

SPRING 2018 | VOLUME 44 | NUMBER 2

concordia journal

LUTHER'S
SMALL
CATECHISM
with Explanation

LUTHER'S
SMALL
CATECHISM

A PARTNER ISSUE WITH



Concordia
Publishing House

On the cover: editions of Luther's Small Catechism as published by Concordia Publishing House from (left to right) 1870, 1943, 1991, and the newest edition on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, 2017. Photo credit: Courtney Koll

Issued by the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, the *Concordia Journal* is the successor of *Lehre und Wehre* (1855-1929), begun by C. F. W. Walther, a founder of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. *Lehre und Wehre* was absorbed by the *Concordia Theological Monthly* (1930-1974) which was published by the faculty of Concordia Seminary as the official theological periodical of the Synod.

Concordia Journal is abstracted in *Internationale Zeitschriftenschau für Bibelwissenschaft und Grenzgebiete*, *New Testament Abstracts*, *Old Testament Abstracts*, and *Religious and Theological Abstracts*. It is indexed in ATLA Religion Database/ATLAS and Christian Periodicals Index. Article and issue photocopies in 16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm, and 105mm microfiche are available from National Archive Publishing (www.napubco.com).

Books submitted for review should be sent to the editor. Manuscripts submitted for publication should conform to a Chicago Manual of Style. Email submission (cj@csl.edu) as a Word attachment is preferred. Editorial decisions about submissions include peer review. Manuscripts that display Greek or Hebrew text should utilize BibleWorks fonts (www.bibleworks.com/fonts.html). Copyright © 1994-2009 BibleWorks, LLC. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

The *Concordia Journal* (ISSN 0145-7233) is published quarterly (Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall). The annual subscription rate is \$25 (individuals) and \$75 (institutions) payable to Concordia Seminary, 801 Seminary Place, St. Louis, MO 63105. New subscriptions and renewals also available at <http://store.csl.edu>. Periodicals postage paid at St. Louis, MO and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Concordia Journal*, Concordia Seminary, 801 Seminary Place, St. Louis, MO 63105-3199.

© Copyright by Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, 2018
www.csl.edu | www.concordiatheology.org

concordia Journal

A Concordia Seminary St. Louis Publication



concordia journal

Volume 44 Number 2

Editorials	Editor's Note	7
	"Truly the Worship of God" <i>Dale A. Meyer</i>	10
Articles	Knowing How to Live and Die: Luther and the Teaching of the Christian Faith <i>Gerhard Bode</i>	15
	LCMS Catechism 6.0 <i>Larry Vogel</i>	34
	Why Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation is a Tool Uniquely Suited for Parish Education <i>Pete Jurchen</i>	44
	An Introduction to <i>Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology</i> <i>Samuel Nafzger</i>	56
	A Review of <i>Confessing the Gospel in the Context of Contemporary Theology</i> <i>Mark Mattes</i>	78
Homiletical Helps	The Question-Answered Design <i>David R. Schmitt</i>	95
Reviews		103

Publisher

Dale A. Meyer
President

Executive Editor

Charles Arand
*Dean of Theological
Research and Publication*

Editor

Travis J. Scholl
*Managing Editor of
Theological Publications*

Assistant Editor

Melanie Appelbaum

Assistant

Andrew Jones

Creative Director

Jayna Rollings

Graphic Designer

Michelle Poneleit

Faculty

David Adams
Charles Arand
Andrew Bartelt
Joel Biermann
Gerhard Bode
Kent Burreson
Timothy Dost
Thomas Egger
Joel Elowsky
Jeffrey Gibbs
Benjamin Haupt
Erik Herrmann
David Lewis
Richard Marrs
David Maxwell
Dale Meyer
Peter Nafzger

Glenn Nielsen
Joel Okamoto
Jeffrey Oswald
David Peter
Paul Raabe
Victor Raj
Paul Robinson
Mark Rockenbach
Timothy Saleska
Leopoldo Sánchez M.
David Schmitt
Bruce Schuchard
William Schumacher
Mark Seifrid
Kou Seying
W. Mart Thompson
James Voelz

Exclusive subscriber digital access via ATLAS to
Concordia Journal & Concordia Theology Monthly
<http://search.ebscohost.com>
User ID: **ATL0102231ps**
Password: **subscriber**
Technical problems?
Email: support@atla.com

All correspondence should be sent to:
CONCORDIA JOURNAL
801 Seminary Place
St. Louis, Missouri 63105
314-505-7117
cj@csleu

Editorials

Editor's Note

The year 2017 marked the 500th anniversary of Luther's posting of the Ninety-five Theses, which launched one of the most significant religious and social movements in Western history, namely, the Protestant Reformation. The year 2017 also marked another significant event for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. During this year, two very important books rolled off the presses of Concordia Publishing House, a new dogmatics text, *Confessing the Gospel*, and a new edition of our church's explanation to Luther's Catechism.

Lutheran Dogmatics and the Formation of Pastors in the Pulpit

We do not think that it is too much of an exaggeration to say that few Christian traditions have as strong or rich a dogmatic tradition as does our Lutheran tradition. Over the past few decades, no publishing house has done more to make these available to the English reading public than our own Concordia Publishing House (CPH).

Philip Melancthon set the direction for the Lutheran tradition by organizing biblical teaching around topics (*loci*) with his *Loci Communes* of 1521, revised in 1535, 1543, and 1555.¹ Martin Chemnitz (the "second Martin") carried on this *loci* tradition with his magisterial *Loci Theologici* of 1591² in addition to his *Examination of the Council of Trent*. Robert Kolb has provided a helpful analysis to this *loci* method that Melancthon set in motion and that would carry on to the present day.³

This Lutheran dogmatic tradition was continued by seventeenth-century dogmaticians. Doubtless, the most important of them was John Gerhard who wrote his *Loci Theologici* from 1610–1625. This work is being made available for the first time in English by CPH. Other notable dogmaticians include Abraham Calov and John Quenstedt. The best introduction and analysis of these dogmatics is found in Robert Preus's two-volume work, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*.⁴ We should note that Preus was the founder of yet another important Lutheran dogmatics project in recent years. The *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics* series, which continues to add new volumes to the existing seven in the series, is published by the Luther Academy.

We should also note that this dogmatic tradition has reached beyond its Germanic and North American roots. Through the editorial leadership of Hector Hoppe at CPH, the *Biblioteca teológica Concordia* has published seven of an intended ten volumes of Lutheran dogmatics original to the Spanish language, written by native Spanish-speaking theologians.

Given this rich tradition, it is not surprising that C. F. W. Walther had hoped to write a dogmatics text for the training of pastors within the newly formed Missouri Synod. However, Walther was never able to do so because of the eruption of the Election

Controversy.⁵ What Walther did produce was a revision of Johann Baier's *Compendium Theologiae Positivae* in 1899 that served as a dogmatics text for seminary students.⁶

There is little doubt, however, that the most influential dogmatics text within the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* published over the course of the 1920s. This text has informed and shaped the teaching of Missouri-Synod pastors for nearly 100 years. It continues as the port of entry not to the history of the Lutheran dogmatic tradition, but for standard Lutheran distinctions and vocabulary, comparable to theology as *Gray's Anatomy* is to medicine. Unlike *Gray's Anatomy*, now in its forty-first edition, Pieper's work had never been formally and extensively supplemented until now.

In this joint issue of the *Concordia Journal* by Concordia Seminary and Concordia Publishing House, we consider the latest work to appear in the line of this tradition, namely, *Confessing the Gospel*. Samuel Nafzger, longtime executive director of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) provides an overview of its development over the past three decades along with the vision of its plan while Mark Mattes, one of the finest Lutheran systematians in America today and one who knows the Missouri Synod well, provides his take on this new work.

Luther's Catechism and the Formation of People in the Pew

If few Christians traditions can match the rich dogmatic history of Lutheranism, that much and more can be said when it comes to our catechetical tradition. Whereas Lutheran dogmatics has shaped the theological thought of pastors for generations, no text outside the Bible has played a more significant role for shaping the life and piety of people in our pews than Martin Luther's Small Catechism.

Already in the sixteenth century, pastors and others began expanding Luther's catechisms and adding explanations. Johann Conrad Dietrich prepared the one that would become most influential upon our Missouri Synod tradition. In 1613, Dietrich prepared the *Institutiones Catecheticae* for schools and a smaller *Epitome Catecheticae* in 1615, for use by pastors within their congregations.⁷

When the Missouri Synod was founded, pastors used a variety of catechisms, often the ones they had brought from Germany.⁸ By 1857, there were increased calls for the synod to develop an approved catechism for use by pastors in congregations and schools. For this catechism, C. F. W. Walther relied heavily upon the Dietrich catechism but supplemented it with the Dresden Cross Catechism (1666). Walther's edition was first published in German (1858) and later translated into English (1902).

Over the next few decades, that text underwent a number of revisions to address pedagogical concerns as well as contemporary doctrinal issues. The first revision took place in the late nineteenth century by Heinrich Schwan (1893)⁹ and was published in German (1896) and English (1912) under the title, *A Short Exposition of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism*.¹⁰ Several decades later several proposals for revising the synod's text were considered that resulted in what became known as the 1943 catechism,

Martin Luther's Small Catechism. This was further updated in both its translation and explanation in the 1992 text, *Martin Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*.

That brings us to the latest revision, the 2017 catechism. In this issue of the *Concordia Journal*, Larry Vogel, associate executive director of the CTCR provides background on the development of this revision along with its key features. Gerry Bode provides a larger context on the history of our catechisms with a focus on Johann Conrad Dietrich's catechism. Finally, Peter Jurchen of CPH provides suggestions and ideas for using this as a teaching tool within schools and congregations.

Historically, these two texts, one a systematic theology and the other a catechism, have been two of the most significant texts for shaping the public teaching (*publica doctrina*) of our synod and guiding the life of both its pastors and people. May that continue to be the case in the years ahead!

Charles P. Arand
Dean of Theological Research and Publication

Paul T. McCain
Publisher, Concordia Publishing House

Endnotes

- 1 *Commonplaces: Loci Communes 1521*, trans. Christian Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014); *Loci Communes 1543*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992); *The Chief Theological Topics: Loci Praecipui Theologici 1559*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011).
- 2 Translated by J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989).
- 3 See Robert Kolb, "The Ordering of the *Loci Communes Theologici*: The Structuring of the Melancthonian Dogmatic Tradition," *Concordia Journal* 23 (1997): 317–337.
- 4 St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970.
- 5 For a brief and to the point summary of the election controversy, see William Schmelder, "The Predestinarian Controversy: Review and Reflection," *Concordia Journal* 1, no. 1 (January 1975): 21–33.
- 6 *Compendium theologiae positivae: adjectis notis amplioribus, quibus doctrina orthodoxa ad [paideian (romanized)] academicam explicatur atque ex Scriptura S. eique innixis rationibus theologicis confirmatur, denuo edendum curavit Carol. Ferd. Guil. Walther.* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1899).
- 7 See Gerhard H. Bode, "Conrad Dietrich (1575–1639): Teaching the Christian Faith and Life" in *Lives and Writings of the Great Fathers of the Lutheran Church*, ed. Timothy Schmeling (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016). See also Gerhard H. Bode, "Conrad Dieterich (1575–1639) and the Instruction of Luther's Small Catechism" (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, 2005).
- 8 Richard George Maassel provides a nice overview of the catechisms in use in "A History of the Early Catechisms of the Missouri Synod" (STM thesis, Concordia Seminary, 1957).
- 9 This proposal was a much briefer and thoroughgoing proposal. It was published *Schulblatt* for reactions. Many felt that it was too brief with the result that the synod opted to revise the Walther-Dietrich catechism that then became known as the "Schwan" catechism.
- 10 An entire issue of *Concordia Theological Monthly* was devoted to three different proposals for a revision. See *Concordia Theological Monthly*, VIII (February 1937).

“Truly the Worship of God”

I invite you to focus your attention on the first words that Peter spoke to Cornelius and his household. “*So Peter opened his mouth and said, ‘Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.’*” “Truly I understand,” Peter said. How did he come to understand that God shows no partiality? No partiality to the people of Concordia Seminary? God shows no partiality to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod? How did Peter come to understand that God shows no partiality to Anglos, shows no partiality to Hispanics or to Asians or to Africans or to African-Americans? How did Peter come to understand that God shows no partiality to Peter himself or to me or to you? *Truly I understand.* It’s a present tense, literally “now I grasp it.” Now I grasp “*that God shows no partiality, but in every nation (every people group) anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.*”

The answer is that Peter got out of his personal comfort zone, got out of his comfortable synagogue cocoon and got to know someone who was different. That wasn’t easy for Peter. He was a Galilean Jew. It was as a Jew that Peter followed Jesus. True, Jesus did interact with Gentiles. Jesus did show that he had come for Gentiles, but most of the time Jesus ministered among the Jews. So, for whatever reason, Peter didn’t get the Gentile mission into his head . . . until Acts chapter 10. You can read about the vision of animals, a vision that perplexed Peter. *I should eat food that is unclean?* And you can read about the messengers who asked Peter to come to the Gentile Cornelius. *I should go into the home of a Gentile?* Now the theory of the Great Commission got personal for Peter. Peter obeyed, got out of his personal comfort zone, got out of his comfortable synagogue cocoon and got to know people who were different. That gave Peter the opportunity to tell Gentiles about Jesus.

So also for us. As we get out of our personal comfort zones, our comfy churchy cocoons and get to know people different than we are, we put ourselves in positions to grow in faith and grow our witness to Jesus. Let me make a point clearly. I am not talking about us from our different ethnicities getting to know one another. That’s fine, of course. Remember, we together already share faith in the Lord Jesus. I am talking about us who know the Lord Jesus getting to know people who don’t know

Editor’s note

This sermon, based on Acts 10:34–48, was originally preached on May 2, 2018 at Concordia Seminary’s Multiethnic Symposium.

the salvation Jesus brings. That's what Peter did with Cornelius, a believer spent time with someone who didn't yet know Jesus. Let me give a rationale for this, hopefully a divine rationale. Where does the worship of God take place? Most of us would probably say in a church, in the divine service, in those appointed times when the Spirit uses Word and Sacrament to nurture our saving faith in Jesus. That is true but it is too restricted an understanding of worship. It suggests that the first three commandments, our duties toward God, make the rest of the commandments less important. Phillip Melancthon, Martin Luther's right-hand man wrote, "We should learn that the works of the Second Table are truly the worship of God, that is, when our works are guided by the fear of God and by faith" (Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, 716). That is, when we followers of Jesus give attention to the bodily needs of people who don't yet know Jesus, the fifth commandment. . . . When we followers of Jesus give attention to the family life or broken family lives of others, the sixth commandment. . . . When we give attention to the economic needs of others, the seventh commandment. . . . When we give attention to the reputations of other people, the eighth commandment. . . . And when we do so because we fear and love our God and Savior above all things, then we are truly worshipping God. Again, "We should learn that the works of the Second Table are truly the worship of God, that is, when our works are guided by the fear of God and by faith." It is too small a thing to compartmentalize the worship of God only to the First Table of the Law or to the Sunday sanctuary. After all, Jesus does tell us to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength," and then adds "Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these" (Mk 12:30–31).

Does this in some way diminish the gifts God gives us in the divine service? Does this somehow tilt us toward what was called a "social gospel" that is devoid of justification by grace through faith? Absolutely not, so long as we do the good works of the Second Table acutely aware that God is an impartial judge to whom each of us must look in fear and reverence as our only Savior. In doing the works of the Second Table, we gain an incentive for the First Table. When we believers concern ourselves with the bodily, familial, economic, and reputational needs of people who don't yet know Jesus, we will see the devastation of sin in our world. We will see the hurt, the hopelessness, the despair that comes without faith in the grace of God freely given in Jesus. We will face the hard truth that our programs, our policies, and our statements are not sufficient to the ravages of sin. Only Jesus is. Thus our involvement with people in the world will drive us even more to the gifts God gives us through Word and Sacrament. Peter ended his presentation to Cornelius by saying that "everyone who believes in him (Jesus) receives forgiveness of sins through his name." You and I will grow in our own faith in Jesus and his forgiveness as we get out of our personal comfort zones and out of our comfy church cocoons and go to others. As Peter wrote

later, “Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Pt 3:15–16). Amen.

Dale A. Meyer
President

Articles

Knowing How to Live and Die Luther and the Teaching of the Christian Faith

Gerhard Bode



Gerhard Bode is dean of advanced studies and associate professor of historical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Bode has been a faculty member since 2005. He also serves as Seminary archivist. His areas of interest and expertise include the Reformation and the history of Lutheranism.

As we consider the significance of Martin Luther's role in the Reformation it's helpful to focus on his work as teacher of the evangelical message. It may be trite to say it, but it is still true: what is more important than the person of Martin Luther is the message he proclaimed. Perhaps the message is

a good place to start if only because the message is what changed everything.

Preaching a catechetical sermon in September 1528, just a few months before he issued his Small Catechism, Luther called the core catechetical instruction “a *kinder predigt* [a childrens’ sermon] or the *leyen biblia* [a Bible for the laity].”¹ Two years after the catechism was published, he commented on the impact of the catechism and of the evangelical teaching and preaching:

But now—praise be to God—it has come to pass that man and woman, young and old, know the catechism; they know how to believe, to live, to pray, to suffer, and to die. Consciences are well instructed about how to be Christians and how to recognize Christ. We preach the truth about faith and good works. In brief, the aforementioned items have again come to light, and pulpit, altar,

Editor's note

Some of the material in this essay has been adapted from the author's dissertation: “Conrad Dieterich (1575–1639) and the Instruction of Luther's Small Catechism,” Concordia Seminary, 2005. An earlier version of this essay was presented to the LCMS's New Jersey District Reformation Seminar on October 24, 2015, in Princeton, New Jersey.

The catechism forms and informs the daily life of Christians in the teachings of the Scriptures and thus is a book of prayer and comfort.

and baptismal font have been restored to their proper place, so that—thank God—the form of a Christian church can again be recognized.²

How could a simple *Kinderpredigt* have such consequences in a mere two

years? How could Luther's German people be so transformed by it? As Luther would make clear, all this was accomplished through the gospel.³ But how could a little book containing a few dozen paragraphs teach people how "to believe, to live, to pray, to suffer and to die," to know how to be a Christian, to be a Christian church? After all, what is the catechism about? For Luther, the answer is clear: it is about the gospel. The catechism forms and informs the daily life of Christians in the teachings of the Scriptures and thus is a book of prayer and comfort. The catechism explains what every Christian needs to know about God and human beings.⁴ It was but one instrument Luther used to help people—children and adults—understand the new evangelical message. In this way, the catechism became a vehicle for the Reformation. More than that, it was Luther's way of teaching people how to live in Christ and die in Christ, in short, how to be Christians.

Luther is known as the great reformer, theologian, biblical scholar, and preacher, but he was also, throughout his career, an educational reformer.⁵ His call for the education of all people resulted, in part, from his emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. Bringing the Bible into German—into the language of the people—was an early step in this educational project. Translation was key and Luther's catechisms played a central role in the Reformation project of translating the evangelical message into the culture of the time.

The purpose of this article is twofold: first, to describe what Luther intended with his catechisms, asking how they reflect his evangelical concern and purposes for the Reformation, and second, to explore briefly the implications of these questions for the church's life today.

