a consideration of the seven petitions, devotes several paragraphs as to why a Christian will be eager to employ the gift of prayer (LC III, 1-34). In his December, 1528 catechetical sermon on the Lord's Prayer, he summed up these points in a few words: "First, we are commanded to pray; second, the promise is given; third, there are so many and such great needs which ought to drive us to prayer; and finally, a form and way has been prescribed for us" (LW 51, 181).

OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN. In his 1529 edition of the Small Catechism, Luther had omitted these introductory words. But in 1531 he added them with the beautifully expressive explanation, "God would thereby tenderly urge us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him confidently with all assurance, as dear children ask their dear father." The believer prays "Our Father" and not "My Father" to show that he prays not only for himself but for all men. It is the common prayer, precious and most effective "and it is for the sake of this that we assemble ourselves together. The church is called a house of prayer because we are all there as a congregation, and with one accord to bring our own needs as well as those of all men before God and to call upon Him for mercy" (LW 44, 65). He is our "Father" not only because one God has created us (Mal. 2:10), but chiefly because we "are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26).

The First Petition

HALLOWED BE THY NAME. First things first. For Luther the arrangement of the petitions is an ordering of rank in importance. He saw an intimate relation between all the first three parts of the Catechism, and he created prayers in which he embodied all the parts. He says that the Decalog and the Creeds can also be used as a prayerbook. In fact, we may make them into a garland of four strands: As a school text, song book, penitential book, and prayer book (LW 43, 209). He quite naturally connects the First Petition with the Second Commandment. God's name is God as He has revealed Himself in His Word. He is always the Holy God, and the Word through which He reveals His will is also holy. The problem is that

our use of it is not (LC III, 37). The name of God is hallowed by pure doctrine. The person who prays the Lord's Prayer thoughtfully and devoutly will make all efforts to obtain and keep Christ's doctrine unsullied.

But God's name is "also profaned by an openly evil life and wicked works, when those who are called Christians and God's people are adulterers, drunkards, gluttons, jealous persons, and slanderers" (LC I, 43). Our Savior shows this positively when He says, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

The Third Petition

THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. God has established His kingdom of grace and He graciously rules it with the word of His Gospel. While this kingdom is not of this world it is still *in* this world. But here the triple alliance of the devil, the world and our own flesh is aligned against His kingdom of which we by grace are citizens. To take the last mentioned first, Luther never wavered in his certainty that man's will is always in rebellion against God. There is a battle to the end between man's natural will and the will of God. In at least two of his expositions of this petition, Luther uses almost identical words to express this: "Compared with your will ours is never good but always evil. Your will is at all times the best, to be cherished and desired above everything else. Therefore have mercy upon us, O dear Father, and let nothing happen just because it is our own will" (LW 43, 33). The "world" for Luther is not so much the inanimate objects of the earth, such as gold, silver and property, as it is evil men, "those who persecute and suppress Thy holy Word or prevent Thy kingdom from coming" (LC III, 67). But the real, chief archenemy is the devil. He is a demonic supernatural force in this world, "who baits and badgers us on all sides, but especially exerts himself where the conscience and spiritual matters are at stake" (LC III, 104). It is he who stirs up the world and our flesh "in order to hinder us, put us to flight, cut us down, and bring us once more under his power" (LC III, 63). The devil is not an invention of man, nor a personified symbol of psychological processes, as he is dismissed today. Rather, he is a real enemy here upon the earth (I Pet. 5:8). This is a serious matter which God's children should understand. Then they will not be offended when in their lives they receive the "blessed holy cross." The cross is a blessing for Christians, and it is inevitable that it will come because "when God's Word is preached, accepted, or believed and bears fruit, there the blessed holy cross will not be far away" (LC III, 65). But even in the face of such a triumvirate of enemies, there can be true Christian optimism, because "one or two Christians, armed with this single petition, shall be our bulwark against which the others shall dash themselves to pieces" (LC III, 69).

The Fifth Petition

AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US. To say that this is both a comforting and a troubling petition to devout Christians is to state the obvious. It is comforting because we pray for the greatest of all our needs, the forgiveness of sins, "For we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment." This petition sees that the life of the Christian is not without sin, and it asks God to disregard his sins and to forgive them. Our continued need for forgiveness constantly humbles us. In the Large Catechism Luther says, "This petition has to do with our poor, miserable life. Although we have God's Word and believe, although we obey and submit to His will and are supported by God's gift and blessing, nevertheless we are not without sin" (LC III, 86). How comforting then to know that God has removed our transgressions from us as far as

the East is from the West and that He remembers that we are frail children of dust (Psalm 103:10-14). Christ's blood cleanses us from all sin (I John 1:7), and where our sins abound God's grace abounds even more (Rom. 5:20).

That this petition troubles the sincere Christian is due to its last clause, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US. Luther forthrightly raises the troubling question in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount: "The only petition that has an addition of this sort is this one, and it gives the impression that the forgiveness of sins is accomplished and merited by our forgiving. Then what would become of our doctrine that forgiveness must come only through Christ and must be received in faith?" The answer to this question is that the Lord, by 'Putting the petition in this way and connecting the forgiveness of sins with our forgiving, "had the special purpose of making mutual love a Christian obligation, and the continual forgiveness of the neighbor the primary and foremost duty of Christians, second only to faith and the reception of forgiveness" (LW 21,149). In this world of sin and strife and selfishness, nothing is so common as enmity and an unforgiving spirit. And yet what the Psalmist says is recognizably true to man: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1). And so out of gratitude that God constantly forgives us, we forgive our neighbor and will "readily do good to those who sin against us." Considered in this light, one will not regard the last clause of the petition as troubling but, with Luther, will look upon it as comforting as well as necessary: "If you do not forgive, do not think that God forgives you. But if you forgive, you have the comfort and assurance that you are forgiven in heaven. Not on account of your forgiving, for God does it altogether freely, out of pure grace, because He has promised it, as the Gospel teaches" (LC III, 96).