Luther's Intention for His Catechisms

Luther understood that catechetical instruction is a teleological activity. It is directed to a particular goal and purpose, one that is divinely appointed. In Luther's context, this was to educate the German people of his day for faith in Christ and to train them for life in him. Yet Luther recognized that the believer's faith relationship with God is ongoing, nourished by the receiving of God's gifts. There was no end (*telos*) in the sense of ever being finished with this project. Learning continues throughout the Christian life. Thus, in

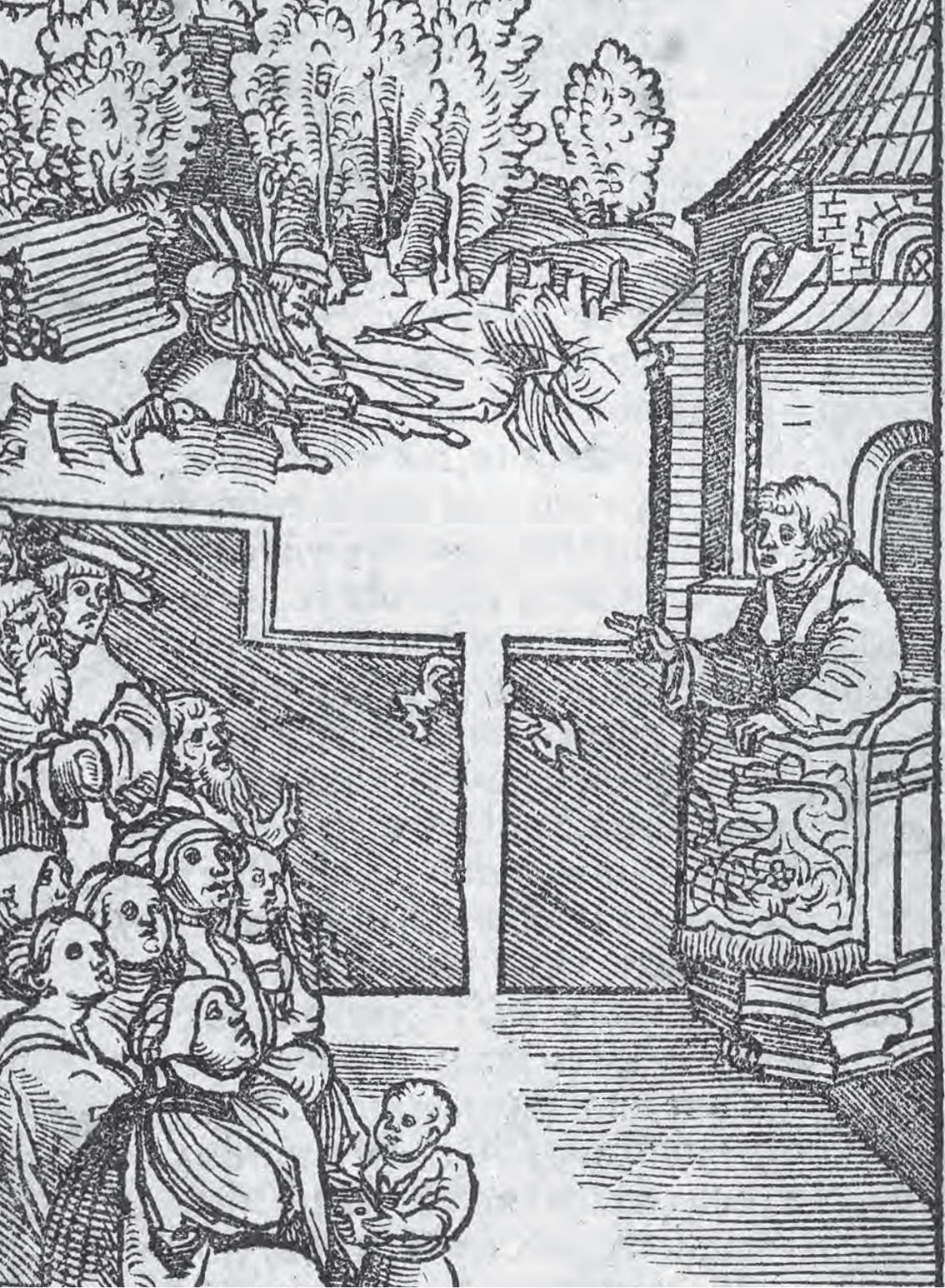
a broad way, Luther intended his catechisms as guidebooks for Christians. Of course, he had specific circumstances and audiences to which he addressed his catechisms.

Luther's chief reason for writing his catechisms was to educate pastors and lay people on the basics of the Christian teachings and life.⁶ Attending to an urgent need for such instruction discovered during the Visitations of Electoral Saxony and Meissen in 1528–1529, Luther provided pastors and preachers with materials useful for the task.⁷ His Small Catechism was presented in dialogue form and intended for lay adults and children.⁸ The Large Catechism, homiletical in nature, offered a more extensive explanation of the material for pastors and preachers.⁹ In both catechisms, Luther incorporated the basic teachings of the Bible and provided instruction in them.¹⁰ His purpose was clear: all people, young and old, should learn what the catechism teaches, “for in these three parts [Decalogue, Creed, and Lord’s Prayer] everything contained in the Scriptures is comprehended in short, plain, and simple terms.”¹¹ The chief parts of the catechism comprise a “theological-pedagogical key to the Holy Scriptures” and thereby a key to the believer’s life in the Christian church.¹² Luther advised in his preface to the Large Catechism that once the catechism had been learned, people should be taught psalms or hymns based on the material “to supplement and confirm their knowledge,” adding, “thus young people will be led into the Scriptures and make progress every day.”¹³ Luther conceived the catechism, then, as a summary not only of the Bible, but also of “the teaching, life, wisdom, and learning that constitute the Christian’s conversion, conduct, and concern.”¹⁴

The catechism was to bring people the central teachings of the faith as well as instruct them in how to put this faith into practice.

The biblical teaching comprised in the catechisms defines what it means to be a Christian.¹⁵ It outlines the core components of Christian doctrine and brings them into relation with the faith and life of a believer.¹⁶ Luther understood that catechetical instruction is interrelated with baptism: through these together the church carries out Christ’s mandate to make disciples, “baptizing and teaching” (Mt 28:19–20). Baptism and catechetical instruction work in tandem to bring a person to a new standing of faith and life in Christ. As Charles Arand has observed: “If baptism carries us into the church by transferring us from the kingdom of Satan into Christ’s kingdom, catechesis imparts the mind of Christ so that we put to death the old ways of thinking and bring to life new patterns of thought.”¹⁷ Knowledge of the catechism is a mark of a Christian. In Luther’s view, the catechism “contains what every Christian should know. Anyone who does not know it should not be numbered among Christians nor admitted to any sacrament, just as artisans who do not know the rules and practices of their craft are rejected and considered incompetent.”¹⁸

*Knowledge of the catechism
is a mark of a Christian.*



Woodcut from the 1531 Wittenberg edition of Luther's Large Catechism
(Credit: Bridwell Library, Southern Methodist University)

Learning the catechism is also learning confession of the Christian faith. Drawn from Scripture and the confessions of the early church, the catechism itself became an exposition of the teachings of Scripture and a confessional primer for the Christian. Although Luther's catechisms were later included among the confessional writings of the Lutheran church, Luther himself did not set out to write them as confessions for a new church.¹⁹ They were teaching resources. However, Luther realized that teaching the faith and confessing it are very nearly the same thing. Both interpret and apply the Scriptures to contemporary life.²⁰ Luther understood confessing the faith to be both what is confessed and the activity of confessing.²¹ The catechism, as a guide to confessing, also makes it possible, at least on a fundamental level, for people to determine when a preacher or teacher is expounding God's word correctly. Instruction in the catechism provides the ability to draw at least a broad line between true and false teaching, and to know what doctrines Lutherans confess and what they condemn.²²

Luther's catechism sought to affirm and express the content of the catholic church's confession of faith. It underscores God's activity in the world and gets at key questions: Who is God? Who are human beings before him? In other words, what kind of God do we have and how does he deal with us? The catechism communicates the word about God in simple, clear language and, in turn, gives its learners the language of faith. Thus, the catechism is a confession of faith, but it is also a statement of intent to follow the Christian life. The language of the catechism speaks to the identity of the believer as one who follows Christ and lives in him. The appending of elements for personal and family devotion, as well as the Table of Christian Callings, made the Small Catechism a tool for cultivating the practice of discipleship in daily life based on the law and gospel given in the first two chief parts.

Luther designed the Small Catechism as a guidebook for pastors, parents, and teachers, from whom children would receive oral instruction. He cast the material in fixed forms of expression and in simple language to facilitate memorization and comprehension. Still, conveying the content was the main thing. People should learn the text of the catechism thoroughly, appropriating it in a deliberate and personal way. This would prepare them for a more in-depth study of the catechism and serve as an introduction to the reading of the Bible.²³

Luther understood the nature of the task of catechesis as well as the difficulty of teaching the catechism well. It requires communicating in a way that affects the lives of readers and hearers with the gospel. In his "Lectures on Zechariah" (1527), Luther adds:

One ought . . . to regard those teachers as the best and the paragons of their profession who present the catechism well—that is, who teach properly the Our Father, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed. But such teachers are rare birds. For there is neither great glory nor outward show in their kind of teaching; but there is in it

great good and also the best of sermons, because in this teaching there is comprehended, in brief, all Scripture.²⁴

The Catechism in the Hands of Pastors

By addressing the Small Catechism to “Ordinary Pastors and Preachers” Luther assigned the parish clergy the task of mastering the catechism and then teaching and preaching it in the local congregations. Luther also encouraged clergy to employ the catechism as a devotional and prayer book, and to drill themselves in it daily.²⁵ Although he intended his catechisms first for pastors and preachers, they were designed and undertaken ultimately “for the instruction of children and the uneducated.”²⁶ In his preface to the Small Catechism, Luther charged the pastors “to take up your office boldly, to have pity on your people who are entrusted to you, and help us bring the catechism to the people, especially to the young.”²⁷ Young or old, there were those who could not read.²⁸ Pastors were to speak the text of the catechism word for word, even as part of the sermon from the pulpit, so that their hearers could repeat it back and learn it by heart.²⁹ Luther warns, however, that “it is not enough for them simply to learn and repeat these parts verbatim,” but “the young people should also attend sermons, especially during the times when preaching on the catechism is prescribed, so that they may hear it explained and may learn the meaning of every part.”³⁰

Luther gave preaching a primary role in the presentation of the catechism to the laity. He intended his catechisms as aids for preaching,³¹ so young people “will also be able to repeat what they have heard and give a good, correct answer when they are questioned, so that the preaching will not be without benefit and fruit.”³² Luther adds, in his explanation to the commandments in the Large Catechism, “The reason we take such care to preach on the catechism frequently, is to impress it upon our young people, not in a lofty and learned manner but briefly and very simply, so that it may penetrate deeply into their minds and remain fixed in their memories.”³³

In his *German Mass and Order of Service* (1526), Luther makes the case that catechetical instruction is crucial in the life of the congregation, especially in worship: “First, the German service needs a plain and simple, fair and square catechism. Catechism means the instruction in which the heathen who want to be Christians are taught and guided in what they should believe, know, do, and leave undone, according to the Christian faith.”³⁴ Luther urges the preaching of the catechism as well as examination in it, not simply because corporate worship is, pragmatically speaking, a place to have contact but because this actually helps the people benefit from daily worship.³⁵ Without the building blocks the catechism lays down, the laity come to church and leave without learning or comprehending what they hear. Luther exhorts pastors to drive this knowledge home to the hearts of their parishioners.³⁶ “And let no one think himself too wise for such child’s play. Christ, to train men, had to become man himself. If we wish to train children, we must become children with them. Would to God such child’s play were widely practiced. In a short time we would have a wealth of

Christian people whose souls would be . . . enriched in Scripture and in the knowledge of God.”³⁷

In addition to providing instruction on each of the chief parts of the catechism, Luther also included other materials in the Small Catechism that helped it serve as a “manual of pastoral care.”³⁸ This expanded the medieval use of the catechism in the confessional. These materials included a form for confession and absolution, prayers, a chart of Bible passages, and marriage and baptismal booklets for parish pastors.³⁹

The Catechism in the Hands of Parents

Apart from pastors,⁴⁰ Luther urged the need for two other important groups to be involved actively in religious education: parents and the governing authorities.⁴¹ All three—church, home, and school—have the duty to work together in teaching the Christian faith, but Luther accented the family as the primary instrument for teaching young people.

One of the most important divinely ordained responsibilities of the parental office or vocation was to teach the catechism and train children in the faith.⁴² Luther assigned this duty particularly to the *Hausvater*,⁴³ or the head of the household, the family of which may include domestics, live-in guests or friends, and other dependents as well as the children. (This was an era of extended families and households.) The question-and-answer format of the Small Catechism provided parents with a simple method for instruction, which was to be drilled or reviewed regularly. This Luther reiterated in the preface to the Large Catechism: “It is the duty of every head of a household at least once a week to examine the children and servants one after the other and ascertain what they know or have learned of it, and, if they do not know it, to keep them faithfully at it.”⁴⁴ Parents were to bring their children to church to hear sermons on the catechism and sing catechetical hymns, and see to it that they attend school where they would receive further Christian education.⁴⁵

Luther gave extraordinary emphasis to the parents’ teaching role, assigning titles once reserved exclusively for clergy.⁴⁶ Parents are to serve as pastors and bishops in their own households, preaching at home what is publicly preached in the church. In his introduction to a sermon on the catechism in 1528, Luther addresses parents: “God has appointed you a master and a wife in order that you should hold your family to [the teaching of the catechism and learning of the Scriptures]. . . . Every father of a family is a bishop in his house and the wife a bishopess.”⁴⁷ Parents are to fulfill the responsibilities of their office, which, in this context, was auxiliary to the office of the ministry; as Luther says, “Remember that you in your homes are to help us carry on the ministry as we do in the church.”⁴⁸ Parents are to proclaim God’s word to their children—in a sense, to evangelize them—and to train them up in the fear and knowledge of the Lord.⁴⁹ At the same time, parents also are examples to their children. Parental catechesis teaches by living out faith in Christian life: caring for one’s neighbor, establishing and maintaining good relationships with others, fulfilling Christian

vocations, and so on. In order for parents to serve as teachers in the home, they themselves need to have a basic knowledge of Christian faith and doctrine and to be able to explain this and exemplify it to their children.

The Catechism in the Hands of School Teachers

Luther believed the instruction of children was of vital importance for the preservation of the gospel, the church, and society. Indeed, the whole success of the Reformation depended on it, as he notes in the Large Catechism, “We cannot perpetuate these and other teachings unless we train the people who come after us and succeed us in our office and work, so that they in turn may bring up their children successfully. In this way God’s Word and a Christian community will be preserved.”⁵⁰ While Luther affirmed that parents have the primary responsibility in the training of children in the faith, he also recognized the failure of parents to fulfill this task, whether from lack of will, ability, time, or opportunity.⁵¹ He reminded parents “that it is their

duty, by God’s injunction and command, to teach their children or *have them taught* the things they ought to know.”⁵² For this reason, in the preface to the Small Catechism, pastors and preachers are to urge parents (along with governing authorities) to “rule well and send their children to

Luther believed the instruction of children was of vital importance for the preservation of the gospel, the church, and society.

school.”⁵³ Pastors, civic authorities, and teachers in schools serve as auxiliaries to parents in fulfilling their obligations regarding religious education. Luther’s goal was to train up not only individual believers and their families, but also entire communities. The benefits of this education affect not only the life of each Christian, but society.

Already in his *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* (1524), Luther had exhorted civic authorities to provide schools and competent teachers and to assure that children received adequate training.⁵⁴ Luther had no illusions about the difficulty of operating schools and the challenges faced by administrators and teachers, noting, “It takes extraordinary people to bring children up right and teach them well.”⁵⁵ Failure to educate children would, according to Luther, result in the ultimate ruin of both children and community.⁵⁶

Within his broader emphasis on education, Luther stressed most of all the importance of religious instruction for children. Learning the Christian faith is more important than other school subjects are. In his *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* (1520), Luther urges that schoolchildren

be instructed in the Bible, or at least the Gospels. As an introductory summary and exposition of the teachings of Scripture, Luther's catechism came to play a leading role in the curricular program of schools.

The Theological-Pedagogical Design of Luther's Catechisms

The catechisms epitomized and communicated the heart of Luther's evangelical message. He began with three parts of the medieval catechetical tradition: Decalogue, Creed, and Lord's Prayer. To this he added parts on Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Confession.⁵⁷ The medieval catechetical literature normally had followed the order of Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Decalogue. This arrangement had made sense pedagogically when the catechism had been used as a preparation for the sacrament of penance.⁵⁸ But in his catechisms, Luther changed the order, placing the Decalogue first, then the Creed and Lord's Prayer, a move that demonstrates his purpose includes both inculcation of faith as well as the preparation for Christian life.

The structure and content of the Small Catechism in particular reflect Luther's understanding of the relationship between God and humans in terms of law and gospel.⁵⁹ Luther first leads readers to repentance through the message of God's law in the Decalogue. Then they hear the gospel in the Creed, which proclaims the triune God's love and saving work.

Luther's reordering of the first three chief parts is key to understanding his purpose. The arrangement affects how people learn the building blocks of faith. It teaches and explains how the relationship with God works. First, the Commandments show us that we do not meet God's standards for life before him; we do not make the grade. Second, the Creed shows us who God is and what he has done for us in every aspect of our lives: He is creating, redeeming, bringing us to faith and sustaining us in it. Then when we look back at the Commandments we see them with new eyes, we see how the people of God live before him and before one another. We are people who fear and love God, honoring his name and gladly hearing and teaching his word. We are people who respect those in authority; we love our neighbors in their bodies, their family relationships, their possessions, their reputation, and all their stuff. We begin to learn our Christian callings. Ongoing learning and training in the catechism trains us in the carrying out of our vocations.⁶⁰ Then once more, we look to the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments in the catechism, and we learn again how God deals with us and who we are before him. The Lord's Prayer teaches believers to exercise their faith, praying to God as Father and calling upon him in every time of need.⁶¹ In his instruction on baptism, confession, and the Lord's Supper, Luther shows how God, by means of his word, is at work in daily life, communicating his love, forgiveness, and salvation. In short, Luther teaches about God and human beings, about the relationship between them, in ways that lead the believer to dynamic responses of faith and love.

The Small Catechism as a Textbook

Luther's intentions for his catechisms are clear: their purpose is to teach the Christian faith and life. What Lutherans after Luther do with his catechisms is revealing. It tells us about the context of the time, the condition of the Lutheran churches and how they engaged the culture around them. Yet what these later Lutherans did with the Small Catechism also makes clear how they understood the catechism itself and how they viewed themselves as heirs of Luther's evangelical message. This is more than how they viewed the Reformation and its goals. What they did with Luther's catechism reveals how they identified themselves as Christians. How they understood who God is and who they were before him. Surveying the entire history of Lutheran catechesis is not our purpose here; however, I want to offer one illustration of how Lutherans after Luther used his catechism to meet their own needs. This example may give us something to consider as we teach the Christian faith and life today in our own context.

Luther designed the Small Catechism as a guidebook for parents, pastors, and teachers. He never really intended his catechism as a textbook in the hands of students, although it became one within a couple of years of its first publication, and quickly took its place in the new evangelical school curricula. As schools advanced over the years, the content of catechetical instruction developed beyond the limits of Luther's text. The catechism as textbook expanded and grew more doctrinal in nature according to the needs of the schools. Lutheran pastors and theologians formulated amplified treatments of the basic teachings of the Scriptures, often integrating them with the parts of the catechism. This effort followed Luther's recommendation in the preface to the Small Catechism that instruction should progress beyond his catechism to more advanced forms of catechetical teaching.⁶² In some cases doctrinal textbooks intended for this purpose departed from the text of the catechism altogether and presented the fundamental Lutheran teachings in different formats. (Some, for example, employed Melancthon's *Loci Communes* for this task.) Others, however, elaborated the teaching of the Small Catechism, building on Luther's base and vastly supplementing its content. Some of these catechisms were expositions or commentaries on Luther's catechism, but they also introduced a more comprehensive discussion of doctrinal topics far beyond what Luther had done.

As catechisms became textbooks for use in schools, especially higher-level Latin schools, they gradually took on more of the internal structure and methodology of a dogmatics. Elements of logic and rhetoric began to shape the content of the catechism as well as the manner and methods with which it was presented. Hans-Jürgen Fraas refers to this trend as the "*Akademisierung des Katechismus*" and suggests that use of theoretical language and the tendency toward the imparting of detailed information are marks of this "academization" of the catechism.⁶³ In this way, catechetical books often became small dogmatic works, still founded upon the catechism, but with a much more detailed exposition of its doctrinal content. The prime example of this is

Conrad Dieterich's *Institutiones Catecheticae* (1613), which expanded Luther's Small Catechism into an 800-page dogmatics textbook, and so became one of the most widely used catechisms in Latin schools during the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy. (For example, under Luther's explanation of the Second Article of the Creed, Dieterich's treatment on Christology is over one hundred pages long, thirty of which are dedicated to the *Genus Majesticum* alone.)

The methods used to communicate the teaching of the Christian faith were an integral part of the understanding of education and its goals in the later Reformation period as well as that of Lutheran Orthodoxy. The approach of later Lutherans to catechetical instruction and its application did not necessarily lead to the obscuring or loss of Luther's message, nor over time did they diminish the role it played in the education of children and adults. Robert Kolb has pointed out the oversimplification that permeates "the theory of the decline and fall of Lutheran catechetical instruction" as suggested by Fraas and others. Kolb contends that instead of seeing a decay or decline in this period, "we must keep in mind that catechists of the late 16th century fought the same battle that all catechists fight as they try to find the balance between learning the material and understanding and applying it." Recalling the condition and needs of churches and schools at the time, Kolb adds, "that the catechism took on a textbook quality when it was employed as a textbook may be regrettable, but it reflects the practice which church and society found necessary for instruction in the faith."⁶⁴

Something happens to the catechism when it becomes a textbook. More happens when it becomes a dogmatics. Its purpose has changed. No longer was it a training manual intended to form and inform the Christian faith and life; it had become a miniature system of dogma, a rationally ordered presentation of Lutheran doctrine. This is not necessarily a bad thing—it can serve a purpose—but it is not the same thing as Luther first intended with his own catechism. It is not a replacement for it. Reflection on this question is helpful, because it leads us to consider our own use of the catechism in our context today.

The Catechism in the Church's Life Today

Every generation in the church is confronted with two key questions: first, what of the entirety of the Christian story to communicate as essential and definitive? What is the central thing? Second, how do we translate the message to the next generation and perhaps across cultures? The answer to the first question (the what of the message) is relatively uncomplicated for Lutherans, given our catechetical and confessional tradition. The answer to the second question (the how of the translation) is more challenging because of the great diversity of contexts in which the church is at work. But here, too, Luther gives us something to consider.⁶⁵

With the Renaissance humanists, Luther emphasized the importance of original sources, the return *ad fontes*, in particular to the Scriptures. "Back to the Bible, to Augustine, to the church fathers," as Luther would summarize his approach.⁶⁶ Yet in

Luther was about understanding the text, grasping its central meaning, and getting to the significant part.

this return, Luther meant something more than the humanists had intended. It was not merely renewed attention to the earliest and foundational sources of the

church, or to the “philosophy of Christ” of humanists like Erasmus. It was not simply about establishing the best biblical text and a grammatically sound translation. Rather, Luther was about understanding the text, grasping its central meaning, and getting to the significant part. This was, for Luther, not about mere philology, but theology. He was concerned about recovering the gospel and the essence of the relationship between God and human beings. The indispensable element is the means of this relationship—the word of God, spoken by God to human beings, a living, breathing word, killing and making alive, a creating word, sustaining and life-giving. As he read the Scriptures Luther was seeking Christ and his gospel in the text. And the purpose was to convey the heart of God’s word, the whole reason for God’s revelation of Christ to the world. Luther wanted Christians to be radically dependent on God, specifically on the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ, to hope in Christ alone, not in themselves.

The task set before the church in our time may be different from Luther’s in some ways, yet fundamentally, it is still the same. Each generation faces the challenges of communicating the gospel and the Christian faith to the people of its own day. We live in an increasingly pluralistic world. The contexts in which the message of the Christian faith is taught change over time and from place to place. But change is not new. Methods of instruction are adapted to different contexts. Cultures and languages vary; however, the central message of Christianity—Luther’s message—remains the same.

Lamin Sanneh observed that in its history, the Christian church has been adept at translating the message of the Christian faith. He asserted that the Christian gospel is translatable on a linguistic level as well a cultural one.⁶⁷ James Nestingen also has pointed out that the Lutheran Reformation was a matter of translation.⁶⁸ In a similar way, Luther’s catechisms are fundamentally a translation. Luther brought his teaching of the evangelical faith and the message of law and gospel into the German language and expressed it within his sixteenth-century cultural context. We do the same thing in our own time and place. Whether in multilingual and multicultural contexts or not, the work of education is one of the most important means of translating the message of the Christian gospel. The central message of God’s word, that human beings are lost in sin and it is God who justifies does not change. But it does translate.

The fact that methods change or need to be adapted for the audience may be obvious, but it is still not to be ignored. With Luther’s example, we are reminded that Christian freedom presents the message of God’s word to people in different settings and situations. God has given his people creative skills and abilities to communicate in ways that convey the message clearly, artfully, and faithfully.

Timothy Wengert has written about the importance of reclaiming Luther's catechisms for the church today.⁶⁹ He notes, for example, that the catechism grounds instruction in the word and sacraments; they play a role in evangelism and mission in that they provide the basics of the Christian faith to those who do not know them. The catechisms then also provide definition to "daily life as the locus of the Christian life," Wengert notes, adding, "What if our goal were to bring adults to realize that the catechisms were written for them?"⁷⁰ He explains that the catechism can be a useful guide in premarital counseling, in prebaptismal instruction, and so on. The catechism helps Christians understand who they are before God and before one another.

Luther was interested not merely in helping people of his day understand what it means to be human, but what it means to be a creature, not merely a member of society, but a Christian living in a distinct relationship to the Creator and to the created world.

These questions get at Luther's understanding of Christian identity. What is a Christian? How do Christians deal with God, and how do they relate to the world in which they live? These questions of identity and the consequences of that identity remain key today. What does it mean to be a Christian in Luther's day? What does it mean to be one today? The answers to these questions matter because they give us clues as to how new generations become heirs of the evangelical message. These questions matter because the answers help us as individuals and as a Christian church apply God's word today. What does God's word have to say to us today? How does that word interpret me, and all of us, and how does it interpret the world in which we live? Luther has something to teach us here. Living each day, fulfilling our divine vocations, worshipping, confessing, and witnessing, we relate to God and we relate to those around us all under the cross of Christ.

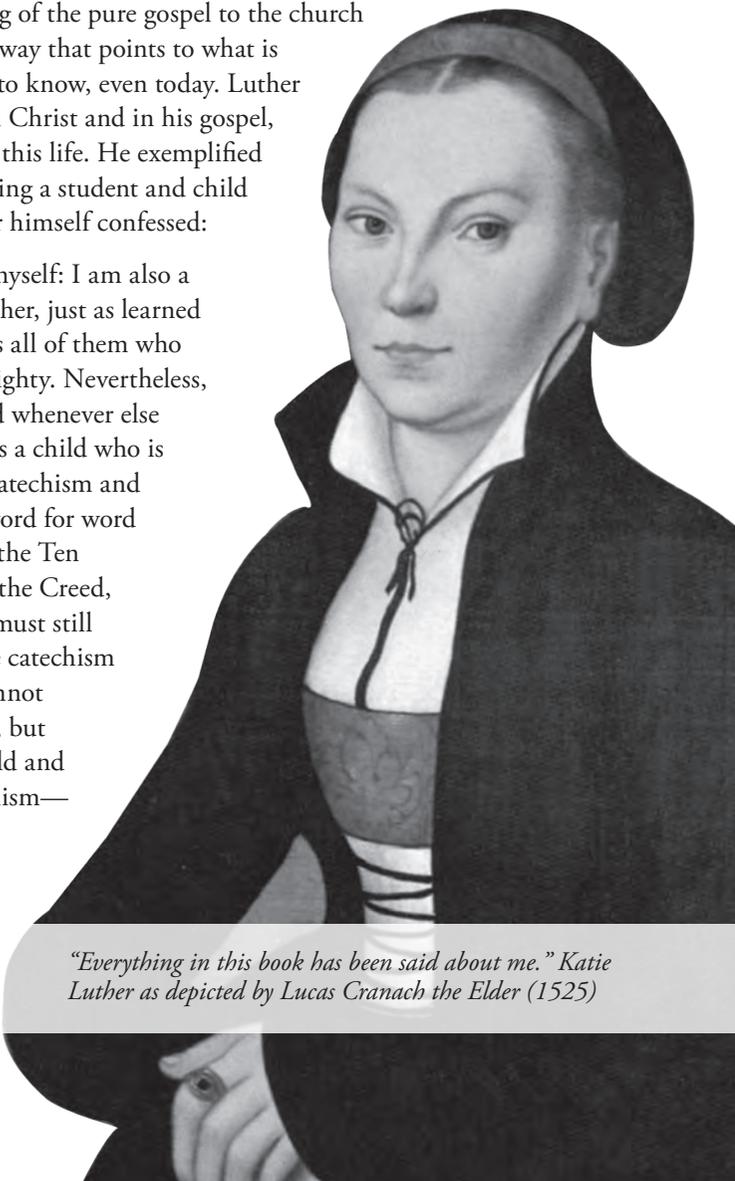
Confession means confessing . . . they go together.⁷¹ Faith and life. Christians speak to the heart of the issue. They speak and live the basics—what God demands in his law and what he bestows through his gospel. We witness to this gospel in what we say and in how we live. Perhaps embodying this message is the thing called for. The message of the gospel is eminently translatable in word, in baptism, and in the Lord's Supper. The Christian life then, too, is translated in prayer, in worship, in praise, in hope, and in every expression of joy.

Education was key for Luther's work as a reformer. The great change came with living by faith, not by logic. It remains the same today. Faith is trust, but faith takes hold of something. Faith looks to its object and grasps it. The Holy Spirit brings us to faith through our hearing the word of God. Yet also the message of this word—the content—must be learned. Luther understood the relationship between faith and education.⁷² The Christian faith must be taught and it must grow. Education in the faith never ends in this life. Learning the catechism is a lifelong learning—it is learning for life.

Conclusion

Katie Luther once proclaimed of the Small Catechism: “Everything in this book has been said about me.”⁷³ This is true *for* us, too. The message of the catechism has been said about us; it is about us because it is for us. The law, the gospel, the word of God to us and for us, his baptism, his holy supper. All of this is said about us and for us. This is the heart of Luther’s evangelical message. And, this message—with Christ at the center—has interpreted us. In a sense, it has translated us. The message of the gospel has converted us from living expressions of sin and death to people of life and hope. The gospel has informed and shaped every aspect of our lives as Christians and leads us to live out our callings wherever God has placed us. God’s word addresses the reality of our lives—it speaks to us in our context, at this place and at this time. The gospel is amazingly translatable, crossing languages, cultures, and ethnic lines. Luther restored the teaching of the pure gospel to the church of his day. He did this in a way that points to what is most important for people to know, even today. Luther called us to a life of faith in Christ and in his gospel, yet showed us a way to live this life. He exemplified this in his own life, remaining a student and child of the catechism. As Luther himself confessed:

But this I say for myself: I am also a doctor and a preacher, just as learned and experienced as all of them who are so high and mighty. Nevertheless, each morning, and whenever else I have time, I do as a child who is being taught the catechism and I read and recite word for word the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Psalms, etc. I must still read and study the catechism daily, and yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the catechism—and I also do so gladly.⁷⁴



“Everything in this book has been said about me.” Katie Luther as depicted by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1525)

Endnotes

- 1 "Vorrede zur 2. Predigtreihe," WA 30.1:27.
- 2 *Dr. Martin Luther's Warning to His Dear German People* (1531), LW, 47:52–53. *Warnunge D. Martini Lutheri, An seine lieben Deutschen*, WA 30III, 276–320. This treatise was composed in October 1530, in the aftermath of the Diet of Augsburg.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 Cf. Albrecht Peters, *Commentary on Luther's Catechisms. Volume 1: Ten Commandments*, trans. Holger K. Sonntag (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 20f.
- 5 Cf. James M. Kittelson, "Luther the Educational Reformer," in *Luther and Learning: The Wittenberg University Luther Symposium*, ed. Marilyn J. Harran (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1985), 96.
- 6 For a concise discussion of the contextual issues involved at the time Luther wrote his catechisms, cf. Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 13–16. For a further study of the Agricolan controversy and its role in prompting Luther to write the catechisms, see Timothy J. Wengert, *Law and Gospel: Philip Melancthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over Poenitentia* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 49ff.
- 7 It is possible to see Luther's gradual development in the purpose of education in the 1520s from *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* (1524) to *A Sermon on Keeping Children in School* (1530). In the former he is chiefly interested in communicating the basic teaching of the gospel; in the latter, written while Luther was at the Coburg during the Diet of Augsburg, he is concerned about ensuring the survival of the evangelical teaching in the Germans lands. What brought about the difference? Several factors, but the Saxon Visitations played a key role. Luther responded to the challenge by writing his catechisms.
- 8 *Der kleine Katechismus für gemeine Pfarherr und Prediger*, first published in May 1529 and later known as the Small Catechism (WA 30/I: 243–425).
- 9 The *Deutsch Katechismus*, first published in April 1529 and later known as the Large Catechism (WA 30/I: 125–238).
- 10 The Formula of Concord, Epitome (Concerning the Binding Summary, Rule, and Guiding Principle . . . , 5) calls Luther's Small and Large Catechisms "a Bible of the Laity [*Laien Bibel*]" in which everything is summarized that is treated in detail in Holy Scripture and that is necessary for a Christian to know for salvation." Already in 1528, in his first series of catechetical sermons of that year, Luther called the catechism the "*kinder predigt oder der leyen biblia*" (WA 30/I: 27), understanding it as the instrument for bringing the biblical message to the laity. In the Large Catechism, Luther describes the catechism as "a brief digest and summary of the entire Holy Scriptures" (Long Preface, 18).
- 11 Large Catechism, Short Preface, 18.
- 12 Ivar Asheim, *Glaube und Erziehung bei Luther: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Verhältnisses von Theologie und Pädagogik* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1961), 272.
- 13 Large Catechism, Short Preface, 25. Luther's translation of the Bible into German made this even more possible.
- 14 Large Catechism, Short Preface, 19. The catechism shares the same object and claim as the Scriptures, as expressed in Jn 20:31: "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."
- 15 Charles P. Arand, *That I May Be His Own: An Overview of Luther's Catechisms* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2000), 27.
- 16 For a discussion of Luther and Melancthon's understanding of doctrine, cf. Robert Kolb, *Teaching God's Children His Teaching: A Guide for the Study of Luther's Catechism*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2012), 16–17.
- 17 Arand, 28.
- 18 Large Catechism, Short Preface, 2.
- 19 See Karl Bornhäuser, *Der Ursinn des Kleinen Katechismus* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1933), 3.

- 20 See Robert Kolb, *Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church, 1530–1580* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), 22–23.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 23.
- 22 See also Formula of Concord, Epitome, 11.22, where the catechism, along with God’s word, directs Christians in recognizing which teachings are “correct and incorrect.”
- 23 Otto Albrecht has disproved the notion that memorization was the chief goal of Lutheran catechesis, arguing that it was simply the means of taking up and understanding what was being taught. Cf. Albrecht, “*Besondere Einleitung in den Kleinen Katechismus*,” in WA 30/I: 543–44. It seems clear that oral communication and aural learning were likely the projected means of inculcation of Lutheran catechetical teaching. Printing was already there to stay, but it takes time to develop a reading culture, so the oral/aural approach would still dominate for a time.
- 24 “Lectures on Zechariah” (1527), LW 20: 157; WA 23: 486.
- 25 Large Catechism, Long Preface, 3, 19. As noted above, Luther asserts that the Holy Spirit is at work in such study of the catechism: “In such reading, conversation, and meditation the Holy Spirit is present and bestows ever new and greater light and devotion . . .” (Large Catechism, Long Preface, 9).
- 26 Large Catechism, Short Preface, 1. That Luther aimed his Small Catechism at parish clergy is evident from the title page: “Handbook. The Small Catechism for Ordinary Pastors and Preachers.” From the early Middle Ages parish clergy had traditionally served as teachers of the catechism to the laity. As Arand (94) observes, “catechetical instruction emerged as one of the primary tasks of a Lutheran pastor.”
- 27 Small Catechism, Preface, 6.
- 28 For more on the oral presentation of the catechism and Luther’s recommended method of oral instruction, see Arand, 92. As mentioned above, many of Luther’s own initial catechetical works were sermons on the catechism.
- 29 See Small Catechism, Preface, 10; Large Catechism, Short Preface, 24.
- 30 Large Catechism, Short Preface, 26. See also Small Catechism, Preface, 14–17. In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531), Melancthon notes the absence of instruction of children in the Roman Church, and states that catechesis is the regular practice among the confessors: “Among our opponents there is no catechesis of children whatever, even though the canons prescribe it. Among us, pastors and ministers of the church are required to instruct and examine the youth publicly, as custom that produces very good results” (15.41).
- 31 See Mary Jane Haemig, “The Living Voice of the Catechism: German Lutheran Catechetical Preaching 1530–1580” (ThD diss., Harvard University, 1996), 10–11; Arand, 58–63.
- 32 Large Catechism, The Ten Commandments, 26.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 27. Luther also encouraged pastors to preach on the catechism in other works; see especially the *Deutsche Messe und ordnung Gottis diensts* (1526), (WA 19: 72–113; LW 53: 61–90), and the *Vermanung zum Sacrament des leibs und bluts unsers Herrn* (1530), (WA 30/II: 595–626; LW 38: 97–137). See also Haemig, 11–12; and Arand, 58–63, for a helpful overview of the history of catechetical preaching from the early church to the time of Luther.
- 34 *Deutsche Messe und ordnung Gottis diensts* (1526) (WA 19: 76; LW 53: 64).
- 35 “This instruction must be given . . . from the pulpit at stated times or daily as may be needed, and repeated or read aloud evening and mornings in the homes for the children and servants, in order to train them as Christians. Nor should they only learn to say the words by rote. But they should be questioned point by point and give answer what each part means and how they understand it.” *Deutsche Messe und ordnung Gottis diensts* (1526) (WA 19: 76; LW 53: 65). Luther states the practice in place in Wittenberg: “On Monday and Tuesday mornings we have a German lesson on the Ten Commandments, the Creed, Lord’s Prayer, baptism, and sacrament, so that these two days preserve and deepen the understanding of the catechism.” (WA 19: 79; LW 53: 68.) The parts of the catechism also play an important role in the divine service, for Luther as evidenced by the creedal hymn “In One True God We All Believe,” a paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer, and admonition to receive the Lord’s Supper (see WA 19: 95–99; LW 53: 78–81).
- 36 “[Without enrichment in Scripture and in the knowledge of God] people can go to church daily and come away the same as they went. For they think they need only listen at the time, without any thought of learning

- or remembering anything. Many a man listens to sermons for three or four years and does not retain enough to give a single answer concerning his faith—as I experience daily. Enough has been written in books, yes; but it has not been driven home to the hearts.” (WA 19: 78; LW 53: 67).
- 37 *Deutsche Messe und ordnung Gottis diensts* (1526) (WA 19: 78; LW 53: 67).
- 38 Arand, 94–95.
- 39 In 1535 Luther wrote *A Simple Way to Pray* for a friend, Peter the Barber, in which he suggests a method for personal prayer based on the pattern and content of the Small Catechism (LW 43: 193–211; WA 38: 358–375).
- 40 E.g., Small Catechism, Address, and Preface, 6; Large Catechism, Long Preface, 1, 13, 19.
- 41 Small Catechism, Preface, 19–20; Large Catechism, Long Preface, 19; Short Preface, 4. These three correspond to Luther’s understanding of the divine division of earthly and spiritual government, the “*drei Regimenten*”: the “*weltliches Regiment*” or political government, the “*Hausregiment*” or family, and the “*geistliches Regiment*” or church. For more on the secular and spiritual authorities, see Augsburg Confession 28; for more on the “*Hausregiment*,” see Large Catechism 405. 141–142.
- 42 Luther emphasizes this in many writings. See e.g., Large Catechism, The Sacrament of the Altar, 87: “Let all heads of a household remember that it is their duty, by God’s injunction and command, to teach their children or have them taught the things they ought to know.” For a more expanded discussion, see Large Catechism, The Ten Commandments, 167–178; and from the Sermon on the Estate of Marriage (1519) [*Ein Sermon von dem ehelichen Stand*, WA 2: 169–170]: “But this parents must know, that they do no better work and service to God, Christendom, the entire world, themselves and their children, than to educate their children well.” [“*Aber das solln die eheleudt wissen, das sie gott, der Christenheyt, aller welt, yhn selbs un yhren kindern keyn besser werck und nutz schaffen mugen, dan das sie yhre kinder wol auff tzyhen.*”]
- 43 Each page of the first German Tafeldruck edition of the Small Catechism (1529) bore the title of each section or part of the catechism followed by “*wie sie ein Hausvater seinem Gesinde einfältiglich furhalten soll.*” This title was retained in subsequent printings of the catechism in pamphlet/book form. The 1529 Latin translation, intended largely for use in schools, is addressed to students and schoolteachers: “. . . *pro pueris in schola. Quo pacto paedagogi suos pueros . . . simplicissime docere debeant.*”
- 44 Large Catechism, Short Preface, 4.
- 45 Robert Kolb has observed that, “Luther believed that four factors should motivate Christian parents to instruct their children in the ways of the Lord: God’s command, their own reason, their feeling of love for their offspring, and the customs of human society.” Kolb adds that, according to Luther, “this function of the parent was to be carried out in the freedom of the Christian life, not in an effort to earn salvation by fulfilling God’s orders.” Robert Kolb, “Parents Should Explain the Sermon: Nikolaus von Amsdorf on the Role of the Christian Parent,” *Lutheran Quarterly* XXV.3 (August 1973): 239. Cf. also Klaus Petzold, *Die Grundlagen der Erziehungslehre im Spätmittelalter und bei Luther* (Pädagogische Forschungen, Veröffentlichungen des Comenius-Instituts 42), (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1969), 69–71.
- 46 See Arand, 96, and endnote 29: “In fact, Luther could apply every high and respectable title, such as ruler, bishop, doctor, pastor, preacher, judge, schoolmaster to the parent (WA 16: 490, 30ff).” See Luther, *Predigt über das 1. Buch Mose. Kap 10.* (1527) WA 24: 223, 9–13: This authority [of parents] is given and instituted for this reason that children are to be instructed and taught God’s Word and to know and fear God, and to believe in Him, so that a father actually is to be bishop and pastor of his house. For to him belongs the same office over his children and household which the bishop holds over his people. [*Diese gewalt ist nu daruemb geben und eingesetzt, das man die kinder ziehen sol und Gottes wort leren, Gott erkennen, fuerchten und yhm glauben, Also das ein vater eygentlich ein Bischoff und Pfarrrer seines hauses sein sol. Denn yhm eben das ampt behoert uber seine kinder und gesind, das einem Bischoff gebuert uber sein volck.*] (Unless otherwise noted, translations are by the author.)
- 47 *Ten Sermons on the Catechism* (1528) LW 51:136–37; WA 30/I: 58. Cf. also Luther: “Every father is obliged to train up and teach his children and servants or to arrange for them to be instructed, for in his home he is as a pastor or bishop for his household, and he is commanded to supervise their learning and is accountable for it.” *Das Fünffte, Sechste und Siebend Capitel S. Matthei gepredigt und ausgelegt* (1532), WA 32.303, 29–33.