The Seventh Petition

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL. In the Large Catechism Luther translates these words as "deliver or keep us from the Evil One, or the Wicked One." To him this petition seems to be speaking of the devil as the sum of all evil in order that the entire substance of our prayer may be directed against our archenemy: "It is he who obstructs everything that we pray for" (LC III, 113). All seven petitions deal with prayers of need in which we petition God's help. These petitions, as explained by Luther, reveal a life in this world characterized by a deceitful use of God's name, a disobedience of God's will, and a hindrance to the coming of His kingdom of grace. We live in a hungry land and are embarked on a dangerous journey through a world full of evil. Truly, the pilgrim's progress to the Beulah land is a hazardous trip fraught with many difficulties. But he need not despair, for he has God's support. If he did not have it, he would not be safe from the devil "for a single hour" (LC III, 116). Praying this petition in faith, he may be assured of his final deliverance (Rom. 8:28-39; Phil. 1:6).

Pride together with self-satisfaction with himself is one of the great temptations that confront the Christian of long standing. He may have prayed the Lord's Prayer so many times without thought that it has become no more than vain repetition that conduces to self-satisfaction (Matt. 6:7). Luther saw this danger in his old friend, Peter Beskendorf the barber. One day in 1535, when Luther was getting a haircut, Peter said that he was going to write a book to warn everybody against the power and cunning of the devil. Luther then wrote some lines of verse in one of Peter's books to the effect that no one can become so sharp that he can know the devil well, and that Peter had better look sharp lest in trying to trick the devil it might backfire on him. As a positive gesture, however, Luther did write a prayerbook for Peter on the text of the different parts of the Catechism, "A Simple Way to Pray" (1535).

Shortly afterwards Peter was tempted to act in a way that brought tragedy and shame to his family and himself. One Saturday night his son-in-law, an army veteran, boasted that he had acquired the ability to make himself invulnerable to any wound. Peter, possibly intoxicated, attempted a medieval version of Russian roulette by experimentally stabbing his son-in-law with a knife. The blow was fatal and Peter was brought into court. Luther and other of his friends interceded on his behalf so that he was only sent into exile. The incident vividly recalls Luther's words, "Such is life that one stands today and falls tomorrow. Therefore, even though at present we are upright and stand before God with a good conscience, we must pray again that He will not allow us to fall and yield to trials and temptations" (LC III, 100).

Luther composed the following prayer for Peter on the basis of the Seventh Petition. One can only hope that Peter did continue to pray it fervently until "he was taken from this vale of tears," and that Luther's prayer will also today serve to help all to pray this petition to their eternal welfare: "Say: 'O dear Lord, God and Father, this wretched life is so full of misery and calamity, of danger and uncertainty, so full of malice and unfaithfulness (as St. Paul says, 'The days are evil' [Eph. 5:16]), that we might rightfully grow weary of life and long for death. But Thou, dear Father, knowest our frailty; therefore help us to pass in safety through so much wickedness and villainy; and when our last hour comes, in Thy mercy grant us a blessed departure from this vale of sorrows so that in the face of death we do not become fearful or despondent but in firm faith commit our souls into Thy hands. Amen.'" (LW 43, 197f).

Baptism

To understand the doctrine of Baptism one must keep in mind three decisive points which the Lord has revealed regarding the sacraments. In a sermon on Matthew 3:13-19, which Luther preached at the baptism of the son of a close friend, Prince John of Anhalt, Luther explained these points briefly and simply to the congregation:

Now, as I have often said, God's Word teaches us that the sacrament of baptism has three parts. The first is just natural water. ... The second part, God's Word beside and with the water, which is not something we have invented or dreamed up, but is rather the Word of Christ who said, "Go into all the world and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" [Matt. 28:19]. When these words are added to the water, then it is no longer simple water like other water, but a holy, divine, blessed water. For where the Word of God, by which He created heaven and earth and all things, is present, there God Himself is present with His power and might. ... Then there is a third part which is necessary to make it a sacrament, namely, institution or the Word which institutes and ordains baptism; for two kinds of words must be present in order that it be a baptism. One which is spoken with the water or baptizing, the second which orders and commands us to baptize in this way. that is, to immerse in water and to speak these words. When these two come together, namely, the command and the institution to do this and the Word with the water, which is used in accord with the institution and practices and administers the same, then this is called a baptism and is a baptism" (LW 51, 320f).

Luther finds the special command of God for baptism in Matthew 28:19. In view of this, "To be baptized means to be baptized not by men but by God Himself. Although it is performed by men's hands, it is nevertheless truly God's own act" (LC IV, 10). Once again

Luther eliminates any idea of man's power to cooperate in the work of regeneration. But how comforting to know that it is God who sanctifies and cleanses us "with the washing of water by the Word" (Eph. 5:26).