- 48 *Ten Sermons on the Catechism* (1528) LW 51:136–37; WA 30/I: 58.
- 49 Elsewhere, Luther will speak of parents as “schoolmasters of God’s will” as they teach their children. Cf. Luther in a sermon on Deuteronomy 6, October 24, 1529, WA 28.662. (For other references, cf. Kolb, “Parents Should Explain the Sermon,” 233.)
- 50 Large Catechism, The Sacrament of the Altar, 86.
- 51 See *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that they Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* (1524), LW 45: 354–55; WA 15: 33–34. The failure of many in the clergy, as well as that of parents, to adequately instruct children in the fundamentals of the Christian faith was made further apparent in the Visitations of the late 1520s. These circumstances perhaps encouraged Luther and the other reformers to promote a coalition-approach toward education and, in particular, catechesis. It is useful to note again here that the 1529 Latin translation of the Small Catechism, intended largely for use in schools, is addressed to students and schoolteachers. In addition, Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560) furnished instructions for schoolmasters on how to teach the catechism to students in different grade levels in the *Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony* (1528) (LW 40: 315, 318; WA 26: 237, 238–39). Melancthon also wrote a catechism, first published in Wittenberg in 1532 and with many later editions, under this title: *Catechesis Puerilis, id est, institutio puerorum in sacris* (Wittenberg: G. Rhau, 1532), in *Corpus Reformatorum*, eds. C. G. Bretschneider & H. E. Bindseil (Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1855), vol. 28, 103–192. This catechism was clearly designed for use in schools, and perhaps in conjunction or in supplement to the 1529 Latin translation of Luther’s Small Catechism, though Melancthon’s catechism is not based on Luther’s.
- 52 Large Catechism, The Sacrament of the Altar, 87 (italics added).
- 53 Small Catechism, Preface, 19. Luther goes on to explain that the governing authorities sin greatly and do much damage when they do not “help to train children as pastors, preachers, civil servants, etc.” (Preface, 20).
- 54 Another example of Luther’s encouragement of the establishment of schools by governing authorities is a letter dated July 18, 1529, in which Luther urges Markgraf Georg von Brandenburg to set up schools in his principality. Luther advised him to establish good schools for children in all cities and towns, as well as one or two higher schools (universities) in cities, where theology, law, and the liberal arts would be taught, and which would produce pastors, preachers, clerks, councillors, and other officials, as well as theologians, jurists, and physicians for service in his land. D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Briefwechsel. 18 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1930–85), 5: 119–21.
- 55 *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that they Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* (1524), LW 45: 355; WA 15: 34.
- 56 *Ibid.*, LW 45: 354–56; WA 15: 34–35. Luther’s exhortations were not unheeded. In 1524, Magdeburg, Halberstadt, and Gotha adopted school reforms, followed by Eisleben in 1525, Nürnberg in 1526, and Electoral Saxony in 1528. Philipp of Hesse issued a new program for the establishment of schools in all cities and towns in Hesse in 1526, which included the organization of a new Lutheran university in Marburg. Other new *Schulordnungen* were put in force throughout the German lands in the decades that followed. See also Harran, 184–87.
- 57 Editions of the Small Catechism from 1531 and afterward included a separate section on confession.
- 58 See Marilyn J. Harran, *Martin Luther: Learning for Life* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 206. This former order of the catechism had assumed that faith (Creed) permits one to approach God to receive his grace (Lord’s Prayer), the aim of which is the living of life prescribed in the law (Decalogue). Closing with the Decalogue made sense as a preparation for penance, “since it would leave most fresh in the mind of the person confessing the ways in which he or she had violated God’s commands.”
- 59 For a more extensive discussion of the design and method of Luther’s Small Catechism, see Albrecht Peters, *Kommentar zu Luthers Katechismen. Band 1: Die Zehn Gebote, Luthers Vorreden*, ed. Gottfried Seebaß (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1990), 29–49; and Arand, 129–146.
- 60 Harran, *Martin Luther—Learning for Life*, 19.
- 61 Luther discusses this interrelation of the chief parts in his preface to *A Short Form of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer* (1520), (*Eine kurze Form der zehn Gebote, eine kurze*

- Form des Glaubens, eine kurze Form des Vaterunsers*, WA 7, 194ff.). See also the same material in Luther's *Personal Prayer Book* (1522), LW 43: 13–14, (*Betbüchlein*, WA 10/II: (339) 375–406).
- 62 Small Catechism, Preface, §17–18.
- 63 See Fraas, *Katechismustradition*, 72.
- 64 Kolb, *Luther as Prophet*, 162, n. 21.
- 65 For more on this discussion, cf. Herbert Girgensohn, *Teaching Luther's Catechism*, trans. John W. Doberstein. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 1–7.
- 66 Cf. Willem Jan Kooiman, *Luther and the Bible*, trans. John Schmidt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 16.
- 67 Cf. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989); Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). Cf. also Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996); and *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002).
- 68 Cf. Nestingen, "Luther's Cultural Translation of the Catechism," *Lutheran Quarterly*, XV (Winter 2001): 440–452.
- 69 Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms*, 20–23.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 71 See this emphasis in Robert Kolb, *Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church, 1530–1580* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991).
- 72 Cf. Robert Rosin, "Luther on Education," in *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 130.
- 73 Wengert, 22. Luther himself recounted this in a letter to Katie dated February 7, 1546 (cf. LW 50:302).
- 74 Large Catechism, Long Preface, 7–8.

LCMS Catechism 6.0

Larry Vogel



Larry Vogel is the associate executive director of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (2009–present). He served as a pastor in Queens (NYC) and in Pennsauken, New

Jersey. He was a member of the drafting committee for the 2017 revision of the synodical Explanation to Luther's Small Catechism.

The 2013 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod resolved, “To Update the Synod’s Catechetical Materials” (Res. 3-13A). It directed the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), in concurrence with the Office of

the President, to propose “needed revisions to the content” of the 1991 edition of *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, noting especially “the many changes in the understanding of morals, civil law and natural law in church and society.”¹ Given such changes, only informed, careful, effective catechesis can enable believers young and old to answer with sober judgment and integrity the question, “Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?”²

History

Catechesis is born of the mission of Christ and his command to baptize and teach (Mt 28:19). To be a disciple of our Lord Christ is to be taught (κατηχέω/κατηχέω) “the word” (Gal 6:6), that is, “the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:25). Early church catechesis was instruction for the baptism of converts, that is, for “those who will give their assent to the faith”³ or for those who were “persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly.”⁴ Justin speaks of baptism “in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.”⁵ Later, Hippolytus explains how catechumens who could answer for themselves, renounced Satan, his ways, and his service. Parents, or other adults, answered for the children who were too young to speak for themselves. And then they were baptized—first children, then men, then women—as they replied to the credal confession in three parts: “Do you believe in God the Father . . . ?” “Do you believe in Jesus Christ . . . ?” “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit . . . ?”⁶

Catechesis early developed a threefold shape, focusing on the Creed, the Our Father, and the Commandments.⁷ This triad would become the heart of the Christian catechism thereafter. However, as Christianity was established in Europe, the catechumenate declined. “By the sixth century, the pre-baptismal instruction offered to adult catechumens had all but disappeared and been replaced with infant baptism in most cases.”⁸ While there are certainly examples of catechesis in the medieval church, catechetical instruction declined as conversions and adult baptism became increasingly rare.

Over time, the result became the “deplorable, wretched deprivation” Luther bemoans in the introduction to the 1529 Small Catechism. “The ordinary person, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about the Christian faith, and unfortunately many pastors are completely unskilled and incompetent teachers.”⁹

This was not a new concern for Luther. His first “catechetical” sermons preceded the posting of the Ninety-five Theses. In 1516, he preached a series of sermons on the Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer.¹⁰ Throughout his catechetical labor, Luther affirmed the practice of teaching on the key materials from earlier catechesis, namely the Creed, Our Father, and the Decalogue. Luther inverted the order of the three placing the Commandments first. Then he supplemented these three standards with a biblical grounding for baptism, the supper, and absolution, while ignoring material that had made many prior catechisms unusable.¹¹

Luther’s catechisms bear witness to his concern that the Reformation be a recovery of the one gospel by which all people are forgiven and redeemed, not an intellectual movement for elites. Thus, he attended to not only erudite studies and debates with leaders from the church and the universities, but also to catechesis. Arguably, at least, the Lutheran Reformation continued after Luther largely because of the catechisms. Millions of people would study them and take them to heart.

Luther himself explains why catechesis is so important a task and why he revised the order of the three traditional pieces of instruction, beginning (rather than ending) with the Commandments, continuing on to the Creed and Our Father:

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. Then he has to desire to search for this medicine and to obtain it or have it brought to him.¹²

Luther's catechetical labor was not a one off. He understood catechism to be content, not a book or manual (even though his Enchiridion would be a vital catechetical tool). He and his contemporaries catechized in sermons, manuals, services and prayers offices, prayer books, hymns and chorales. But the "handbook"—his Enchiridion (Small Catechism, see nearby graphic¹³) came to be the tool most consider when they hear the word *catechism*.¹⁴

Michael Reu traces the texts and editions of the Small Catechism. Here it may suffice only to mention that the original publication in 1529 was followed by a fuller edition in 1531 (which adds an introduction to the Lord's Prayer and Confession). Numerous regional editions followed both during Luther's remaining years and after his death in 1546. Reu notes that in the sixteenth century the Small Catechism was often "treated, even by staunch Lutherans, with a liberty few of us would dare to exercise today."¹⁵ It was only after the publication of the *Book of Concord* (1580) that such flexibility gradually slowed and then ceased.¹⁶

Though the text of the Small Catechism proper became largely fixed after 1580, Luther's material was soon supplemented with further explanations. One of the most influential supplemented editions, especially for the history of LCMS catechesis, was Conrad Dieterich's (1575–1639)¹⁷ *Institutiones Catecheticae* (1613).¹⁸ Together with Luther's text, Dieterich employed a full array of dogmatic terminology and technical language in the additional questions and answered plumbing the depths of Christian doctrine. The result was a temptation toward a highly intellectualized version of Christianity which neglected Luther's simplicity and practicality.

We may identify five or six Missouri Synod editions of "the catechism."¹⁹ Dieterich's catechism was used by the Missouri Synod in its earliest years. Soon after its establishment, the synod published a version of Dieterich edited by C. F. W. Walther. ²⁰ In the 1890s Missouri developed its second supplemented catechism under the leadership of H. C. Schwan, published first in German in 1896.²¹ The synod soon followed this German edition with an English translation in 1897 which was offered to the public in 1900 with the title *A Short Exposition of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism*.²² Having gone through a post–World War I adoption of English in nearly all its congregations and schools, the synod's fourth catechism explanation was an English edition only, published in 1943, with minor variations in the text of Luther's Catechism itself, and the continuance of Dieterich's general approach.²³ In 1986 a new translation of Luther's chief parts was published and approved by the synod. A new set of explanatory material followed in 1991. This fifth "LCMS catechism" once again followed the Dieterich pattern, but its explanations incorporated an increasing number of questions and answers that touched on contemporary concerns.²⁴

The 2013 LCMS convention adopted Resolution 3-13A "To Update the Synod's Catechetical Materials," directing the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) and the LCMS president to approve revisions to the supplementary "Explanation" from 1991. As its rationale, the resolution noted that nearly twenty-five

years had elapsed since the previous edition had been published in 1991 and that quarter-century had introduced “many changes in the understanding of morals, civil law, and natural law in church and society.” It also noted the “need for more comprehensive catechetical materials for adults.”²⁵

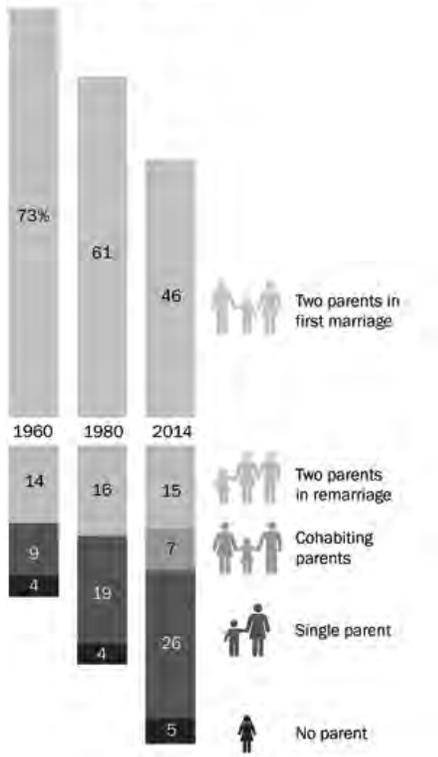
Overview: Addressing New Realities

It is perhaps an understatement to refer to “many changes” as one looks back over recent decades of American life and culture. Among the new realities of the present day, one may look in three directions: cultural, religious, and demographic. Few things are more central to a culture than its views of marriage and family. Pew Research²⁶ has documented the steady decline in two-parent households and the rising diversity of “living arrangements” (see nearby graphic²⁷). Countless moral questions pervade discussions in church and society over a host of topics: abortion, marriage, divorce, cohabitation, single-parenting, same-sex relationships, same-sex marriage, transgender identity, sexting, and on and on.

All this has a direct effect on religiosity to the degree that people look to churches for moral guidance, but changes in religiosity go much deeper than the need to comment on discrete moral/ethical questions. America’s religious “landscape”—to use a pew Research term—is experiencing profound changes. “The Christian share of the U.S. population is declining, while the number of U.S. adults who do not identify with any organized religion is growing” summarizes Pew’s most recent findings (see nearby graphic²⁸). The percentage of non-Christian religions is growing steadily, and those without any religious affiliation has grown by nearly 50 percent in less than a decade. People are increasingly “spiritual, but not religious”—a phenomenon that is especially marked in

For children, growing diversity in family living arrangements

% of children living with ...



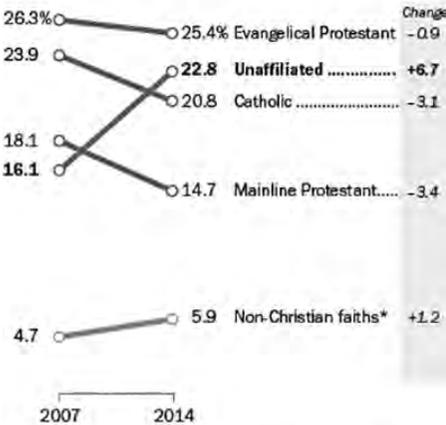
Note: Based on children under 18. Data regarding cohabitation is not available for 1960 and 1980; in those years, children with cohabiting parents are included in “one parent.” For 2014, the top share of children living with two married parents is 62% after rounding. Figures do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 1960 and 1980 decennial census and 2014 American Community Survey (IPUMS)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Changing U.S. Religious Landscape

Between 2007 and 2014, the Christian share of the population fell from 78.4% to 70.6%, driven mainly by declines among mainline Protestants and Catholics. The unaffiliated experienced the most growth, and the share of Americans who belong to non-Christian faiths also increased.



* Includes Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, other world religions and other faiths. Those who did not answer the religious identity question, as well as groups whose share of the population did not change significantly, including the historically black Protestant tradition, Mormons and others, are not shown.

Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

younger adults. It fits hand-in-glove with discomfort over both Christian doctrine and moral teaching.

American demographics are also changing. America is aging with the median age rising—especially so among non-Hispanic whites, and non-Hispanic whites have the lowest birth rates in the US. That the US population continues to grow is largely a result of the country's growing ethnic diversity.²⁹

From the perspective of the LCMS, these cultural, religious, and demographic changes are noteworthy. Demographically, the synod is largely non-Hispanic white in terms of ethnicity and, as such, reflects the aging and birth rate tendencies of the US quite dramatically, while experiencing very little growth from the rising percentage of the US population that is black, Hispanic, or immigrant.

As religious and cultural attitudes and mores have changed, they have done so more strikingly for non-Hispanic whites than others. Once

again, the LCMS is experiencing challenges on an acute level. Pew Research data indicates, for instance, that, while the LCMS is theologically and morally conservative in its formal stances, its membership is very much affected by the trends of American life and view such practices as same-sex marriage in much the same way that the rest of America does.³⁰ In light of such changes, it is completely understandable that the LCMS convention would realize the need for a catechism revision that takes such matters into consideration. The LCMS must address these realities for the sake of our children. Moreover, fewer adults who come to faith will have been baptized, and they too will need solid catechesis and answers to their questions.

Overview: Structure

In the fall of 2013, President Matthew Harrison, with the approval of the praesidium and CTCR, appointed a drafting committee (DC) for requested revision. Joel D.

Lehenbauer, executive director of the CTCR, was asked to chair the committee. The other members of the drafting committee appointed were Charles Arand, Wally Arp, Thomas Egger, Jan Lohmeyer, John Pless, and Larry Vogel.

The committee's first decision concerned the structure of the Explanation.³¹ At the suggestion of Arand and with the approval of the CTCR and praesidium, the committee decided on a four-part structure. As in previous editions, the Explanation would take on individual parts of the six chief parts—an individual commandment, the articles of the Creed, the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, four baptismal questions, two parts for Confession and the Keys, and four questions on the Sacrament of the Altar.³² (The only deviation from previous editions was the decision to break the Creed into nine parts—three for each of its articles—rather than only one part for each article.) After each segment of Luther's catechism was repeated, there would follow:

- The Central Thought
- A Closer Reading of the Small Catechism
- Connections and Applications
- Devotional Aids

Arguably, the most innovative element of this structure is the Central Thought. Its goal is to identify a sphere of life or faith being addressed. For example, the ubiquity of some sense of a god or a highest good for the first commandment; a reflection question; an illustrative passage/narrative from Scripture; a summary statement of the key point of the lesson, and a personal application question.

Following this, A Closer Reading of the Small Catechism, focuses on Luther's wording and thought using the familiar question and answer method. Rather than passing too quickly to more technical theological language or to contemporary concerns, the committee saw a need to delve into Luther's simple language and emphasis first. For example, in his explanation of baptism (first part), his phrases and expressions are explored more fully, asking about the meaning of "baptize," the description of the water, and the meaning of baptizing "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." In drafting this, the committee gave special attention to Luther's Large Catechism as further commentary on his priorities. Supportive Scripture texts are provided together with longer biblical references cited and some confessional references.

The next section, Connections and Applications, goes beyond Luther's explanations and applications to address associated matters of teaching and application to life today. Thus, a doctrinal concept such as the states of humiliation and exaltation is considered under this heading (2nd Article, Part 2). In the fourth part of the Sacrament of the Altar, consideration is given to who should not be given the Lord's Supper. Once again, a question and answer method is employed together with supporting passages and references.

The final section is a devotional aid. Initially, the committee determined to provide a suggested hymn verse and a newly composed prayer, both of which were

to reflect the basic elements of the lesson. (Later the decision was made to include a suggested psalm.)

Two members of the DC were asked to provide initial drafts for the review of the entire committee, with Arand assigned the first three parts and Pless assigned the remaining three parts. The DC met a number of times in 2014 and 2015, evaluating and revising the materials provided by Arand and Pless and providing progress reports to the CTCR and the office of the president. In 2016, the DC completed its initial draft. The CTCR reviewed the draft in its entirety, making revisions, but retaining the vast majority of the suggested material. The praesidium also provided revisions in various places and requested that the draft be made available to the synod for review and comment.

An Explanation of Martin Luther's Small Catechism: Field Test Edition—July 2016 (FTEd) was published. It was immediately available for download and hard copies were sent to all rostered members of the synod and to every congregation. Provisions for individuals to provide feedback were available online and through the mail. Over 1000 responses were collated and shared with the DC, CTCR, and praesidium. Numerous suggested changes were provided and some respondents were scathing in their criticism of the FTED; however, the overwhelming number of respondents were favorable with an approval rate of nearly 80 percent (ratings of the individual chief parts were even higher, averaging over 85 percent).

After analyzing the FTED reactions and suggestions, the DC made some changes to the Explanation, while retaining most of its prior work. Most of the changes were of a minor, editorial nature. Several of the changes bear comment here. First, about a dozen of the suggested biblical sections within the Central Thought sections were changed to include key narratives from the Bible's saving history and, typically, passages that were more vivid. Additionally, in response to the single most frequent suggestion from respondents, the initial design of having each chief part end with a supplementary section was changed so that each chief part would have its own introductory section. Finally, over a dozen additional questions were added to the Connections and Applications sections of the text.

Reactions

Reactions to the field test edition were requested, received, collated, and evaluated by the DC. The responses were taken with full seriousness as the DC continued its work. In revising the FTED, the DC was cognizant of the need not to allow revisions to undermine the strong support expressed.

At the same time, the responses enlarged the vision of the DC as we revised the FTED and enabled us to recognize both strengths and weaknesses of our prior work. We are grateful for the numerous individuals who took the time to share their impressions, questions, concerns, criticisms, and suggestions. While the majority of the responses were from LCMS pastors (about 65 percent), about 20 percent of the

responses were from commissioned workers, and a little over 15 percent were from laity. In a few cases, groups of pastors shared concerns and feedback. The broad base of the response was vital. In addition to revisions of the work on the six chief parts, the DC also prepared supplementary materials on Luther's Daily Prayers and Table of Duties, as well as brief considerations of several topics (Reading God's Word, Who Is Jesus?, How Creeds and Confessions Help Us to Answer This Question, What Is Worship?, Simple Prayer, and a glossary).

After revising the FTED, the DC submitted its work once more to the CTCR. After making some minor changes, the CTCR approved the draft for formal submission to the praesidium. (It should be noted that the president and first vice-president sit on the CTCR, so their input was, to some extent, available for the consideration of the plenary CTCR.) After consultation and consideration by the Office of the President, a final draft was submitted for doctrinal review at the suggestion of the CTCR. Having approved the draft, it would not have required doctrinal review—no documents adopted by the CTCR require doctrinal review. Nevertheless, due to the wide use of any "Synod Catechism," the commission felt it prudent, to provide additional review beyond itself and the praesidium.

Having passed doctrinal review, the draft was in the hands of Concordia Publishing House where it was published in 2017. We pray that this resource will be used to the glory of God and the well-being of his church.

Endnotes

- 1 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *2013 Convention Proceedings*, 123.
- 2 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “Rite of Confirmation,” *Lutheran Service Book* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 273.
- 3 *Apostolic Tradition*, 15.1–2. See also *Apostolic Constitutions*, XVIII; *Didache* VII; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*.
- 4 Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 61).
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.1–18. See also *Apostolic Constitutions*, XXXIX–XLV. Patristic catechesis did not make use of a catechism “book” and was often lengthy. Cyril provides twenty-four “discourses” and Augustine, twenty-seven catechetical chapters (*The First Catechetical Instruction [de Catechizandus rudibus]*).
- 7 See Charles P. Arand, *That I May Be His Own: An Overview of Luther’s Catechisms* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 29–39. Also see “Catechesis, II (Medieval)” and “Catechesis, III (Reformation)” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, v. 1, 228–236 and Michael Reu, *Luther’s Small Catechism: A History of Its Origin, Its Distribution and Its Use* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1929), 1–4.
- 8 Arand, 32.
- 9 SC Preface 1–2, KW 347.
- 10 Bjarne W. Teigen, “Luther’s Catechisms, 1529–1979: I. How the Catechisms Came to Be Written,” unpublished essay presented to the 62nd Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (June 17–22, 1979).
- 11 Reu (5) notes as examples of material frequently included: the Ave Maria, seven gifts of the Spirit, seven deadly sins, seven cardinal virtues, seven works of mercy, eight Beatitudes, twelve fruits of the Spirit, the crying sins, the alien sins, and the five senses. Also see Arand, 32–34.
- 12 AE 43:13–14. Note the footnote on p. 13: “In the Middle Ages the four items everyone was to know by heart were the Hail Mary, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. The most common traditional order in the period from 1450 to 1500 was: the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments on the grounds that the Lord’s Prayer in the rosary was valueless without the faith of the Creed, and the faith of the Creed was of no effect without the keeping of the commandments. Luther consciously reversed the order with the purpose of showing that the gospel is the source of vitality and power for morality. Luther did not seek here to show a new way to salvation which omits the keeping of the law. Rather, the law is to show man that he is powerless to fulfill God’s will by himself. See Johannes Meyer, *Historischer Kommentar zu Luthers kleinem Katechismus* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1929), 82–83.” Although Luther greatly simplifies this, it is noteworthy that Luther is still directly addressing the mortal sins, “strange sins,” “crying and silent sins” etc. (p. 21).
- 13 Graphic of Luther’s Small Catechism with explanatory material from www.smu.edu/Bridwell/Special_CollectionsandArchives/Exhibitions/Childrens-Books/Catechisms/-/media/B0057F75D3E345A9A2A-B32AE8A9D27EA.ashx
- 14 Arand, 58–81.
- 15 Reu, 66–67.
- 16 If imitation is the highest flattery, then all of Christianity was impressed by Luther’s catechisms. His labors led others, both erstwhile friends and foes, to try their own hands at writing catechisms. A few examples are adequate. In England, *The Book of Common Prayer* (1549) included a catechism. Peter Canisius published a Roman Catholic *German Catechism* in 1555. The *Heidelberg Catechism* was published in 1563. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* was printed in 1647.
- 17 Dieterich’s name came to be [mis]spelled in subsequent editions as Dietrich. We will use that spelling here.
- 18 See Reu, 175–176. Reu cites Dieterich’s catechism as “[a]n especially bad example” of the highly technical catechesis of Lutheran Orthodoxy from the 17th century onward. He faults Dieterich and others for trying to work all of the careful dogmatic precision of Orthodox theology into books of instruction intended for ordinary youth with the result that their labors were “more abstract, theological, and doctrinal, and, as a result, more unfruitful” (176). Reu is no foe of Orthodoxy, but only of a

- counterproductive method. He also notes efforts (e.g., Arndt, Gerhard, Schmidt) which, while fully orthodox, emphasized more the kind of simplicity and applicability one finds in Luther (see 179–185).
- 19 While the Synod has re-translated Luther’s texts at various times, its catechisms are noteworthy as supplements or explanations. Luther’s words are relative constants either in German or in translation.
- 20 Reu (282) refers to Missouri Synod use of “the Dresden *Kreuzkatechismus*,” initially, soon replaced by Dietrich. In 1858 the Missouri Synod printed Dietrich for its use and then followed with an abridged version in 1870. See David Aaron Fiala, “Martin Luther’s Small Catechism: A History of English Language Editions and Explanations Prepared by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* vol. 89, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 29, 49.
- 21 Some in Missouri seemingly shared the concern about the heavily technical nature of Dietrich and his tendency to turn the catechism into a dogmatics text. Although Schwan seems to have shared this concern in the material he prepared (which is lost), the final product of numerous editorial changes to his work led him to refuse to have his name printed in association with the finished work. See Fiala, 31, 33–36.
- 22 Ibid., 28.
- 23 Ibid., 36–41.
- 24 Ibid., 41–45.
- 25 The LCMS, 2013 *Convention Proceedings*, 123. The resolution received over a 99 percent vote.
- 26 See Pew Research Center, “The American Family Today” at <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/1-the-american-family-today/>.
- 27 http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/parenting-in-america/st_2015-12-17_parenting-11/.
- 28 Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape” at <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.
- 29 Numerous sources document these changes. A few examples include Pew Research Center, “10 demographic changes that are shaping the U.S. and the world” <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/>. See also American Immigration Council, “The Ever-Changing Demographics of America” <http://immigrationimpact.com/2016/06/09/demographics-united-states-of-america/>; American Census Bureau, “Age and Sex Composition: 2010” <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-03.pdf>. Central Intelligence Agency, “World Factbook” <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2127rank.html>.
- 30 For Pew Research on the Missouri Synod, see <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod/racial-and-ethnic-composition/> and <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod/>.
- 31 “Explanation” will be used herein to refer to the explanatory materials—questions and answers—that supplement the Enchiridion itself (Luther’s material).
- 32 Additional materials that the DC would prepare included an Introduction to the Explanation, a supplementary (transitional) section for each of the six chief parts, and a discussion of the Table of Duties.

Why Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation is a Tool Uniquely Suited for Parish Education

Pete Jurchen



Pete Jurchen is an editor of curriculum resources at Concordia Publishing House, which provides congregations of the LCMS with resources that educate,

equip, and empower households with God's word.

Perhaps your experience mirrors mine. In middle school I went through confirmation class and at the end, after much pomp and circumstance, was confirmed. During my time in confirmation class I was given a copy of Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation—a little blue

hardbound book. At the time I wasn't sure what it was for, but our class referenced this book quite a few times during our instruction, and in the end I remember thinking it was a neat book. After the rite of Confirmation, however, I put the book on my shelf and, sadly, pretty much forgot about it.

It is a story that, I am sure, has been repeated over and over again in LCMS parishes. Perhaps learners used the Explanation a lot during confirmation instruction or adult instruction. It is just as likely that they never bought or cracked open the book. I am not talking about Luther's Small Catechism (or the Enchiridion; short, concise, and brilliant, volumes have been written about it¹). What I am referencing is the Explanation.

The Explanation serves as a framework to break down and understand the precise words of the Enchiridion. It ties everything to God's transformative, life-giving word, and unpacks concepts to teach the faith using that same word. There is a long history of the different editions of the Explanation that will not be covered here.² Though primarily purchased for confirmation instruction, anecdotally it is sometimes seen as too long to be useful for confirmands. Though it depends on the context in which the Explanation is used, there is some truth to this. This is because the Explanation is meant for more than just teaching middle school confirmands. Instead it serves as part of something altogether more important. It supplements and supports the Enchiridion, the "handbook for Christian living."³ If the text of the Small Catechism serves as a handbook, then the Explanation serves as a map, field guide, and cyclopedia to understanding and navigating it.

The publication of the 2017 edition of the Explanation provides an opportunity to talk about its use in parish education. We often talk catechesis and the Enchiridion, but generally talk less about the use of the Explanation.

In this article, I will summarize some challenges and opportunities

we face in parish education, outline the features of the new Explanation, and show how the Explanation serves as a tool uniquely suited for parish education. I will conclude with some thoughts on what the future holds for the varied uses of the Explanation in parish life.

If the text of the Small Catechism serves as a handbook, then the Explanation serves as a map, field guide, and cyclopedia to understanding and navigating it.

Challenges and Opportunities in Parish Education

Broadly speaking, there are three forms of education: formal, non-formal, and informal education.⁴ Formal education is generally designed around degree or certification acquisition, which is what we generally expect from public or parochial schools and universities.⁵ Informal education, at the other end of the spectrum, has little or no structure and education is more self-directed, usually in work, family, or leisure activities.⁶ The third category, non-formal education (NFE), bridges the gap between the two. Parish education or any education that happens in the congregation, including Sunday school, confirmation, youth group, Bible class, and men and women's groups, likely falls into this category. Understanding non-formal education, then, is critical to understanding how the Explanation can be best used in the mission of the church: to go and make disciples by baptizing and teaching.

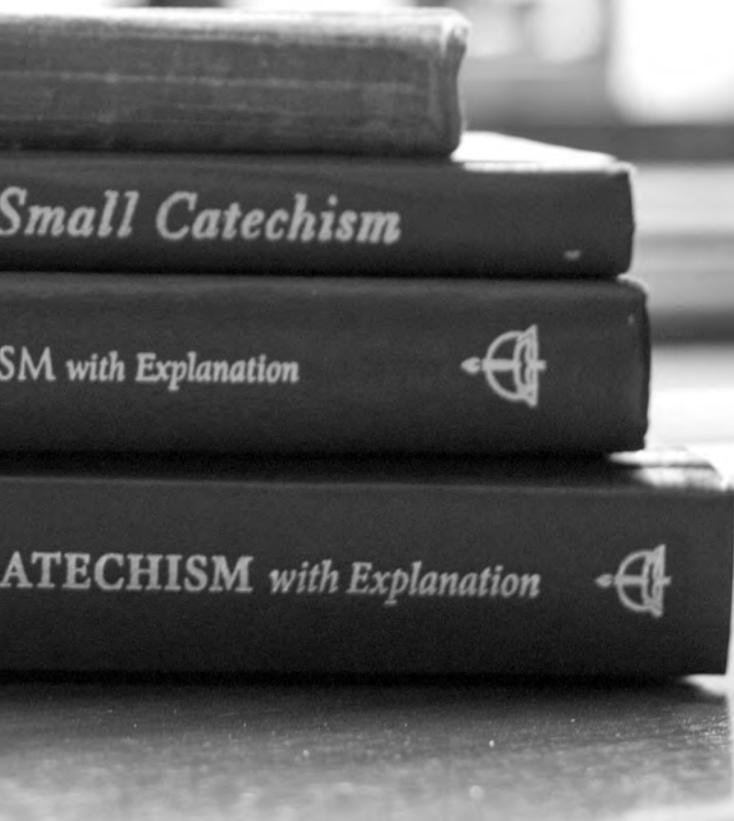
NFE can be defined as any organized or systematic program or activity that provides specific, targeted groups of learners with specialized, selected learning experiences.⁷ In common with formal education, NFE usually includes stated goals and objectives, assessments, and the use of learning strategies. NFE programs, however, do not end in degree acquisition or certification.⁸ The difference is that NFE uses these curriculum features to teach genuine human learning tasks to willing learners for their own sake or for society in general. Among the broad categories of NFE programs are literacy education, ELL, family-life education, and vocational education.⁹

Most parish educational settings are non-formal in one way or another. Though usually grades are not given in a Bible class, there is still structure, including a learning focus, lesson plans, and informal checks for understanding.¹⁰ When designing programs and laying out curriculum, considerations should be made that play to the particular strengths of NFE. After all, we know that Sunday school and day school run differently. The question is how, exactly, they are different. Though there have



been studies outlining the strengths and weaknesses of non-formal education, three general considerations emerge that help define what makes non-formal education both a unique opportunity and a challenge for its teachers and facilitators:

Choice: Non-formal education is different from most formal education in that attendance is voluntary. The motivation to participate is internal, especially for adult learners,¹¹ usually our least represented demographic in parish education. Participants must see a need that drives them to the place where parish education happens. The teacher or facilitator must be prepared for partial attendance; learners tend to drop in and out, and teachers must be willing to adjust and not get discouraged when people need to catch up to understand what they missed. For example, in the parish education environment of Sunday school, teachers must be prepared for any number of children to show up because of outside



influences like travel, sports, or sickness, and there's generally little a Sunday school teacher can do to extrinsically motivate greater attendance (for example, by giving grades).

Interest: Whereas much of formal education is generally based on readymade standards of education, NFE generally must customize standards, goals, and objectives directly to the group of learners. NFE teachers must be flexible and adaptable to make sure that what is being learned not only conforms to their field but that it applies to the specific interests of the learners. In parish education facilitators must always remember to stick to the truth of God's word, and they must also be willing to adjust specifics as learners bring their own cares, concerns, and questions with them. If the leader is not willing to dialogue with these learners, attendance may dwindle. On the other hand, if the teacher consistently allows one

or two voices to hijack the conversation, others in the class may vote with their feet and cease to attend.

Socialization: In much of formal education, though there is some room for customization of classroom atmosphere, the rules of interaction are pretty well dictated. There is a facilitator or teacher in front who lectures, facilitates, and directs the learners. In this formal setting, learners will likely put up with an educational culture they do not prefer because their motivation is to get a grade or certification at the end. In NFE, because of the choice and interest components, classroom rules for engagement tend to be socially determined by the group. Though there is a facilitator, he or she must foster a climate of mutual learning or respect among the class in a much more fluid way than in many formal education settings. At the same time, the facilitator must balance democracy with anarchy, making sure that the group stays on task. If not, the setting turns into an informal environment where specific goals and objectives can get lost and learning is not maximized.

Two other considerations are unique to parish education:

Continuity: Parish education is generally made up of an ecosystem of different programs, including Sunday school, confirmation, Bible class, small groups, men's groups, women's groups, and youth groups.¹² Unlike other NFE environments, however, they often work together to help equip disciples of Christ to receive the word of God for life. Though individuals move or transition between the groups at different times, there's seldom a true beginning and end to learning. Education in the parish should equip disciples to faithfully receive the gifts of God's word from cradle to grave. For example, Sunday schools tend to provide learning for all ages on a sort of spiral that does not really stop (though there may be some breaks). Though confirmation is often seen as a sort of graduation, it is not the case. Instead, it is meant to be a stepping-stone to the next stage of lifelong discipleship, usually to a youth group and/or adult Bible study.

Integration: NFE in the parish also provides a unique opportunity to bring generations together. Programs generally are age segregated, but it is not unusual for different generations to interact in the parish. Children and their parents intermingle with older adults over coffee, or in an intentional program designed to bring the different groups together, usually during holidays or special events. Whereas most formal education only brings different generations

together to learn incidentally, in the parish there is a lot of potential for intentional bridging of that gap.

To work through these five broad considerations for non-formal parish education—choice, interest, socialization, continuity, and integration—we turn to the Explanation of the Small Catechism. First we will look at its features and then see how it can be used in light of the challenges and opportunities presented in parish education.

The Features of the New Explanation

The new version of the Explanation is laid out in generally the same form as past editions, with a few notable exceptions. The book is divided into the same three general sections: the Enchiridion (the original Small Catechism), the Explanation, and the Appendices. The Enchiridion remains the same as it has since 1986. The Appendix remains a collection of articles and reference materials, though greatly expanded.

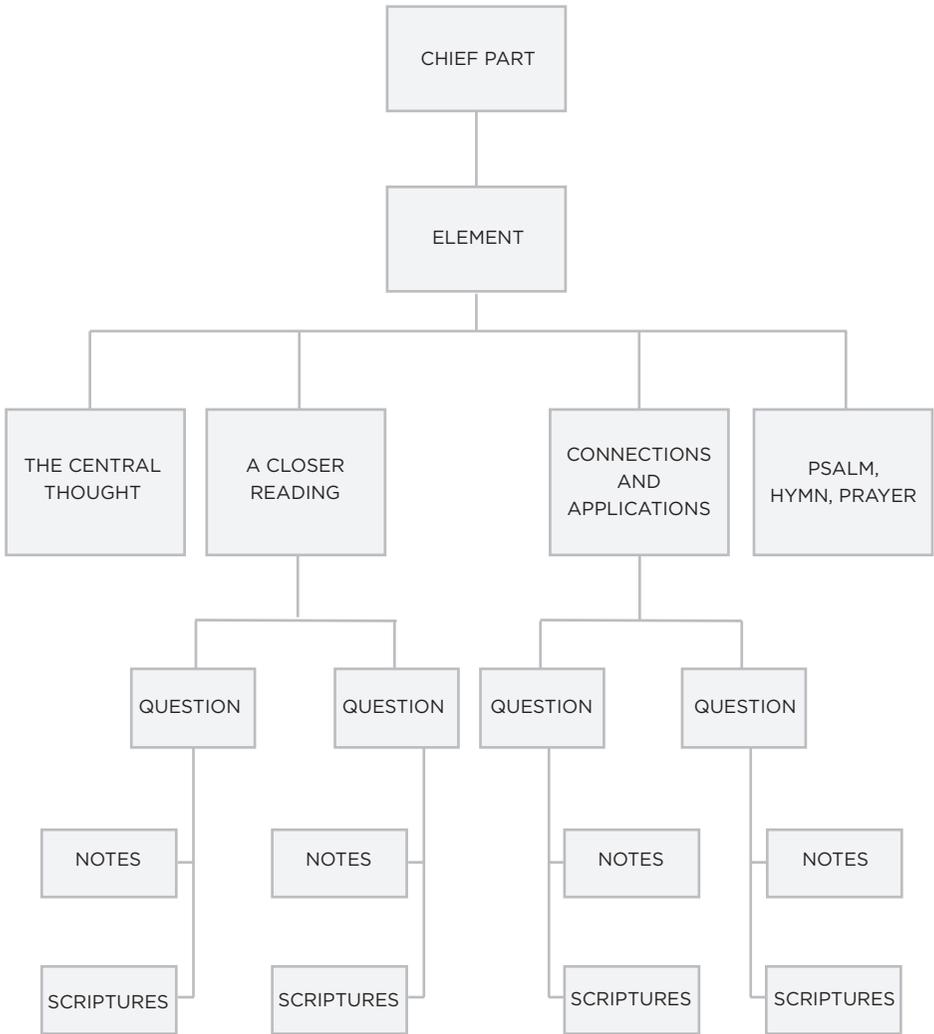
The Explanation is where the greatest changes are. Beyond expanding the length, there was a general expansion of subcategories. At first these may seem confusing, especially if you're used to the previous editions, but they increase the utility of this little handbook for Christian living. As before, each Chief Part of the Small Catechism is broken into manageable chunks, mostly following Luther's original ordering. The exceptions are the three articles of the Creed, which now each have three distinct parts. In total, these make up thirty-eight complete sections, and one abbreviated section (the conclusion to the Lord's Prayer). Each of these sections, for the sake of reference, make up an *element* of the Explanation. Now here is where the main difference lies. Each of the elements now has four subheadings (except for the conclusion to the Lord's Prayer, which has only two). These four subheadings are:

The Central Thought: a brand new section designed to help the reader better understand his or her identity in light of the Small Catechism. This includes the original wording of the Enchiridion, along with a key point, biblical narrative, and guiding questions.

A Closer Reading: Questions, answers, and proof texts that primarily examine the words of the Small Catechism. In addition, there are supplementary notes and extra readings.

Connections and Application: Questions, answers, and proof texts that primarily unpack biblical theology and contemporary issues under the biblical themes of the element. These too include many supplementary notes and extra readings.

Psalm, Hymn, Prayer: a reference to a psalm, hymn (or hymn verse), and prayer that corresponds to the element. These are designed for devotional or worship use.



The traditional questions and answers, along with accompanying proof texts remain, except they are now organized into two categories: those that help explain the text (A Closer Reading) and those that communicate the text into daily life (Connections and Application). What you have, in the end, is a layered effect. At the base of everything in the new Explanation is God’s word, Scripture references. These connect to questions and answers (along with corresponding notes), which connect to the elements of the Small Catechism which connect to the Chief Parts.

One may ask, especially in light of the seeming complexity of this book, why the extras matter and how they help. After all, in a world full of complexity and information overload, what good would the expanded reference work serve? I submit they are exactly what we need for the challenges and opportunities provided by parish education.

The Explanation and Teaching and Learning in Non-Formal Parish Education

Below we return to the five considerations of parish education as a form of NFE. This time we will look at how the new edition of the Explanation addresses each one in turn, and what that may mean for its use as a tool for teaching the faith to young and old alike in the parish.