After establishing the essence of baptism as the application of water and the Word in accord with God's command, Luther next addresses the question of the benefit of baptism. His answer is that "it works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare." This is one of the most pregnant of all statements Luther makes in the entire Catechism. It compactly summarizes the simple Gospel truths against the misunderstanding of both the Anabaptists and the Roman Catholics. This statement, grounded on Mark 16:16 and Titus 3:5-7, bears a most minute examination. Objectively considered, the element of water connected with the Word of God is the instrument of salvation. It is a living, saving water on account of the Word of God which is in it, for "through the Word baptism receives the power to become the 'washing of regeneration as St. Paul says in Titus 3:5'" (LC IV, 27). The thrust of this part of the statement is against all who deny that baptism is a sacrament which imparts the forgiveness of sins: "Therefore it is sheer wickedness and devilish blasphemy when our new spirits, in order to slander baptism, ignore God's Word and ordinance, consider nothing but the water drawn from the well, and then babble, 'How can a handful of water help the soul'" (LC IV, 15).

On the other hand, Luther held that faith is the condition for a blessed reception of the gift of baptism, for he continues with the words, "And gives eternal salvation to all who believe this as the words and promises of God declare." Faith indeed does not constitute or make God's baptism; only His Word and command can do that. But faith receives the gift of baptism: "Without faith baptism is of no use, although in itself it is an infinite, divine treasure. So this single expression, 'He who believes,' is so potent that it excludes and rejects all works that we may do with the intention of meriting salvation through them" (LC IV, 34). Here Luther warns us against the Roman Church and all others who teach that baptism merits grace by the mere external action of the sacrament without faith on the part of the recipient.

These two points are so important that in the Small Catechism Luther develops them further on the basis of Titus 3:5-7, by answering the question, "How can water do such great things?" in these words: "It is not the water indeed that does it but the Word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, which trusts such Word of God in the water." This twofold consideration of baptism is necessary to get its full meaning. On the one hand, the Word makes the water a baptism, that is a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost, and on the other hand, only faith receives the gift of the forgiveness of sins which baptism brings. But baptism itself works faith because of the divine promise attached to the water. It is a washing of regeneration, a washing by means of which God actually brings about the regeneration of man: Titus 3:5; Ephesians 5:26; Acts 22:16; Acts 2:38; I Peter 3:21. Hence infant baptism is pleasing to Christ because all depends on God's command and promise, and God Himself is at work in the sacrament of baptism (LC IV, 47-57). The sacrament is the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation.

But here one must not think only of the moment when one is baptized, as though that were the end of the power of baptism. Indeed not! The power of baptism and its meaning for our daily life are most intimately related. Our baptism means that "the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever." Unfortunately some have missed the enduring value of baptism for our life by understanding Luther's word "signify" (*bedeutet*) as merely meaning that baptism "symbolizes"

something for our daily life. On the basis of Romans 6:1-11, Luther teaches that baptism is not merely an "empty symbol" indicating that the Christian's daily sanctification should take place. On the contrary, baptism "not only announces this new life but also produces, begins, and promotes it" (LC IV, 73f). We are buried with Christ by baptism into death (Rom. 6:3f), and "as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

Our baptism is of value for our whole life. Though one might fall from faith, God's promise made to us in His covenant of baptism stands firm, for all the promises of God are in Christ, "Yea and Amen" (II Cor. 1:20; see II Tim. 2:13; Rom. 11:29). "Therefore baptism remains forever ... The ship does not flounder, since, as we said, it is God's ordinance, and not a work of ours. But it does happen that we slip and fall out of the ship. If anybody does fall out, he should immediately head for the ship and cling to it until he can climb aboard again and sail on it as he had done before" (LC IV, 80-82). The power of baptism is always there to be grasped by faith. Thus the Christian daily draws comfort and strength from his baptism, so that even in the hour of trial when he is deeply distressed, he confidently cries out. "*Ego tamen baptizatus sum!*" – "But I am baptized!" (LC IV, 44).

The Lord's Supper

The three points that Luther set forth with regard to baptism apply also to the Lord's Supper. Luther finds them in the words of institution as recorded in the New Testament (Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19, 20; I Cor. 11: 23-25). He and his fellow reformers constantly reiterate their fundamental conviction that the doctrine of the Lord's Supper is to be derived from the words of institution.

Since not everyone should be admitted to the sacrament ("close communion"), it is necessary that every Christian should be familiar with "what it is, what its benefits are, and who is to receive it" (LC V, If). In the Sacrament of the Altar the elements of bread and wine, the Word of God by which God effects what He declares, and His command by which He instructs us to do what He has commanded in His name and power – these constitute the essence of the sacrament. Following the exact words of our Lord, Luther says that this sacrament "is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and the wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink." Luther holds both to the reality of the body and blood of Christ and the reality of the bread and the wine in the Lord's Supper because "it is bread and wine comprehended with God's Word and connected with it." This must be true because Christ's Word distinguishes it from ordinary bread and wine and causes it to be Christ's body and blood. The old church father Augustine put it accurately in saying, "When the Word is joined to the external element, it becomes a sacrament" (LC V, 9f). When the pastor speaks the words of institution in the name and person of Jesus Christ over the elements, "then in virtue of them they [i.e., the elements] are truly the body and blood of Christ. For as we have it from the lips of Christ, so it is; He cannot lie or deceive" (LC IV, 14-16).