Choice: the new edition of the Explanation is intentionally designed around shorter, more manageable, sections of text. The thirty-eight (or thirty-nine depending on how its viewed) elements in the text, compared to previous editions, are laid out to be seen and used as digestible, teachable, units. For example, in the previous (1991) edition, the Third Article of the Creed was arranged as one long section, under five subheadings, with thirty-nine questions and answers. In contrast, the Third Article of the Creed in the 2017 edition is arranged in three distinct elements, spanning a dozen or so questions and answers apiece, each with a Central Thought and Psalm, Hymn, and Prayer. The implications of this on choice may seem slight, but in fact are staggering. By breaking the Small Catechism into similar-sized chunks, the drafters of the document have made it easier for those who teach the Explanation in NFE settings to create an understandable sequence of lessons. Notably, this allows facilitators of programs with relatively short runs, like many adult instruction (or adult confirmation) classes, Bible classes, and some confirmation instruction classes, to focus on the big ideas more easily. For example, in an adult instruction class the facilitator could use the format of the Central Thought component as a lesson plan. This provides all the essential information of the Enchiridion, plus a narrative for Bible study, a summary of how this influences Christian identity, and reflection questions for discussion. Then, in the same setting, the Questions and Answers could be used to supplement the Central Thought as questions arise. In addition, the new layout of the Explanation should also help those who learn the Explanation in NFE settings to more easily track what they missed (and what they need to catch up on) as they drift in and out of learning sessions due to outside influences. This arrangement also gives a manageable plan for heads of household who want to teach different Chief Parts in their

homes. By intentionally mapping out the text itself and the index, a sequence for working through the elements in fewer than forty manageable steps (not including introductory sections) is achieved.

Interest: The layout and content of the new Explanation makes it much easier for facilitators in parish NFE to customize learning programs based on topics. By not only dividing the Enchiridion into manageable elements, but then by subdividing each element into two categories of questions and answers (A Closer Reading and Connections and Applications), the authors have provided a structure for users to easily reference critical issues. For example, if someone wants to learn more about life issues, he or she should think about turning to the Connections and Applications section of the Fifth Commandment. In this case, one would want to search in this subsection as opposed to the A Closer Reading section, which tends to focus more on unpacking the wording of the Enchiridion. In addition, the expanded side notes in the new edition supplement the questions and answers in a variety of ways, allowing teachers and learners to continually search throughout the text for bonus material that is relevant and accessible.¹³

Socialization: The most striking change to the new Explanation is the addition of The Central Thought and Psalm, Hymn, Prayer sections that bookend each element. This is a departure from previous editions, but serves to increase its usefulness as a parish NFE tool. As stated earlier, NFE settings rely more on a shared vision for social interaction than many formal settings. By adding these two subsections to each element, the authors built in discussion prompts, Bible studies, and orders for prayer. This changes the tone of the new Explanation from being primarily a systematic reference to also being a practical community-building curricular tool. By asking ourselves and each other the questions that begin each element, engaging in a narrative Bible study before exploring a chief part, or using the accompanying psalms, hymns and prayers, in a program or group learning experience, the Small Catechism becomes a much more socially agile teaching tool. This can only help to build motivation and a sense of shared learning.

Continuity: One will notice, right away, that the length of the new Explanation is greatly expanded, not only in page count but also in trim size. If this were to be a tool only for teaching confirmation to youth, then the expanded scope and size of could be seen as a

challenge. As a handbook for lifelong discipleship, however, the greater scope of this edition serves as an opportunity. With hundreds more proof texts, questions, and notes, as well as multiple new appendix articles, the new Explanation becomes a reference for life. It contains 1142 Scripture references, not including the hundreds of optional readings that can be read as teachers and learners alike continually spiral back to the timeless truth of God's word explained in the Small Catechism over the years. More than ever, the new edition of the Explanation is designed to be a tool for lifelong learning, and every household would do well to have a copy. Parish educators, then, can treat education as a kind of armory to educate, equip, and empower with the tools to rightly receive the gifts of God's word. The Explanation works well as a central piece in this.

Integration: From the earliest days of the church, different generations have gathered around God's word together. The more recent development of age-segregation in learning has spilled over into parish education in often non-helpful ways. Some of the new features in the Explanation help bridge those gaps. The Central Thought and Psalm, Hymn, and Prayer sections provide scaffolding on which to create conversations between older and younger learners in intentional ways. For example, at an intergenerational event in a parish, learners of all ages could spend a few moments in groups sharing their answers to the question "What are some examples of God's generosity in my life?" after reading Matthew 14:13–21 together.¹⁴ This is the example from The Central Thought to the First Article (Part 3), but is simple enough for different ages to appreciate as they learn together what it means that God has created them to be his own. As disciples from different ages and stages learn together in different NFE programs, parish educators can more easily scale up complexity from the Explanation to help differentiate learning.¹⁵

Closing Thoughts

Though underappreciated in my youth, as a parish pastor I rediscovered the Explanation and fell in love with it for what it is. As it happens, just last year I found myself as the developer for the new 2017 edition at Concordia Publishing House. As one in the parish who had looked forward to the new edition's release with great anticipation, as an editor on the project I can say that the volume has exceeded my expectations not only as a pastor, but also as a parish educator. Yes, the Explanation is long, but it is useful. The new components are well suited for teaching and learning in a non-formal

Though underappreciated in my youth, as a parish pastor I rediscovered the Explanation and fell in love with it for what it is.

education environment, taking into consideration unique challenges and opportunities like choice, interest, and socialization, as well as continuity and integration. Adults, in particular, would do well to

become acquainted with the book, reference it often, and use it as a guide for finding answers to life's big questions from God's word. Parish educators, including pastors, DCEs, and teachers, as well as faith leaders, would benefit from taking a fresh look at this tool. Together let us find ways to use this well-designed handbook for the Christian life in our own lives and in the lives of those whom God has given us to serve. Then, not only would we more faithfully and joyfully receive the gifts of God's word, but parish education, as a critical non-formal educational environment for equipping households with God's word, would be further strengthened in our congregation.

Endnotes

- 1 For understanding the origin and use of the Enchiridion, see Charles P. Arand, *That I May Be His Own: An Overview of Luther's Catechisms* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000); Robert Kolb, *Teaching God's Children His Teaching: A Guide for the Study of Luther's Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2012); and David L. Reuter, *Teaching the Faith at Home: What Does This Mean? How is This Done?* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016).
- 2 For a longer history of the Explanation, see David Aaron Fiala, "Martin Luther's Small Catechism: a History of English Language Editions and Explanations Prepared by the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 89, no. 4 (2016): 19–54.
- 3 Robert Kolb, *Teaching God's Children His Teaching: A Guide for the Study of Luther's Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2012), 15.
- 4 I. V. Ivanova, "Non-formal Education: Investing in Human Capital," *Russian Education & Society* 58, no. 11 (2016): 724.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Roslyn Cameron and Jennifer L. Harrison, "The Interrelatedness of formal, non-formal and informal learning: Evidence from labour market program participants," *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* 52, no. 2 (2012): 280.
- 7 Shlomo Romi and Mirjam Schmida, "Non-formal education: a major educational force in the postmodern era," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 39, no. 2 (2009): 260.
- 8 I. V. Ivanova, "Non-formal Education," 726.
- 9 For more on this, consult Sri Nurhayati, "Andragogical Content Knowledge as a Key Component in the Training of the Instructors of Nonformal Education," *International Education Studies* 8, no. 2 (2015): 220.
- 10 For a free resource outlining how to integrate these teaching elements in the parish, download *Timeless Truth: an Essential Guide for Teaching the Faith* at <https://teachthefaitth.cph.org/timeless-truth-an-essential-guide-for-teaching-the-faith>.
- 11 "Adults are responsive to some external motivator . . . but the most potent motivators are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like)." Malcom S. Knowles, Elwood Holton III, Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development* (Maryland Heights, MO: Elsevier, 2005), 68.
- 12 For more on how parish education functions as an ecosystem, see John Roberto, *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century: Engaging All Ages & Generations* (Naugatuck, CT: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2015).
- 13 Another great help for this is the Index of topics found on pages 422–429.
- 14 *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 156.
- 15 Reading plans for devotions can be downloaded for free at <https://teachthefaitth.cph.org/luthers-small-catechism-with-explanation-reading-plans>.

An Introduction to *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology*

Samuel Nafzger



Samuel H. Nafzger was director of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (1974–2008). He also served as director of Church Relations, assistant to the President (2008–2010)

and as the executive secretary of the International Lutheran Council (1993–2011). He presently lives in retirement in Washington, Missouri. He is the general editor of *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology*.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, in the 500th anniversary year of the Reformation, published a new dogmatics text. The last time the synod undertook such a project was 100 years ago with the first volume of Francis Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics* (1917, with two additional volumes in 1920 and 1924). This

article introduces *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology* by providing background material for the project. The first section will address the “Lutheran Approach to Confessing the Gospel,” the theological orientation on which this project is based. The second section reports on why this project was undertaken and how it has been implemented.

The Lutheran Approach to Confessing the Gospel

Confessing the Gospel in the Sixteenth Century

It was three o’clock on a Saturday afternoon. “The Lutherans,” as their opponents called them, gathered at the Bishop’s Palace in Augsburg, Germany, summoned by the most powerful man in Europe, Emperor Charles V, the thirty-year-old grandson of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella.

Thirteen years earlier in 1517, an unknown Augustinian monk had nailed ninety-five theses—or topics for discussion—on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg where he taught. Based on scriptural passages such as “the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7) this thirty-four-year-old professor of theology had concluded that “any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters” (LW 31, 28). This hammer blow set off a series of events that would change the entire world. It is the

500th anniversary of this event that was recently celebrated around the world.

The name of this young professor did not long stay obscure. Martin Luther's teachings quickly spread like wildfire throughout Germany and beyond. Four years later in 1521, he would receive an ominous letter from the head of the Holy Roman Empire: "Both we and the diet have decided to ask you to come under safe conduct to answer with regard to your books and teaching."¹ How would Luther react to this "invitation"? To a friend he wrote, "I will reply to the emperor that if I am being invited simply to recant I will not come. If to recant is all that is wanted, I can do that perfectly well right here. But if he is inviting me to my death, then I will come."² He wrote to another friend: "This shall be my recantation at Worms: 'Previously I said the pope is the vicar of Christ. I recant. Now I say the pope is the adversary of Christ and the apostle of the Devil.'"³

Luther, of course, *did* accept Emperor Charles V's invitation. But he did not go to Worms for the purpose of recanting—or, for that matter, for the purpose of dying. Instead, he stood his ground and defended his writings based on the authority of God's word. In one of the most dramatic moments in human history, he spoke these magnificent words of Spirit-wrought conviction that still move people's minds and souls:

Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply,
I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am
convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the
authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each
other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and
I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither
right nor safe. God help me. Amen.⁴

Because of this defiant refusal to cave in to the demands of the highest secular and sacred authorities of the realm, Martin Luther was condemned as a heretic and declared an outlaw.

Almost a decade later, the Emperor sent another letter, not to Luther this time but to "the Lutherans" who had dared to follow him and his writings. This time Charles was more conciliatory. The Emperor had a problem, and he needed the help of the Germans in dealing with it. The Muslim Turks, having laid siege to Vienna in 1529, threatened the Holy Roman Empire from the East (Vienna is only about 300 miles from Augsburg). There were insurgents in France and the West. If he was to be successful in holding the Empire together, Charles V needed the political support of the German princes. So he summoned "the Lutherans" to come to Augsburg, Germany, in an effort to save the Empire.

It was too dangerous, of course, for Luther himself to come to Augsburg; as a declared outlaw, he had a price on his head. He camped out at the 150-mile distant Coburg Castle and kept up with the proceedings via courier. Philip Melancthon, a

layman and Luther's friend and colleague on the Wittenberg faculty, authored, with Luther's help and approval, the *Augustana*, what we refer to today as the Augsburg Confession.

Christian Beyer, the Vice Chancellor of Saxony, presented the written statement of what the Lutherans believed. Beyer began with these words: "Most serene, most mighty, invincible Emperor, most gracious Lord. A short time ago your Imperial Majesty graciously summoned an imperial diet to convene here in Augsburg."⁵ After a few words of introduction, Beyer came to the reason they had come: "*This is our confession and that of our people*, article by article, as follows."⁶ Two hours later Beyer concluded this first formal presentation of the Augsburg Confession with these words:

These are the chief articles that are regarded as controversial . . . We have listed only matters that we thought needed to be brought up and reported on. *We did this in order to make it clear that among us nothing in doctrine or ceremonies has been accepted that would contradict either Holy Scripture or the universal Christian church.* For it is manifest and obvious that we have very diligently and with God's help (to speak without boasting) prevented any new and godless teaching from insinuating itself into our churches, spreading, and finally gaining the upper hand.

In keeping with the summons, *we have desired to present the above articles as a declaration of our confession and the teaching of our people.* Anyone who should find it defective shall willingly be furnished with an additional account based on divine Holy Scripture. (AC Conclusion, 1, 5–7)

On this day, with the reading of this statement, two things happened. As noted historian Roland Bainton writes in *Here I Stand*, his classical treatment of the life of Martin Luther, "One might take the date June 25, 1530, the day when the Augsburg Confession was publicly read, as the death day of the Holy Roman Empire."⁷ But something of even greater significance took place. On this day the Lutheran Church was born. The *Augustana* quickly became the magna carta of Lutheranism and, as many non-Lutherans would agree, all of Protestantism. Neither the ecclesiastical nor the political world has been the same since.

The Gospel and Three Reformation Solas

Fifty years to the day later, on June 25, 1580 the Lutherans published the Book of Concord, which, in addition to the Augsburg Confession, included the three ecumenical creeds—the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian. The sixteenth-century Lutheran confessors did not want to be doctrinal innovators. They wanted to confess nothing more and nothing less than what had been handed down in the Holy Scriptures. As they had confessed before Emperor Charles V in Augsburg, "nothing in doctrine or

ceremonies has been accepted that would contradict the Scriptures or the universal church” (AC Conclusion, 5). Running through each of the confessional writings in the Book of Concord is a common refrain; they unpack and spell out the confession of the gospel by the sixteenth-century Lutherans. Sinners are justified (declared right with God) by grace alone, through faith alone, on the basis of Scripture alone.

*There is no sinner for
whom Christ did not die.
There is no sin for which
Christ has not already
shed his blood.*

Grace Alone

At the heart of the Book of Concord, which includes the Augsburg Confession, and of the Lutheran approach to confessing the gospel, is the conviction that salvation is the free gift of God’s undeserved grace. The basis for the grace of God that alone gives hope to sinners is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Luther puts it in his explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. . . not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. (Small Catechism II.4)

God’s grace in Christ Jesus is for everyone. “We must always firmly and rigidly insist that, like the proclamation of repentance, so the promise of the gospel is *universalis*, that is, it pertains to all people (Luke 24[:47])” (FC SD XI.28).

The Lutheran approach to the confession of the gospel holds that God’s grace in Christ Jesus is universal. It embraces all people of all times and all places. There is no sinner for whom Christ did not die. There is no sin for which Christ has not already shed his blood. Forgiveness has already been won for our innate sinfulness (original sin) and for every actual sin that has ever been committed or ever will be committed. When Jesus said on the cross that “it is finished” (Jn 19:30), the forgiveness of sins was won for the whole world. It means that God has removed our sin as far as the east is from the west. He “has buried” our sin(s) there—and “has forgotten” where he buried them, because the blood of Jesus Christ has washed them away.

Theologians call this teaching “objective justification.” It is the purest gospel—music to the sinner’s ear—for who does not need to hear this message in dark moments of the soul when the enormity of our sin would drive us to despair, when the devil would use the littleness of our faith to devour us by telling us that our sins are too great, too numerous, too heinous for God to forgive? But since the universality of the gospel is the “gospel truth,” there is hope for all of us.

Faith Alone

While God's grace is universal and embraces all people, the Lutheran approach to confessing the gospel recognizes that the Scriptures teach that this universal grace of God can be appropriated by sinful human beings only through the gift of faith worked in us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The medieval Catholic Church did not deny, at least in theory, that sinners are saved by grace alone. Luther had learned from Augustine that only the grace of God could save him. But Luther's rediscovery of the gospel in all its clarity took place when it finally became clear to him that the Bible teaches that sinners do not first have to do something to merit God's saving grace nor do the works following grace contribute to salvation. God's universal grace is received by sinners *only* through the Spirit-wrought gift of faith in the heart. This rediscovery of the scriptural gospel comes through clearly in Article IV of the Augsburg Confession:

It is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3 [:21–26] and 4[:5]. (AC IV.1–3, 38–39)

It was this insight that sinners are saved “through faith alone” that transformed Luther into the great reformer. The justification of sinners through faith alone—*sola fide*—stands at the heart of the Lutheran teaching of the gospel.⁸

The teaching of salvation “through faith alone” permeates every part of what Lutherans believe, teach, and confess, and lies at the heart of the Lutheran approach to the confession of the gospel. This approach regards human reason highly, but it rejects all suggestions that rational arguments can produce faith in Christ. The Lutheran approach to the confession of the gospel recognizes also the importance of emotion and feeling in the life of a Christian, but it repudiates any and every claim that experience can add anything at all to the sinner's certainty of salvation (FC SD II.56, 554). Since salvation is “through faith *alone*,” it is never the result of any human effort or of a decision for Christ. Faith is always and only God's gift.

Scripture Alone

Luther's rediscovery of the gospel that sinners are saved not by what they do but rather solely by the grace of God alone, which they receive only through God the Holy Spirit's gift of faith, cannot be divorced from “on the basis of Scripture alone.”

Together with his contemporaries, Luther held that the Bible is the word of God. Unlike his opponents in the Roman Catholic Church, he rejected the notion that an

infallible magisterium of the church was necessary for the right interpretation of the Bible. For the Lutheran Confessors, Scripture alone is infallible. The institutional church and its councils, as well as its teachers, including the pope himself, can and do err. But, as Luther puts it, the Scriptures “will not lie to you” (LC V.76, 474). God’s word alone stands as the ultimate authority for what Christians are to believe about the gospel. Already in 1521, Luther had testified before the Emperor: “Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God.”⁹

“On the basis of Scripture alone” was the position of Luther. This *sola* informed the debates of the Lutherans with Rome regarding the understanding of the doctrine of the salvation of sinners. And Scripture alone provided the basis for resolving the intra-Lutheran controversies which threatened internal Lutheran unity following Luther’s death. The last of the Lutheran Confessional writings in the Book of Concord, the Formula of Concord, begins with these words:

We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone, as it is written, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119[:105]), and Saint Paul: “If an angel from heaven should proclaim to you something contrary, . . . let that one be accursed!” (Gal. 1[:8]) Other writings of ancient or contemporary teachers, whatever their names may be, shall not be regarded as equal to Holy Scripture, but all of them together shall be subjected to it, and not be accepted in any other way, or with any further authority, than as witness of how and where the teaching of the prophets and apostles was preserved after the time of the apostles. (FC Introduction, 1–2)

This understanding of Scripture lies at the heart of the Lutheran approach to the confession of the gospel, and it is the basic presupposition on which this project of preparing a new dogmatics text for the synod has been founded.

Confessing the Gospel in the Nineteenth Century

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod traces its beginning to 750 Saxon immigrants who came to the US in 1839 seeking freedom from religious rationalism in Germany. The entire venture, however, almost ended before it could even get off the ground. Just over four months after their arrival in Perry County, Missouri, their leader and bishop, Martin Stephan, was charged with “the sins of fornication and adultery, committed repeatedly, and of prodigal maladministration of the property of others,” and with being “guilty of false doctrine.”¹⁰ On May 30, 1839, Stephan was removed



der Augsbürgischen Confession, wie solche vor
 Erren Friderich Ferdinands König zu Hungarn u. Böheim allen Chr-
 vordienere Geistlichen und übrige Leiche Stände alhier die Augsbürg-
 andten Pfälz oder Bischöflichen Fronhofft öffentlich abgelesen
 nach dem Original gedrechnet, wie dieselben stehende
 zu sehen.
 geprediget die Stadt Soltz.



from his office as bishop. He was then excommunicated and forever banished from the settlement. The Sentence of Deposition pronounced upon Stephan states: “we hereby declare by virtue of our office that you have forfeited not only your investiture with this spiritual office, but also the rights and privileges of a member of the Christian Church, in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.”¹¹

This disastrous turn of events threw the newly arrived colonists into near chaos. Having lost their life’s savings, beset by harsh climate and illnesses, they now experienced the disillusionment of having the leader on whom they had built their hopes for temporal—and eternal—happiness exposed as a deceiver and hypocrite. They found themselves asking troublesome questions about the office of pastor, about the nature of the church, and about their very existence as Christians, all of which affected their understanding of the gospel itself.

Were they still a “church”? Since they had resigned from their calls to congregations in Germany, did the pastors in Perry County now have valid calls into the office of the ministry? Could the congregations call pastors, since they no longer had a bishop? Did they have to go back to Germany to continue being Christians? If they stayed in the US, how should they organize themselves in the face of their present circumstances? Should the laity have authority over the clergy? After all, the clergy had taken this action of removing Stephan, not the laity.

After almost two years, the Altenburg debate of April 1841 brought some clarity. One party in the debate, led by Franz Adolph Marbach, a lawyer, and his brother-in-law, Carl Eduard Vehse, who had been the curator of the Saxon State Archives, argued, that because of their grievous errors in leaving the Lutheran church in Germany, they could not be regarded as a true church at all. Since they were not a true church, they could not be properly constituted to have the authority to call pastors, and if they could not call a pastor, congregations did not have the sacraments. Carl S. Munding describes Marbach’s position in the debate at Altenburg:

To apply the word “church” to an organization that is built upon something that looks like the Word of God but is not, is [not only] a misuse of the term . . . but [it] is not Scriptural. God never calls such people a “church” or His children. Since such people have a false word, a false spirit, a false Christ in their hearts, they cannot be saved. There is no salvation in such a church. Such churches . . . have no God given authority to administer the mysteries of God which have been entrusted to the Church. Until they have repented and renounced the false word and the false Christ and returned to the true Christ, they cannot call a pastor or administer the Sacraments.¹²

In other words, such a “false church” did not have the gospel, and therefore the Saxon immigrants must return to their homes in Germany if they were to continue to be Christians.