When speaking of the benefits of the Lord's Supper, Luther calls this sacrament "the Gospel." In the Small Catechism he says that the benefit of such eating and drinking is shown in these words: "Given and shed for you, for the remission of sins." It is clear from these words that "forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." There is a wonderful word of promise here related to the eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood. It is the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ who is giving us His body and blood, which He offered up for us on the cross. Luther says that "we go to the sacrament because we receive there a great treasure through and in which we obtain the forgiveness of sins. Why? Because the words are there through which this is imparted. Christ

bids me eat and drink in order that the sacrament may be mine and may be a source of blessing to me as a sure pledge and sign—indeed, as the very gift He has provided for me against my sins, death, and all evils” (LC V, 22).

As a final point of instruction concerning this sacrament, Luther asserts that the gifts of the Lord's Supper must be received in faith: “He that believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins.” Christ directs the promise of the Lord's Supper to His disciples who receive it by faith. Faith is the hand that accepts the treasure; “The treasure is opened and placed at everyone's door, yes, upon everyone's table, but it is also your responsibility to take it and confidently believe that it is just as the words tell you” (LC V, 35). The impenitent, however, should be restrained, but the weak in faith are to be encouraged, for people with misgivings about their unworthiness “must learn that it is the highest wisdom to realize that this sacrament does not depend on our worthiness” (LC V, 61). In this sacrament Christ “offers us all the treasures He brought from heaven for us, to which He most graciously invites us. ... We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also” (LC V, 66f).

III. Enduring Values for 1979

It is a commonplace to assert that at the time of Luther the knowledge of the Gospel was, for several reasons, severely restricted. There were few Bibles and these were pretty much limited to places of learning. What was promulgated from the sacred Scriptures in sermon and prayerbook was so seriously distorted that it was virtually impossible for an average person to get to know the saving truths of God's Word. The Gospel had been turned into law. The people were taught the lives of saints as substitute for the Gospels. The devotional literature centered the practical life of the Christian on how the saints (many of them legendary) achieved perfection by external discipline.

There is a tendency on our part to look with pitying eye on the spiritual conditions that obtained four hundred fifty years ago. But with that we often exhibit a condescending note of superiority and self-satisfaction that conditions in our time are much better. We may contentedly say to ourselves that we are quite fortunate. After all, the Lord raised up Martin Luther at just the right time, because it is true what the Lord said at the time of Hosea: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6).

But conditions are not very different today from the time of Luther, nor, for that matter, from the time of the Old Testament prophets. Solomon observed that “the thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it has been already of old time, which was before us” (Eccl. 1:9, 10). In this modern, mad scramble of searching for new techniques, new methodology, new material to achieve our instructional goals in the church, I would suggest that when we come to a consideration of what to do with Luther's Catechisms in 1979 we remember these words of Solomon. The thesis of this last essay asserts that there are enduring values in Luther's Catechisms, and unless we stay with what is there presented we will be in danger of losing our Reformation heritage.

The inestimable theological value of Luther's Catechisms reveals itself in two towering, white-capped Mount Everests: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE, and THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL.

Luther made the Gospel the central point of his presentation in both Catechisms. The Gospel is the truth that the accomplished redemption in Jesus Christ has set the sinner free from

the wrath and condemnation of the Law. Christ, true God and man in one person, died and rose again, the just for the unjust. God is reconciled to the sinner: "Let this be the summary of this article, that the little word 'Lord' simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, He who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and now keeps us safe there" (LC II, 31). I believe "that He is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all my sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold and silver but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent sufferings and death."

That this redemption may become the possession of the individual, faith is necessary. This is worked by the Holy Spirit who is tied to the word of the Gospel in working faith in the sinner. Through the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins God calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies His church. This gift of faith is also given and strengthened through the visible Word, the sacraments. With this gift of the forgiveness of sins we receive the Holy Spirit who gives us strength to forsake sin and to lead a new life. Thus we take up the struggle against sin in our daily lives, but we do it with a sense of personal gratitude for the great things which God has done for us and for our salvation.

Luther views the work of Christ for our redemption as objective, outside of us, and completed in the past. In no sense does it depend on me, the lost and condemned creature. But when I have been brought to faith in the Gospel of forgiveness, I consider the work of Christ in the framework of a personal expression of my faith, "in order that I might be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness." But my new life of sanctification is so frail that I need the constant support of God, who has begun the good work in me. So, in the Lord's Prayer I constantly pray for forgiveness, strength, and final deliverance. All this God grants by grace, assuring me "that being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... and access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1. 2). Even in the heat of the fiery trial I can assert on the basis of God's own promises, "But nevertheless I am baptized!" And in the Lord's Supper I have these words: "Not preached to wood or stone but to you and me, This is my body given for you. This is my blood poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins" (LC V, 64. 65). This is the pure Gospel which runs through Luther's Catechism from the beginning to the end, and upon which "all our salvation and blessedness are based" (LC II, 33).

But right alongside these expressions of the forgiving God there runs another string of thoughts of the holy and righteous God, who hates sin and demands perfect piety from every man. And everyone of us is personally responsible for his inner and outer life. The will of God is proclaimed in the Decalog, and Luther explains this will in its full severity: "We should fear, love and trust in God above all things." He says further, in the Large Catechism, "These words [i.e., the First Commandment], therefore, ought to be received and esteemed as a serious matter to God because He Himself here declares how important the commandments are to Him and how strictly He will watch over them, fearfully and terribly punishing all who despise and transgress His commandments" (LC 1,322). With Luther there is no mitigation of the demands of God's Law. Rather, "it is the thunderbolt by means of which God with one blow destroys both open sinners and false saints." Where the Law exercises its office alone, "there is only death and hell and man must despair like Saul and Judas" (SC III, 2-7). God has placed the commandments as the boundary between good and evil (LC I, 183). The commandments always retain their nature and value even though we do not keep them (LC V, 5). But since no man can keep them by his own strength, there is need for the saving revelation of the Gospel

(LC II, 3), which is that other word which God has given and which makes a gift to us of His grace and the remission of sins. This we receive through faith, and faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing. It is devoted to the service of God for, "it is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them" (LW 35, 370). Luther thus sharply distinguishes between the Law and the Gospel, recognizing that they are entirely different in their content and in their purpose. The Law destroys all the self-confidence of man, but the Gospel is God's final Word for the terrified sinner.

It is indeed true that we will find ourselves with the inner discord which Paul describes in Romans 7. Our keeping of the Law is partial and intermittent. As we pray the Lord's Prayer, it is again driven home to us that "we sin much every day, and deserve nothing but punishment." The Law constantly tells us *that* to the end of our lives, and this would lead us to despair except that God promises the sinner forgiveness of sins because "He gave us the Gospel, in which there is nothing but forgiveness, before we prayed or even thought of it" (LC III, 88).

But we also need a guide for our daily life that we may know what works are pleasing to God. By faith we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, but He does not tell us through the Gospel what things we are to do which would be in conformity with the will of God for our relationship to our neighbor. Through the knowledge of the Gospel, however, "we come to love and delight in all the commandments of God" (LC II, 69), and so the Law is a norm which infallibly shows us which works God wants done, for "apart from these Ten Commandments no deed, no conduct can be good or pleasing to God, no matter how great or how precious it may be in the eyes of the world" (LC 1,311).

So, for Luther in the Catechisms, we are free from the sin and guilt produced by the Law, "for Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 10:4), and yet, we "delight in the Law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). In short, the believer fears, loves and trusts in God above all things. In this sentence of Luther we have the proper application of the Law and the Gospel.

These two truths, justification by faith alone and the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel—these are the crowning glories which we also in 1979 have in the gift of Luther's Catechisms. Not to recognize this is to give up our Reformation heritage. Here we have the enduring worth of Luther's Catechisms.

To be sure, there are other excellencies in these two works of Luther. The Small Catechism, just as a book of instruction for the young, always receives high marks. Let us briefly call attention to some of these striking characteristics of the Catechism. Its pedagogical values are quite apparent.

Luther did not shape it into a miniature "dogmatics text," as one might construct a doll house similar in every detail to an adult house but on a diminutive scale. He avoids all the technical phraseology of the university, although Luther could and did use that language precisely when the occasion demanded it. As we have noted, he did not even use the term "justification by faith alone," but he successfully presented the truth as it has never been presented since that time.

Secondly, there is not a single polemical word in the entire text, neither against Rome nor against the Sacramentarians and the Enthusiasts. This is all the more remarkable if one remembers that other instructional texts of the time did not escape this flaw, and it is especially remarkable when one remembers that during the preceding twelve years Luther had been engaged in most violent theological debate on all these fronts. He was personally involved in

defending the doctrines of the bound will, justification, baptism and the Lord's Supper against both Roman and Zwinglian and Enthusiastic falsifications.

Thirdly, pedagogically it was a masterstroke to break away from the traditional division of the Apostles' Creed into twelve parts and instead to present the threefold revelation of God for our salvation as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

And fourthly, one should add the fact that the second Wittenberg edition carried illustrations—ten on the Commandments, three on the Creed, and seven on the Lord's Prayer. Later editions added woodcuts that illustrated Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution.

The values of the Large Catechism are similar to those of the Small, although these values have often been overlooked because of the general neglect of the Large Catechism. More recent inferior explanations to Luther's Small Catechism have usurped the place of the Large Catechism in the life and the teaching of the Lutheran Church.

First, one should note the doctrinal importance of the Large Catechism as enriching all instruction and preaching in the church. The theological concepts, discussions, and Biblical proofs are clear, exact, simply expressed and convincing. Here Luther has expounded Christian doctrine with great precision but without the use of technical jargon. The polemical material is minimal but what is there is helpful for the understanding of Christ's pure doctrine. It is a great mine of valuable Biblical exposition.

Secondly, Luther's concrete applications of Biblical theology to the individual Christian's needs is striking. The applications are thoroughly evangelical and they are directed to the everyday garden variety of Christian who is trying to grow in grace and knowledge of his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. By studying the Large Catechism one learns how to apply the Law and the Gospel to himself in whatever life situation he may find himself. When one makes a careful study of the Large Catechism one will be surprised at its modernity.

Thirdly, an examination of the logical arrangement of the material and the language which Luther used can only arouse the greatest admiration for Luther as a teacher. As he moves from one part to another, he summarizes what he has said and makes a smooth transition to the next topic, showing the interrelationship between the ideas. He begins his exposition of the Second Commandment by saying, "As the First Commandment has inwardly instructed the heart and taught faith, so this commandment leads us outward and directs the lip and the tongue into the right relation of God. The first things that issue and emerge from the heart are words" (LC 1,50). By means of these skillful connecting links, Luther has given a unified presentation of God's will directed towards man for his salvation. Luther's language is powerful and concrete. It is couched in what we today would call vivid, informal colloquial speech, laced with proverbial sayings that catch the eye of the common reader. To be sure, the illustrative examples which Luther uses are taken from the daily life of Sixteenth Century Saxony, but it is remarkable how apt they are to the modern mind even after 450 years of cultural change.