A twenty-nine-year-old pastor named C. F. W. Walther disagreed. Taking his cue from Luther and the Lutheran Confessions' understanding of the doctrine of the church, he argued that, although they had been misled by Stephan, they had done so in ignorance. They had not lost the gospel entirely. They had simply lacked the ability to see through Stephan's errors. So they did not need to repent for having come to US. They might even regard their emigration as a work of God. But that was not the question of the moment, so argued Walther.

The burning issue before them now, according to Walther, was not whether they were a false church, but whether they could call pastors, and whether the pastors that they called could legitimately carry out pastoral functions. Walther contended that they could and that they should. The third of Walther's eight Altenburg theses states:

The name Church, and in a certain sense, the name true Church, belongs also to those visible companies of men who have united under the confession of a falsified faith and therefore have incurred the guilt of a partial departure from the truth, provided they possess so much of God's Word and the holy Sacraments in purity that children of God may thereby be born.¹³

He continues to say in these theses that "the name Church is not improperly applied to heterodox companies," that the "members of such companies may be saved," that the "outward separation of a heterodox company is not necessarily a separation from the universal Christian Church," that "even heterodox companies have church power . . . the ministry established . . . the Sacraments validly administered, and the keys of the kingdom of heaven exercised," and that "heterodox companies are not {to} be dissolved, but reformed."

In this way, Walther answered whether the gospel was being confessed and proclaimed in their midst and whether their administration of the sacraments was valid with a resounding and convincing yes. There was therefore no need for them to go back to Germany, because the name church can properly be applied also to them. Six years later, in April 1847, these Saxon immigrants who decided not to return to Germany, joined with a number of pastors sent by Wilhelm Loehe in Bavaria to organize "The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States." In 1947, this new synod officially changed its name to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

This new church addressed the Lutheran approach to the confession of the gospel in the confessional article of its constitution. Article II states: "The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation: (1) The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice; (2) All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God . . ."

This confessional article is followed with ten "Objectives" for the synod, the first two of which read:

The Synod and every member of the Synod shall

1. Conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph 4:3–6; I Cor 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom 16:17), and heresy;
2. Strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and extend *the Gospel witness into all the world*;

Two points stand out in these articles of the LCMS's constitution. Because Holy Scripture is the word of God in writing it "is the only rule and norm of faith and practice." First, the word *only* indicates that Scripture, the written word of God, is the final standard, the ultimate judge, the deciding rule, the "unnormed" norm for all that the members of this synod believe, teach, and confess about the gospel. Second, the word *only* means that there is nothing else that can serve in this capacity. Scripture, and only Scripture, determines what the members of this synod believe, teach, and confess about all those marvelous things which God has done, and continues to do in creating us, redeeming us, and sanctifying us. In other words, Holy Scripture is the sole and final norm for determining what the gospel is that is to be confessed and proclaimed.

Walther anticipated that some might conclude that a synod with "no power but the power of the word" and which determines its corporate position about what God's word teaches by majority vote, could result in the "democraticization" of the church or degenerate into "mob rule." But, says Walther, there need be no "fear that the secular element of a political democracy will invade the church, that therefrom will arise a popular government, a papacy of the people, and that we, who are to be servants of Christ, will thereby become servants of men."¹⁴

Why not? Because in Walther's understanding this newly formed synod was not just any old synod. It was a synod made up of members who had unanimously committed themselves to the Scriptures "as the only rule and norm of faith and practice." And this meant that it is an organization unreservedly committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ, who shed his precious blood for the forgiveness of the sins of the world, which is taught in the Scriptures.

Walther begins his first presidential address by saying:

In these days of sore distress there have again come days of great joy, days of refreshment and strengthening for us members and servants of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of this country. God has granted us grace that we, who knew and know that we are united in our faith . . . have been able to meet here to manifest our unity in the spirit publicly by deeds and jointly to strengthen this unity, to confess our most holy faith jointly and to be edified thereby, jointly

to take upon ourselves the burden of the individual and to present it to God in joint prayer.¹⁵

He contrasts the “joyful life” in this synod with that of the believers in “our former fatherland” who were “restricted almost entirely to solitary sighing in the closet.” It was being “united in our faith” that made membership in this synod such a joy for Walther. This unity in the confession of the faith provides the glue that would hold this organization together. To be sure, the founders of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States saw this synod as “our organization,” not as the church itself. But it was not *merely* an organization. It was a synod of believers in Jesus Christ, “going the same way,” bound unconditionally to the same Scriptures, confessing the same creeds, believing one gospel, offering praise to the one triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in one worshipping community, united in “pure doctrine.”

Walther concluded his first presidential address with these words:

Even though we possess no power but that of the Word, we nevertheless can and should carry out our work joyfully. Let us therefore, esteemed sirs and brethren [and we would add “sisters”] *use* this power properly. Let us above all and in all matters be concerned about this, that the doctrine of our dear Evangelical Lutheran Church may become known more and more completely among us, that it may be in vogue in and of our congregations, and that it may be preserved from all adulteration and held fast as the most precious treasure.¹⁶

When this happens, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod gives honor to our Lord and Savior. It gives a winsome witness to his gospel. It becomes a joyful instrument in the hands of our loving God to proclaim the gospel taught in Holy Scripture, the only really good news there is, about what Christ Jesus has done for us and for all people everywhere. And this is why the LCMS asked the successor to Walther to prepare a dogmatics text at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Confessing the Gospel in the Twentieth Century

In 1878 Francis Pieper was called to teach systematic theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, and in 1887 he succeeded C. F. W. Walther, not only as the president of the seminary but also as its premiere theologian. Some twenty years later, while still serving as president of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, he was elected to serve concurrently as president of the synod from 1899 to 1911.

After having completed his terms of service as synod president, Pieper was able to find time to work on a project that made use of his decades-long work of teaching systematic theology in preparing what was to become his monumental three-volume

systematics *Christliche Dogmatik* or *Christian Dogmatics*. Volume II appeared first in 1917, the 400th anniversary of the Reformation. Volume III was completed in 1920, and what was to become Volume I in 1924.

The order of the preparation and publication of Pieper's dogmatics is significant. Pieper tells us in the preface to the second volume why it had been prepared first. He says that this volume takes up "the doctrines of saving grace, of the person and work of Christ, of faith, of the origin of faith, and of justification by faith." He continues, "The reason for the very full presentation of the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, the doctrine of justification, requires no explanation. All doctrine of Holy Scripture is either *antecedens* or *consequens* of this article, and all false teachings antagonize it either directly or indirectly" (Vol. II, viii).

He further explains starting with Volume II in the section of this volume dealing with the relationship between the gospel and Holy Scripture: "Faith as far as it justifies, concerns itself only with the Gospel, not with the Law or the entire Scripture. . . . Only after a man is justified does he take the right attitude toward the entire Scripture, believing that Scripture is God's Word" (Vol. II, 423–424).

For Pieper, the person and work of Christ, together with the way sinners come to faith, form the very heart of the good news of the gospel. This is of the greatest importance, and it should be done first.

But this does not mean any diminution of his Pieper's commitment to Scripture as the final norm in confessing the gospel. In the preface to Volume I, which he wrote last, he takes up prolegomena and the doctrine of Scripture. He writes:

More than half of the present volume is devoted to "The nature and Character of Theology" and "Holy Scripture." This has become necessary because modern Protestant theology has adopted unchristian views regarding the nature of theology. And this is simply the inevitable consequence when men deny that Holy Scripture is God's infallible Word. . . . The claim is made that by identifying Scripture and the Word of God our theology will lead to an intellectualism, which will stifle all true and genuine religion of the heart ("*Herzenschristentum*"). This matter does not properly belong to dogmatics. Nevertheless, I consider it necessary to refute the unwarranted charge and to remove any misgivings concerning the "repristination theology," and have therefore set forth in some detail the religious life of a church body which is definitely committed to the "repristination theology." (Vol. II, ix).

He goes on to say, "our teachers [at the seminary] constantly admonished us not to substitute any human authority—not even Luther or the Lutheran Confessions—for the authority of Scripture."

But this does not mean for Pieper that the church can ignore what is going on in other churches or in the world. Quite the contrary is Pieper's contention. He writes in the preface to Volume II that in this dogmatics text he has endeavored to offer "a modern presentation [of Christian doctrine] in the true sense." What does he mean by this? In the first place, so he contends, a "truly modern presentation of Christian doctrine," one that is "abreast of the times," must first be "oriented solely to the Word of God, that is, it makes the Word of God its sole source of knowledge." The second characteristic of a truly modern presentation of Christian doctrine, however, is that it must "take account of ecclesiastical developments both past and present. It must propound and maintain the truth revealed for all times in Scripture over against human deviations not only in the past, but also today" (iii). Pieper's success in this endeavor is borne witness to that *Christliche Dogmatik*, published in English in the 1950s, has continued to serve as a basic textbook for the preparation of pastors and church leaders in the synod for almost a century.

But if Pieper is correct in his assessment of what a *truly modern* presentation of Christian doctrine in its *true* sense is, then there is a pressing need for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to do for our day what Pieper did for his. Namely, present the gospel taught in Scripture and confessed in the Lutheran Confessions in light of ecclesiastical developments of both the past *and the present*. It is for precisely this reason that preparing a new dogmatics was initiated thirty years ago. Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* can and will continue to stand as a valuable dogmatic resource, but there is a need for Lutherans to confess the gospel in the midst of the issues which confront us today.

"Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology"

The Assignment

In the early 1980s the president of Concordia Publishing House, Ralph Reinke, acting in response to requests from pastors, professors, and seminary students encouraged the president of synod to develop "a new Lutheran/Christian Dogmatics."

On September 6, 1983, President Ralph Bohlmann wrote:

The Synod's need for one or more new textbooks in Systematic Theology to replace, or stand beside, Pieper has been on the agenda of the Commission on Church Literature and Concordia Publishing House for many years. A recent recommendation to CPH of the standing Committee on Church Literature encourages the development and publication of such new materials.

Because of the overall impact of a text of this nature, I am appointing a special Editorial Committee to guide the development of this new dogmatic text. By this letter I am asking you to serve on that committee.

This letter was sent to the following individuals: the chairmen of the systematic departments of the two seminaries, John Johnson from St. Louis and David Scaer from Ft. Wayne; Edwin Lehman from the Council of Presidents; William Meyer from Concordia Publishing House; and Samuel Nafzger from the synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations. All five recipients of this letter agreed to serve.

In his appointment letter, President Bohlmann laid out this committee's specific assignment.

I plan to meet with the committee at its initial meeting, and from time to time as it carries out its assignment. That assignment is the determination of the general scope and character of the textbook(s), the selection of writers, and in concert with CPH the development of the manuscript.

Publication of this significant resource for the seminaries and clergy of the Synod should not be done in haste, but I hope it will occur in the [19]80's. The Committee's activities will be funded by CPH as Synod's publisher.¹⁷

During the coming months, this committee met in four sessions. Its meetings included consultations and discussions with parish pastors and with members of the systematics departments of the synod's two seminaries.

The committee concluded its work in April 1984 with the recommendation that the president of synod endorse the project and that Concordia Publishing House develop and publish such a resource. Included with the committee's report were five additional recommendations:

- That a general editor be named to guide and encourage the development of the project (the committee encouraged the president of synod, who had served for over twenty years as a professor of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, to accept this role).
- That associate editors be selected to edit/rewrite into an integrated format and style the contributions of invited national/international Lutheran scholars.
- That contributing authors be selected from a list of recognized Lutheran scholars and assigned a portion of the classical dogmatic loci in their area of expertise.
- That each locus should focus on at least four perspectives: Biblical, Confessional, Historical, and Contemporary. A further recommendation included a possible subsequent resource to assist in the application of each locus to contemporary teaching and preaching ministries of the church.

- That CPH should develop a publication schedule, editorial guidelines, appropriate contracts, and administrative responsibility.

The CPH board of directors endorsed the project at its May 1984 meeting, and the president of synod agreed to serve as the project's general editor. He also accepted the recommendation to appoint associate editors to work with him to bring this project to completion. Those appointed were the academic deans of the two seminaries, John Johnson, St. Louis and Howard Tepker, Ft. Wayne, and the executive director of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, Samuel Nafzger. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod endorsed this project at its next convention in 1986.

Implementing the Assignment

The editors of this project immediately began work preparing a new dogmatics for the synod. After several months of discussion the editorial committee decided on a non-traditional format that they called the “building-blocks approach” (more about that below). One of the major reasons for this decision was the desire to demonstrate by its very method of presentation how Lutherans go about doing theology and confessing the gospel. This would mean that they would first present a review of what the Holy Scriptures say about the topic of each locus with minimum comment. Next, they would review what the writings in the Book of Concord say about that topic, and only then present an organized, systematic essay of what Lutherans believe, teach, and confess about that article of faith.

Having decided on the building-blocks approach, the editorial committee proceeded to invite theologians from the Missouri Synod and its partner churches in the International Lutheran Council to participate in this project. Over seventy invitations were sent, and almost all were enthusiastically accepted. From this pool of participants, the editorial committee selected the principle drafters for each of the fifteen loci agreed upon by the editorial committee. Additional assignments for the respective building blocks for each section of each locus were also made. Each of the three original associate editors was given responsibility for editing and integrating the various building-block materials for each locus into a unified draft for presentation to and review by the entire editorial committee. After frequent rewrites and many revisions, the final draft of each locus was submitted to the synod's process for doctrinal review and approval.

The editorial committee early on, after months of deliberation, selected the title *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology* for this new dogmatics. For Lutherans, the gospel is at the center of every theological endeavor. At the same time, the editorial committee wanted the title to give witness to its conviction that

The editorial committee decided on a non-traditional format that they called the “building-blocks approach.”

the systematic presentation of the gospel in all of its articles as taught in the Holy Scriptures and expounded in the Lutheran Confessors is the never-ending task of the church in its own time and place. This task is never completed once and for all time. It is therefore always “an approach.” Finally, this task of preparing a systematic presentation of the gospel in and for the church militant is itself an act of confession. It is not a matter merely of making a systematic presentation of the gospel for its own sake, but it is also a matter of confessing Jesus Christ so that all might hear the good news and be saved eternally.

While most of the loci of the new dogmatics had been completed and doctrinally approved by the early 1990s, the work of such a large and complex project involving contributors from around the world, speaking different languages, and busily engaged in their respective ministries experienced many and long delays. Synod president Ralph Bohlmann was succeeded by President Alvin Barry in 1992, Barry by Presidents Robert Kuhn and Gerald Kieschnick in 2001, and President Matthew Harrison in 2010. During this time, David Lumppp, professor of theology at Concordia University in St. Paul was asked to take the place of Howard Tepker, who had passed away in 1998. Nafzger was asked to supervise and coordinate the work of completing the remaining chapters, making use of the ESV translation of the Bible (in place of the original NIV) and the new Kolb/ Wengert translation of the Book of Concord (2000) in all of the texts of this project. Nafzger was also responsible for working with a new generation of theologians at both synodical seminaries who were asked in 2006 to review the texts written earlier with a view toward addressing new theological issues that had arisen after the original texts had been prepared.

As mentioned above, all texts in *Confessing the Gospel* have been submitted and resubmitted at various stages in their preparation for doctrinal review by multiple reviewers appointed by four successive presidents (Bohlmann, Barry, Kieschnick, and given final approval by two reviewers appointed by President Matthew Harrison). But the editors (Nafzger, working together with John Johnson and David Lumppp) are alone responsible for *Confessing the Gospel's* final content.

The Building-Blocks Approach

Confessing the Gospel makes use of a unique format for presenting the classical doctrinal tenets, referred to as “the building-blocks” approach. Each chapter or locus, is structured around five building blocks that organize the vast array of biblical, confessional, and historical data that define and inform each of the doctrines addressed. These five blocks provide the central

The building-blocks approach seeks first to organize the scriptural teachings on key issues in an easy to follow format.

design for each of the loci. (Because of the nature of the material, the chapter on “Prolegomena” is not structured around this format). The five building blocks are:

Scriptural Foundation. In this first section of each chapter, the relevant biblical texts of the Old and New Testaments are presented, with a minimum of theological interpretation, in general canonical order and according to broad categories (e. g., Pentateuch, Historical Books, Gospels, etc.). The Scriptures are the Word of God in a collection of ancient writings in Hebrew and Greek, not a collection of doctrinal topics. Therefore the first building block examines the pertinent passages from the Holy Scriptures in a contextual, exegetical way. Only after studying them in an intentionally exegetical way can we consider how they fit together into the *corpus doctrine*, in a systematic theology.

Confessional Witness. The major (and sometimes minor) discussions of the topic of each locus in the documents in the Book of Concord are noted in this section and reviewed, but with minimal commentary.

Systematic Formulation. Here is a detailed discussion of the scriptural and confessional data for that locus, organized in a systematic essay. This section of each chapter focuses on presenting the doctrine under discussion through the distinction between law and gospel and the material principle of theology (justification by grace, through faith, for Christ’s sake). The focus in this block is on a positive presentation of what Lutherans “believe, teach, and confess” about this specific article of faith. This section often draws on the writings of Luther and of other theologians such as the early church fathers, the seventeenth-century orthodox theologians, and contemporary theologians as it addresses the teachings of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions relating to the topic of each respective locus.

Historical and Contemporary Developments. This section presents a summary overview of the key issues, persons, and movements associated with each locus down through the Christian tradition—the Early Church, the Middle Ages, the Reformation Era, the Age of Orthodoxy, the nineteenth century, and the contemporary period. It provides a brief history of the topic of each locus and an explanation of the specific challenges that have characterized this history. It reviews the significant errors and controversies that have arisen in the course of the church’s teaching and confession of that article of faith. As it does this, it may engage

in the polemics of defending and upholding right, scriptural teaching and repudiating false teachings and heresy, but always seeking to do so in the spirit of 1 Peter 3:15, “Be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

Implications for Life and Ministry. Each locus ends with a short, reflective essay on key pastoral and congregational concerns regarding the importance of the doctrine of each locus and its implications for daily living. It addresses the key question, “What difference does this article of faith make for Christian life and ministry in the twenty-first century?”

A further word about the benefits of the “building-blocks” approach employed might be helpful. First, the Scriptural Foundation and Confessional Witness sections present the data, the seminal material pertinent to that topic. The first two building blocks are intended to marshal the primary data for each locus as revealed in the Bible, the final rule and norm for faith and practice, and the Lutheran Confessions, as a correct exposition of what Lutherans believe, teach, and confess about the doctrine under discussion. The goal in these sections is to let the Scriptures and the Confessions “speak for themselves,” that is, to allow for the clear and powerful witness of God’s word and the Lutheran Confessions.

The Systematic Formulation building block is the heart of each locus; it brings together the basic biblical and confessional material into a concise, yet systematically organized essay. In general, the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions citations are not quoted at length in this section, but they do form the foundational basis and norm for what is concluded about the topic. The works of Luther and of other theologians give insights into the issues at stake in the treatment of each of the respective loci. This building block, then, presents the truly systematic portion of each locus, and some readers may therefore wish to go directly to this section. Others may find it more helpful to make use of one of the other sections in carrying out their study of Holy Scripture.

The Historical and Contemporary Developments section reviews the history of each article of faith, and evaluates the errors and aberrations from the teachings of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions associated with it in the life of the church. In this way this section gives its readers a basic understanding of past problems and errors as this doctrine faces new challenges that arise in the church’s ongoing efforts today to understand, confess, and teach the gospel faithfully. Especially in this section are copious references in footnotes pointing to other treatments of the topic, including original sources, for further in-depth study.

The Implications for Life and Ministry section identifies how this locus informs the church’s pastoral ministry at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In many

respects, this section stands as a testimony to the gospel's impact on the life of the church as it explains why the topic of each locus is relevant for life and ministry in the church today.

In summary, the building-blocks approach seeks first to organize the scriptural teachings on key issues in an easy to follow format. Readers may choose to “get the full picture” by working through each of the five blocks in sequence, or they may choose to focus on one particular section. This approach is especially helpful for busy parish pastors and teachers. It offers a quick review of the history of each of the topics addressed through the 2000-year history of the church.

Second, *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology* demonstrates how Lutherans do theology from a Christ-centered, gospel-focused perspective, under the authority of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. For Lutherans these are the *norma normans* and the *norma normata* of theology. The positive, confessional, systematic presentation of the gospel in each locus is anchored in these standards, since a Lutheran dogmatics will always be rooted in the inspired writings of the Old and New Testaments and the confessional writings in the Book of Concord, which Lutherans recognize as a true and correct exposition of the written word of God.

Third, it should be noted that the “building-blocks” approach assists pastors and students of the Bible to see and make use of the contributions of scholars from each of the traditional theological disciplines—exegetical, systematic, historical, and practical—in bringing their respective insights directly to the task of confessing the gospel today.

Finally, this project has allowed Lutheran theologians from all over the world to work together in confessing the gospel to the church and to the world. This project was designed from its very beginning to be an international effort, drawing on the expertise of Lutheran theologians in doctrinal agreement living in diverse settings, in different cultures, and speaking different languages. This project is a work of the church for the church.