In short, a fresh examination of Luther's two Catechisms will lead one to the admiring conviction which the authors of the Formula of Concord expressed nearly fifty years after the publication of the Catechisms: "They are 'the layman's Bible' and contain everything which Holy Scripture discusses at greater length and which a Christian must know for his salvation" (Ep., Rule and Norm, 5).

Over the years there have, of course, been criticisms of Luther's Catechisms. It is a matter of wisdom not only to note them but also to examine them. Wasn't it Job who, to gain a better understanding of his own weaknesses and faults, cried out, "Oh, that mine adversary had written a book" (Job 31:35). "Book" here carries the connotation of a list of charges against one,

just as sometimes some of our citizens, prominent and otherwise, are "booked" at the conclusion of a Grand Jury investigation.

Some of these criticisms can be disposed of quite quickly, as the one that modern man simply cannot use a book written for popular consumption 450 years ago, especially since it was directed toward the unsophisticated, people who were just coming out of the medieval Dark Ages. More specifically, it is said that Luther's works are "too agrarian" in its orientation for modern urban society (for example, see Luther on the First Article and the Fourth Petition). Now it is true that today farmers are a definite minority group but really they are not an endangered species, for we are not yet ready to substitute for bread, milk and steak, *ersatz* formulas concocted in a laboratory. Even the most dedicated city dweller easily learns that historically farming was the most widely practiced vocation and that the farm is still the source of our daily living. We really do not live so differently from previous generations when we come to the essentials.

More serious is the criticism that the Catechisms come between us and the Sacred Scriptures. They foist on us a system that is of human origin with its Five Chief Parts. And what is even more serious, they give us a pattern of doctrine developed from the thought patterns of Martin Luther. Luther's method is all wrong and those who use it are wrong, for they are imparting to children previously formulated authoritarian doctrinal statements which will shape the future beliefs of the youth. Rather, the critics assert, there should be an inductive method of going through all the Biblical material on the part of the student, and then let him formulate in his own words what he thinks the Scriptures say.

This type of thinking has led to breaking up the Catechism into small parts which are then tied in with more elaborate material, some of it coming from the Scriptures and some of it being modern applications of ethics to life situations. The net result of such thinking is that a young child does not memorize the Small Catechism for retention and he really does not begin to see the Catechism as a unit of God's revealed will as Law and Gospel, resources which he can well use in his adult life. This type of thinking has also led to a denigration of Luther's Large Catechism and a rejection of it as an instructional tool.

This calls for serious thought and it ought to provoke some intelligent debate on this 450th anniversary of the Catechisms. Such debate is necessary, and as an aid to such consideration of a fundamentally Lutheran practice one should look at the following essential points.

All Christians are enjoined to teach all things that Christ has commanded (Matt. 28:20). Parents are responsible for teaching their children these truths, and they will be held accountable to God for their actions here (Deut. 6:6-7; 11:18-21; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15; Psalm 78:5). Further, all Christians are obligated to confess Jesus Christ before men (Matt. 10:32f). It is the supreme duty of the Christian (1 Tim. 6:12-16). The purpose of confessing our faith is not only to show what we believe as individuals or groups of individuals but also to communicate the content of our faith to others.

It goes without saying, of course, that one's doctrine must be drawn exclusively from the apostolic-prophetic Word of God (Eph. 2:20) and, to learn God's will towards us, we must diligently search the Scriptures as the Bereans did. That means that one must draw doctrinal implications from Scripture. It is not sufficient to say that one teaches what the Scriptures teach without examining and confessing what they really say. Everyone draws doctrinal implications from the assertions of Scripture. This calls for thinking through and accurately reproducing in our own words what the Bible actually teaches. The doctrine of the clarity of Scripture is involved here. This act of confessing has been going on from the beginning of the New

Testament church. Christ's disciples confessed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ and the Son of God (Matt. 16:16; Rom. 10:9-10). Out of this need for confessing has come the Ecumenical Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, and, yes, the Catechisms of Luther. In these confessions great numbers of Scripture texts have been compressed. But it is the conviction of the Lutheran Christian that these creeds confess precisely what the texts of Scripture declare to be God's revealed will. We must all make this act of confessing. That is the only reason Luther himself could say of his catechism that in it is comprised the entire Scripture. It is worthwhile noting his precise words when he says that these three parts (the Decalog, Creed, Lord's Prayer), "in which everything contained in Scripture is comprehended in short, plain, and simple terms, for the dear fathers or apostles, whoever they were, have thus summed up the doctrine, life, wisdom and learning which constitute the Christian's conversation, conduct and concern" (LC, Pref. 19).

Not to acknowledge the Catechisms as a true summary of Christian doctrine is to refuse to be a Lutheran by profession. Lutherans should boldly and confidently use the Catechisms as true manuals of instruction for both young and old for study and memorization. Of course, one will dig deeper into the Scriptures and compare what the Catechisms say with all that Scripture says. And we must not forget in this connection that the Catechisms also contain a great deal of Bible history, such as the creation of the world, historical facts of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection. More importantly, they also set forth in the clearest terms what these great events mean for us. The pupil, even under the most competent guidance of a knowledgeable pastor, cannot dig out for himself everything that has gone into the Catechisms any more than he can mine out everything confessed in the Apostles' Creed. They provide material for study during his entire life.

On the congregational level as well as the synodical level, there is a crying need today to make an intensive study of the Lutheran Confessions, and the Catechisms in particular, because these confessions are drawn from the "pure and clear fountain of Israel" and they are "dependable symbols," as the ancient church always had (SD, Rule and Norm, I-3). It would be a sad day for our Lutheran church if Luther's Catechisms should be crowded out of our teaching material and methods for newer and more modern instructional tools or methods. It would be a sad day because our churches are faced with the same difficulties which Luther's church faced. Luther's Catechisms are opposed to two different concepts of religion which also pose great dangers for our people today. We might name them as superficial, idealistic pietism and subjective mysticism.

Roman Catholic folk-piety, shaped through the lay devotional books, was imbued with work righteousness and a belief in free will. The pious members of the church did not recognize themselves as paragons of virtue, but they were eager to improve their lives, which they thought they could do by means of their own efforts and with some assistance from God's grace poured into them via the complex Roman sacramental system. Many were good, decent people, fairly well satisfied with their state but not so much that they did not think it would be necessary to avoid some of the more notorious ways of sin and strive for some betterment in their lives. On the whole, many were more or less satisfied with what they had achieved in respectability, and their respectability wasn't all bad.

Luther disowned this type of self-complacency with his exposition of the Decalog and his "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him."

Romanism took the Law very lightly, concentrating chiefly on how to escape certain external vices and how to cultivate some outward virtues. Devotional books were full of items

on how to avoid The Seven Deadly Sins, The Six Sins Against the Holy Ghost, The Four Sins That Cry to Heaven. On the other hand, they were drilled on how to cultivate The Seven Works of Charity and The Seven Gifts of the Blessed. Now, pursuit of these ideals are not wrong in themselves, but they tend towards superficiality and overlook the depth of the depravity of the human heart and the need for true daily repentance and trust in the life-giving Gospel. Luther cut through all that superficial piety with his "Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature."

And then there was that high value placed on self-chosen works of piety, such as entering the monasteries and the convents. Once again Luther restored true piety by his doctrine of the Christian vocation of serving God and man by the keeping of the Commandments in whatever calling one may be. The emphasis was on the fact that "we should fear and love God that we do not hurt nor harm our neighbor, but help and befriend him in every bodily need."

Now, it is not difficult to find parallels in our daily life as lived in 1979. There is the self-sufficient man and woman who are comfortably at ease in our middle-class affluence. They can mouth the platitudes of Dale Carnegie. They haven't reached the top of the social ladder as yet, but they're climbing by their own reason, strength, and clever positioning. There are those among us who render shock and horror over some external breaking of the socially accepted game rules, but don't recognize that lack of love for the neighbor in need is where the shoe pinches us. And then there are the usual self-chosen works of how best to achieve a satisfying life. It is quite remarkable how so many of these vocational ideals that the young pick for themselves are the ones glamorized by the media, while not too many are satisfied to be ordinary citizens who must carry on the hum-drum duties of our daily life or our whole civilization becomes unglued.

The sobering results of the researches of Dr. Merton Strommen and his associates in *Profiles of Church Youth* and *A Study of Generations*, should give us more than food for discussion. They ought to arouse some real concern among us. They found many Lutherans who have no understanding of the Lutheran doctrine of justification and who "show a theology that is more Arminian than Lutheran" (*Profiles*, p. 243). On the basis of their most recent research, they drew the conclusion that "about two out of five Lutherans believe in salvation by works" (*A Study*, p. 289). There is a tendency among some of us towards self-complacency so that we slough off these findings by saying they refer to those churches which don't indoctrinate as systematically as we do. We should remember, however, that aside though it may sometimes be, there can be truth to the phrase, "the arrogance of orthodoxy."

Or take the matter of subjective mysticism. The medieval church had been plagued for many years by it, but mysticism broke out in a real epidemic during the time of Luther with the activities of the Heavenly Prophets or the Enthusiasts, as they were called. In general, these had a pipeline to direct revelations from God and they were not at all bashful in proclaiming them to the common people. In mystical piety the life of feeling is dominant. Mysticism values piety according to its warmth and not according to its subject matter. For the mystic the object of faith is more or less incidental, and it can often be dismissed with a brief slogan, such as "Try Jesus."

Over against these excesses, Luther emphasized the objective character of God's revelation to man in the Word of God, as both Law and Gospel. He presents the objective side of the person of Jesus Christ, who is true God and true man; that He, 1900 years ago, actually redeemed the world: this is an accomplished fact. But above all Luther brought out the objective character of the Gospel or the Means of Grace. The Means of Grace do not merely tell the story of salvation, but they actually give this divine gift of salvation and create faith in the individual:

"The Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts. . . . Baptism works the forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare."

All this is Scriptural and it is all in Luther's Catechism. How sorely our people need these truths in the day of the charismatic movement with its special baptism of the Holy Ghost and all the other manifestations of subjective mysticism, We need regular study of these truths in all our congregations. Luther was so right when in the Preface to his Large Catechism he said to the pastors, "Thus we have in all, five parts covering the whole of the Christian doctrine, which we should constantly teach and require young people to recite word for word. Do not assume that they will learn and retain this teaching from sermons alone" (LC, Pref. 24).

Possibly some of us may have misunderstood a word of Luther often quoted with respect to the Catechisms. When his friends wanted to publish a complete edition of his works, he wrote that he was "quite cool and not at all eager about it," adding, "for I acknowledge none of them to be really a book of mine, except perhaps the one on *The Bound Will* and the *Catechism* (LW 50,171f). We tend to remember only that Luther mentioned the Catechism as something for which he might like to be remembered and which would hopefully be found among succeeding generations. From that we may also have inferred that Luther was interested only in what he wrote that was so simple and direct that nearly every young person can understand it without much difficulty. And then we may even draw a further inference, that we ought to simplify these practical writings of Luther even more, according to our sometimes superficial taste. This has resulted in a sort of "confessional reductionism" that leaves a very thin foundation for the average Christian to stand firm in his faith. As an antidote for that kind of thinking, let us look at the other part of Luther's statement. He mentions probably the most profound theological book he ever wrote, *The Bondage of the Will*. Luther could not be satisfied with a goal of superficial theological study and understanding. One cannot escape solid, theological work in the promulgation of truth and the rejection of error, just as Luther could not escape that but had to write his great work against Erasmus. Luther did not want posterity to overlook his practical work in the Catechisms, but at the same time he wanted posterity to recognize that his whole theology is to be sharply differentiated from the easy-going secular humanism that he so savagely attacked in his book against Erasmus. We must gratefully cling to the entire heritage of Luther's theology and not minimize any of it or reduce it to some kind of conventional idealistic pietism or murky subjective mysticism.

Fifty years ago (June 6-12, 1929), our Synod celebrated at its convention in Mayville, North Dakota, the Quadricentennial of Luther's Small Catechism (1529-1929). The convention took note of it in the president's address, and there was a longer paper on sanctification and four shorter papers on Luther's Small Catechism. All of these are well worth re-reading. Then the convention solemnly resolved to observe the 400th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 1930.

But that is not all that was done. A remarkable eulogy was written and distributed throughout the synod by convention resolution. It was penned by the sainted Pastor H. M. Tjernagel, but he did not put his name to it since he modestly felt that since others had reviewed it, it was not his work alone. But it is evident, if one knows his style of writing, that it is chiefly from his pen. As a conclusion to these essays, I would ask President Wilhelm Petersen of our Synod to read this eulogy fifty years after its composition and lead the assembly in the prayer written for the occasion.

**Quadricentennial of Luther's Small Catechism
1529 - 1929
Norwegian Synod Convention, Mayville, North Dakota
June 6-12, 1929**

A EULOGY

Luther's Catechism is unlimited in scope, extending from the beginning to the end of time, from everlasting to everlasting. Its purpose is to serve as a guiding path from the cradle to the grave and, as a bridge, to span the abyss between time and a blessed eternity. In the soul's pursuit of happiness, temporal and eternal, it gives definite and trustworthy guidance.

It is unsearchable as the deep sea, yet as sparkling clear as the North Star. What human mind can fathom its depths or fully understand the message it bears of the love of a crucified Savior? Yet it clearly and unerringly guides the storm-tossed mariner to safety in the arms of just such a Savior.

The profoundest scholar finds it an inexhaustible store of information, yet it is a child's textbook. Have the sages and philosophers pondered any important question that it does not answer so that a child may know the truth?

The bishop and the layman, the king and the subject, the parent and the child, the master and the servant, all alike may profitably use it as a textbook. All can learn from it, none can exhaust it. Not even the most learned theologian will comprehend it fully until, led by its teachings, he has crossed the bridge into the New Jerusalem. There he will behold, in sublime perfection, the beautiful conceptions which his childhood faith gained through his mother's loving instruction in the Catechism.

It is unchangeable, yet fits all ages, races, and conditions. It is not too modern for the most backward, nor too ancient for the most cultured and enlightened. No additions are made necessary by the lapse of time; no part is in danger of becoming obsolete. Revisions and substitutes have appeared only to disappear.

Luther's Catechism is all this because it is the highly concentrated, the most perfect essence of the Book of Books, God's own revealed and written Word. The author was big enough, and yet little enough, not to intrude one personal idea. In our dear, precious Catechism is not one earth-born thought.

This explains its longevity; this assures that it will live and live on and on after the end of time, and resound in song and praise "before the throne and before the Lamb" to all eternity.

The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church in Convention assembled on this the Four Hundredth Anniversary of Luther's Catechism, solemnly rededicates itself to the diligent use, in churches, homes, and schools, of that "string of Bible pearls," the Catechism, and urges the individual member of our Synod to do likewise as he prays:

Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for giving Luther's Catechism into the hands of my father and mother. Guided by them from page to page, I learned to know sin and its consequences; the majesty and power of Thee, my Creator; the infinite love of Thee, my Redeemer; the trustworthy guidance of Thee, my Sanctifier. From my mother's lips I learned the Catechism prayers, and that I was invited to carry everything to Thee in prayer. The same little book imparted to me my first knowledge of Thy wondrous gifts of love, sonship, and forgiveness of sins, bestowed through Thy Holy Sacraments.

For my children and children's children I beg of Thee the greatest boon I know, that they may live and die in the truths of the Catechism.

For my church I pray: Save it from pastors and teachers unfaithful to the doctrines of the Catechism. and multiply the homes and schools where it is a textbook in daily use, for Christian instruction.

For my country I ask Thee, in whose hands "the king's heart is as the rivers of water:" Let the divine light of Luther's Catechism illumine the family hearths of high and low.

Heavenly Father, I beseech Thee: Let Thy Word continue to guide and bless my life; preserve me in its precious truths and let me die a Catechism Christian. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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A good way to get into Luther as one studies his Catechisms is to read some of his other catechetical writings. They are quite easy reading, very practical and devotional. The following are available in English. Unless otherwise noted, they will be found in the modern 55-volume edition of Luther's Works (LW) published by CPR and Fortress Press.

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"Treatise on Good Works" (1520), LW 44,21-114.

"Personal Prayer Book" (1522), LW 43, 11-45.

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