Conclusion

John Theodore Mueller in his forward to the English translation of Volume II of Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* states:

It has been said that his [Pieper's] *Christian Dogmatics* is Scriptural in a preeminent sense. That is true, for not only does it draw all doctrines from Holy Scripture, but it is also eminently practical in the sense that it constantly appeals to the Christian's heart for the

*This project has allowed
Lutheran theologians from all
over the world to work together
in confessing the gospel to the
church and to the world.*

grateful response to the divine Word which has salvation as its goal. Dr. Pieper was fully convinced that the ancient saying *Theologia est habitus practicus theosdotos* is absolutely true and that for this reason no one has a right to teach theology who does not in all of his theological endeavors seek to lead souls to Christ for salvation. The theologian who peruses this dogmatics with that goal constantly in view will glean from that study blessings for the strengthening of his faith, the increase of his love for Christ, and the triumphant enlargement of his hope of eternal life. The devotional values of this great work on doctrinal theology are undeniably precious. (Vol. II, vi)

This emphasis runs from Luther and the sixteenth-century reformers' rediscovery of the gospel through the Saxons and Walther who established The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*. It is the conviction that the gospel so beautifully summarized by Jesus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16) must always stand at the heart and center of the church's confession. This simple yet profound good news taught in the inspired and infallible writings of the Holy Scriptures and rightly confessed in the Lutheran Confessions informs *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology*.

Endnotes

- 1 Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1950), 179.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid., 185.
- 5 AC Preface, 1. All references to the Lutheran Confessions are from Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).
- 6 AC Preface, 24.
- 7 Bainton, 325.
- 8 Unfortunately, despite some progress in resolving this disagreement with the Roman Catholic Church, salvation through faith alone, remains as a sticking point between Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification to the contrary notwithstanding. Revealingly, the phrase “through faith alone” appears nowhere in the Catholic or the common sections of the Joint Declaration on Justification which was signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican in 1999. While progress has been made in bringing Lutherans and Catholics closer together in confessing the Gospel, critical differences remain on such issues as the definition of sin and the role of faith. Pope John Paul II, for example, could issue his millennium indulgence a year later and defend it as not being in violation with the Joint Declaration on Justification signed with the Lutheran World Federation.)
- 9 Bainton, 185.
- 10 Walter Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri, 1839–1841*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 418.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Carl Munding, *Government in the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 119.
- 13 Erwin L. Lueker, ed., *Cyclopedia* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 22.
- 14 2016 Handbook, 11.
- 15 Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 176.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Excerpt from letter on file.

A Review of *Confessing the Gospel* in the Context of Contemporary Theology

Mark Mattes



Mark Mattes chairs the theology and philosophy departments at Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa. He has served in ministry for over 30 years. He has authored several publications, including, most recently, *Martin Luther's Theology of Beauty: A Reappraisal* (Baker Academic, 2017).

The publication of the two-volume *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology* is a remarkable achievement. Decades in the making, it offers a reliable orthodox supplement to Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*, now almost

a century old, that will benefit not only The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) but all church bodies connected with the International Lutheran Council, as well as readers from many different confessional traditions seeking a Lutheran perspective on theological loci. Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* has served the LCMS well providing a common vocabulary, grammar, and syntax for LCMS pastors, teachers, and missionaries.

While LCMS pastors do not always see eye-to-eye in how best to articulate the faith publicly, they share a common theological background in Pieper which helps them not talk past each other—something not at all common among other denominations. For instance, those who think that the 1984 Braaten/Jenson *Christian Dogmatics* functions in a manner similar to Pieper for leaders in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are wrong. There is no single, common theological resource among ELCA teaching theologians, and this one has wide-ranging points of view among its various authors. Some professors only use chapters of the Braaten/Jenson *Dogmatics* in their courses, but many do not. Since the ELCA is the result

Editor's note

Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology. Two Volumes. Edited by Samuel H. Nafzger, with John F. Johnson, David Lumppp, and Howard W. Tepker. St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017. 1261 pages. Hardcover. \$89.99.

of several mergers, and it highly values both academic freedom and individual self-expression, ELCA teaching theologians have no one single resource, which shapes the confessional stance of its future pastors. While study of the Book of Concord is required for ELCA ministerial candidates, there is no one standard approach to systematic theology in the ELCA. In that regard, the ELCA is similar to the majority of mainline Protestant denominations.

All humans are theologians, although most are not very good ones.

Addressing Current Trends

In spite of the fact that Pieper provides a common approach to faith in the LCMS, much has happened theologically in the last century. Pieper may well be confessionally solid, but Pieper alone may put seminarians at a disadvantage for it offers no slant on how to decipher trends that have developed in theology over the last several decades. To mention just a few: liberation theologies, various textual criticisms of the scriptures, process theology, the “Left Behind” approach to eschatology, feminism, religion and science, and environmentalism. Understanding these movements, along with articulating a coherent response to them, is increasingly important for pastors. Pieper himself sought to offer an approach that was a “truly modern presentation [of Christian doctrine] in the true sense.” That is, he wanted to do theology “abreast of the times” but one “oriented” solely to the word of God, honoring the word as the “sole source of knowledge” (Vol. I, xxvi–xxvii). The contributors to *Confessing the Gospel* have good precedent in Pieper. I doubt that Pieper would want his work either fossilized or canonized.

All humans are theologians, although most are not very good ones. Since pastors have years of training in theology, they are often the first resource that faithful laity approach to help them understand new currents in matters of faith. Pastors need to be on top of things theologically. *Confessing the Gospel* promises to help pastors to be more aware of these new currents from within the perspective of orthodox Lutheran theology.

Current trends in theology should not be dismissed as fads. Since Pieper finished his magnum opus, much research has gone into biblical interpretation, study of the patristics, Luther studies and the study of confessional traditions, ecumenical discussions and cul-de-sacs, as well as significant achievements in dogmatics, such as the work of Karl Barth (whether we agree with him or not). Modern Luther Studies had not even reached its adolescence when Pieper finished his *Christian Dogmatics*! A sound dogmatics wants to take into account all this work, but it would be the rare single individual who could deliver that. To its credit, *Confessing* does account for or reference the bulk of recent theological trends.

Originally planned in 1983, this work has twenty-three primary contributors, several who now are deceased. One might think that this many authors would produce a patchwork approach to theology, lacking continuity. That is significantly not the

The authors draw out the implications of each locus for life and ministry, especially for how the doctrine bears on the proclamation of the gospel nearly two decades into the twenty-first century.

case. Most likely, this is because the authors seek neither novelty nor conformity to trends on display at the American Academy of Religion, but instead seek fealty to the LCMS theological heritage. To this end, the editors achieve a consistent thread throughout. The loci surveyed include prolegomena, God, creation, anthropology, the person and work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, Holy Scripture, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the church, the ministry, Christian life, eschatology, and election. No defense is given for this specific ordering or selection of loci topics. One might ask, for instance, whether there should be a locus devoted solely to the doctrine of justification, given its centrality in Lutheran confession.

However, this doctrine finds its way into each of the given loci and it is a specific theme in the locus on the Holy Spirit (and thereby it is true to Luther's Catechisms).

Building-Blocks Approach

In any theological system, the logic of how to present the gospel is discerned not from a distance but in the thick of working through the disputes surrounding each topic. What is unique here, is that this dogmatics offers a "building-blocks approach"—a certain order in examining the resources for any given topic. First, it presents the scriptural foundation, a survey of the relevant biblical texts for each topic "in canonical order" (xxix). Second, it examines the confessional witness, how the topic is presented in the Book of Concord. Third, it offers a "systematic formulation" which brings "together the biblical and confessional data in an organized way," offering "a systematic formulation of each topic on this normative foundation." Fourth, historical and contemporary developments are described to evaluate how various thinkers have dealt with the specific topic throughout the church's history (along with a Lutheran response to those thinkers who deviate from truth). Finally, the authors draw out the implications of each locus for life and ministry, especially for how the doctrine bears on the proclamation of the gospel nearly two decades into the twenty-first century.

More than proof-texting, a building-blocks approach teaches that good theology listens to the biblical, historical, and confessional witnesses and processes them, weighing and sifting various voices and trends responsive to them, and evaluating them in order to offer an "intelligent and winsome articulation" of the gospel (Vol. I, 2).

Confessing Faith

The title indicates that the contributors want to stand in the Lutheran precedent of

confessing. In 1521, Luther confessed his faith before the Holy Roman Diet at Worms. In Augsburg in 1530, Christian Beyer, vice chancellor of Saxony, read aloud the Melancthon's Confession before Emperor Charles V and other nobles and churchmen. And, as Samuel Nafzger notes, the Perry County Saxon immigrants led by C. F. W. Walther confessed at Altenburg, Missouri (April 1841) that their movement still constituted a church in spite of the downfall of their recently dismissed "bishop" Martin Stephan. Given that Europe and America are increasingly secular, with views explicitly counter to faith, the stance of confession will become ever more important. More than likely, Christians will face more and more opposition (which is not to say a diminishment of the gospel's power for those under the cross). The ability to help Christian leaders articulate and defend their faith is crucial for the health of the faith. And the first step towards confessing is learning. For learning, *Confessing the Gospel's* building-blocks approach is a significant advance over Pieper. For instance, the scriptural foundation in each locus shows the interconnectedness of the specific topic throughout the scriptures. In other words, good theology knows the context of its scriptural basis, but here the context is placed within the entire witness of the scriptures. This creates a two-way street that helps not only systematic theology but also, frankly, exegesis.

The ability to help Christian leaders articulate and defend their faith is crucial for the health of the faith.

Likewise, the historical sweep of Christian theology presented in *Confessing the Gospel* is a significant advance over Pieper. This is not to say that Pieper is not strong but that the contributors to *Confessing* have done their homework well.

Prolegomena

Theology has been described as reflection that takes place between worship services, more specifically, as reflection between preaching. That is a good approach. More abstract or "secondary discourse of the church" (Vol. I, 25) is beholden to its rich content, specifically conveying Jesus Christ, which is done in primary discourse, that is, in preaching or proclamation (Vol. I, 25) (and, in my thinking, prayer). However, it is also done so that Christian truth might be presented in preaching and spoken in prayer so that Christ is honored and God is glorified. Following Luther closely, David Lumpp, the primary author of the prolegomena, notes that the proper subject of theology is humans guilty of sin and God as justifier (Vol. I, 3). This theme extends throughout *Confessing the Faith*: forensic justification is front and center for how each locus is configured (Vol. I, 9). More than that, as Lumpp argues, Lutheran theology is "radical (i.e., fundamental, basic, going to the root) in three respects.

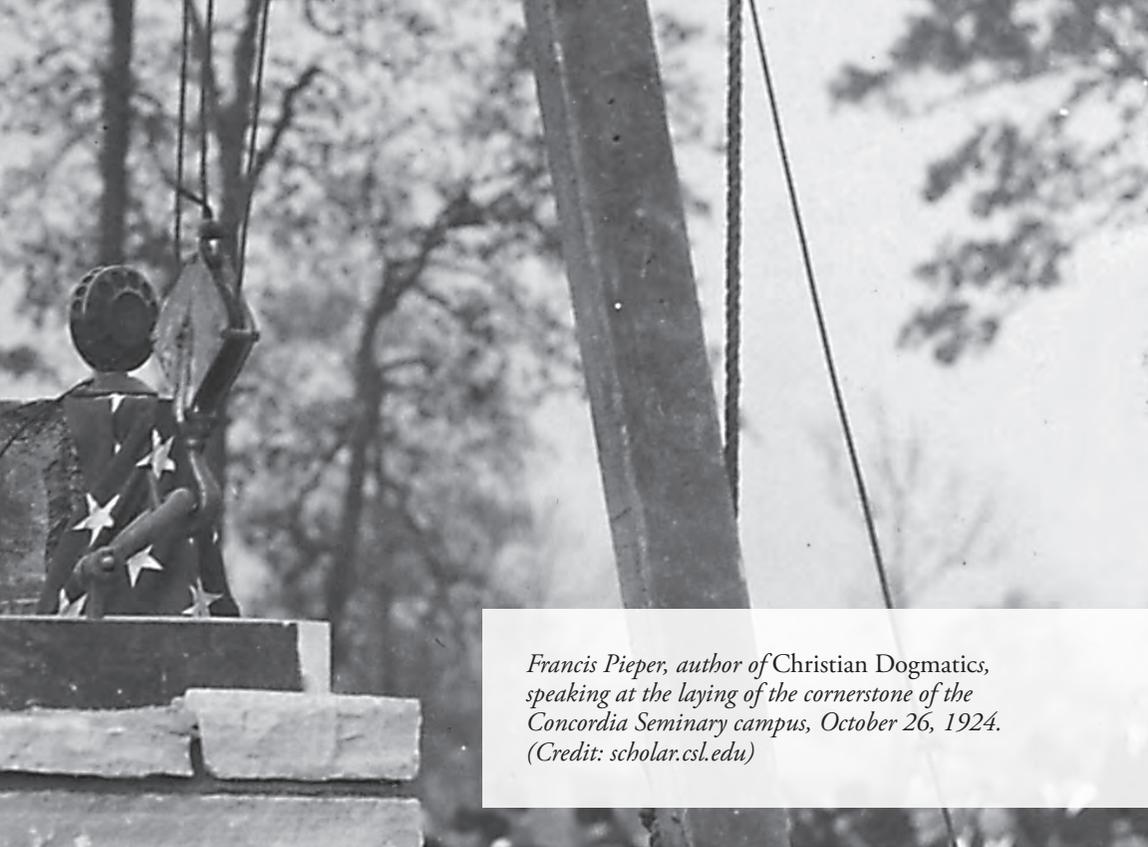


First, it recognizes the condemning law and wrath of God and the guilt and lostness of humanity. Second, it recognizes the exclusive working of God in human salvation (*sola gratia*). Third, it recognizes the transformation of humane existence that is produced by the saving act of God” (I, 9).

Likewise, doctrine is not merely a human construct but an echo of God’s address to humankind. “Doctrine, properly understood, is not simply a series of veracious propositions about God. Rather, it is revealed truth describing the reality of God’s saving relationship to human beings in Jesus Christ in all its implications (Vol. I, 16).” The practice of theology alters the character of the theologian: “theology is a God-given practical attitude (*habitus practicus*) intended to foster living faith and bring salvation” (Vol. I, 41). The discipline of theology becomes definitive of the theologian’s character.

The Triune Life

In the locus on God, primary author John F. Johnson honors the thoroughly Trinitarian approach to God in Lutheran theology seen through the prism of the law and gospel dialectic. “While the doctrine of God was not in general a major concern in 16th-century theology, the Lutheran confessors recognized that the triune God



Francis Pieper, author of Christian Dogmatics, speaking at the laying of the cornerstone of the Concordia Seminary campus, October 26, 1924. (Credit: scholar.csl.edu)

is not known properly apart from the distinction of law and gospel” (Vol. I, 70). Johnson balances the “economic” approach to the trinity, highlighting how God manifests himself in salvation history, with the “immanent” trinity, highlighting unity between the three persons in the inner-Trinitarian life (Vol. I, 72). The economic approach begins with the divine status of each of the three persons in their collaboration to achieve human salvation and from this infers their unity. Hence, “God” does not refer first to the abstract divine essence shared by all three persons, but instead refers most frequently to the Father seen to be the source of unity for the entire Godhead. This view is indebted to the Cappadocian fathers for whom the Father begins the story of salvation, the Son actualizes it in history, and the Spirit perfects it both now and in the life to come. The theological challenge latent in the economic approach to the Trinity is to articulate the union shared between the three persons.

In contrast, the immanent approach to the Trinity focuses on the Father as “unbegotten,” the Son as “begotten” and the Spirit as “proceeding” from both the Father and the Son. Properly “God” is the Godhead as the shared essence between the three persons. This shared being is the highest ontological principle and the locus of the divine unity. The challenge of the immanent approach is to incorporate the Threeness of God within the divine unity. With Augustine and the Western

Likewise, doctrine is not merely a human construct but an echo of God's address to humankind.

theological tradition, it emphasizes more the divine essence held in common within the Godhead and less the distinctiveness of the three persons. Whatever is said of God is said triply of the Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit, and, singly equivalently of the trinity (Vol. I, 75).

Most importantly, the two traditions should not be played against each other. Instead, we should follow Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner's axiom: "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity" (Vol. I, 76). As a word of critique: the degree to which contemporary Trinitarians such as Robert Jenson, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann, and Eberhard Jüngel square with this orthodox approach, should be expressly noted, if even in a footnote. Likewise, discussion of the "proofs" of God's existence could be augmented with recent research in intelligent design or recent defenses of them by Christian students of metaphysics.

Creation and Anthropology

In his locus on creation, primary author William C. Weinrich notes that the biblical approach to creation eschews the mythological approaches rampant in ancient cosmologies (Vol. I, 128). Highlighting an anti-mythological reading of Genesis, he claims, "This creation in six days indicates a linear movement of time that excludes the cyclic repetitions characteristic of paganism, which were based upon the recurring seasons of nature. Such linear movement implies that God has given purpose and direction to the world. Furthermore, the six-day creation indicates that God works in time and by his continuing work moves the world along to its appointed goal" (Vol. I, 129). However, given the widespread conviction of even many conservative Christians that the days in the creation account in Genesis 1 should not be taken literally, the exegetical question of parallelism between days one through three and days four through six should be addressed.

Applying a gospel angle to creation, Weinrich intertwines justification by faith alone as God calling new beings out of the nothingness of sin and death with the Genesis creation account. He notes that God's ongoing work is that of making a "new creation." That God only creates "out of nothing" applies to both creation and new creation. What does "out of nothing" mean? "This 'nothing' does not refer to anything outside God from which or on which God acted. Nor does it refer to a certain void that receives a positive and material existence. This 'nothing' is rather the sovereign will of God. To confess the creation *ex nihilo* is to confess that God is free and created the world solely out of his sovereign freedom by his will and command" (Vol. I, 163).

This truth that bears on human freedom is established solely through trust in God's goodness: "For human freedom lies in the certainty that all things needful for

body and life will be given by the good Creator. Humanity is free as the one created from nothing. That is, as those who receive all things from God and are, therefore, conformed to God's will, human beings are free" (Vol. I, 167). Interestingly, Weinrich refers to medieval theologian Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1075–1130) who retrieves the "Irenaeian view of conceiving creation and redemption as a single economy in which creation finds its goal in the incarnation of Christ," a position not so dissimilar, at least in this respect, from the work of Charles Arand. An ethical upshot of the doctrine of creation is concern for the environment: "the excesses of food, drink, and pleasure and the misuse of the body also may transform the environment, including one's own bodies, into one of God's judging 'masks'" (Vol. I, 215). As a brief critique, given today's secularism, it would be valuable when teaching creation to note that Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) offer mythological approaches to creation, similar to pre-Christian pagans. Hobbes approaches origins not grounded in original goodness but instead original violence, the war of all against all. In contrast, Spinoza makes no distinction between God and nature, not so dissimilar from Epicureanism. What this means for Christians is that the will bills itself as "science" or "truth" in political theory or some philosophies and is by no means inherently objective, but tinged with a significant anti-Christian bias.

The locus on anthropology was a team effort, including authors Jerrold Eickmann, Jerald Joersz, Thomas Manteufel, Daniel Mattson, and Joel Okamoto. Given the environmental challenges we currently face, the authors helpfully explain that God's

command to Adam to have dominion does not mean that humans may do whatever they wish with creation. Instead, "dominion is 'stewardship' of creation on behalf of God. Dominion does not mean 'dominating' or 'ruling over' others like a tyrant, using those who are under one's care simply for one's advantage or desire" (Vol. I, 281).

The authors find Gerhard Forde's imagery of an "upward fall" valuable in showing sin to be "rebellion, as an act of presumption, as the move from being in the image and after the likeness of God to seeking to be just as God," ultimately "nothing less than idolatry" (Vol. I, 296). Likewise, the "bound will" does not mean "human beings live under a kind of compulsion, that they are puppets" (Vol. I, 304). Instead, "with respect to the will of others, human beings may have what they will, especially in respect to their own thoughts, but with respect to the will of God, what human beings will is what God wills. There is no 'freedom' in this regard, and hence it follows that there is no freedom of the will. The human will is bound" (Vol. I, 306).

As Luther put it, humans are like beasts of burden, ridden by either God or the devil.

This truth can be explained, I think, by seeking to get at the core of someone's identity through asking, "What *captivates* you?" As Luther put it, humans are like beasts of burden, ridden by either God or the devil. So, to put a spin on it, there is no homunculus at the steering wheel of our minds who decides its captivations. Any alleged driver at the wheel of our hearts is always already captivated by something or someone. Our "wills" simply express this captivation in different ways and to different degrees. We may well be free to choose how to vote, but not free with respect to fearing, loving, and trusting in God, the source and goal of our very existence, above all things. Advancing the theology of the *imago dei*, the authors assess the Ireneaeen-inspired conviction of Wolfhart Pannenberg and the late Stanley Grenz over whether the image of God is to be understood as destiny or goal (Vol. I, 335). In place of this, the authors affirm with the Book of Concord that the "original righteousness" of Adam and Eve is the image of God (Vol. I, 336).

The Person and Work of Christ

Moving to Christology, the primary author, the late Gottfried Hoffmann, addressed the *person* of Christ and primary author, the late Henry A. Hamann, addressed the *work* of Christ. Christology is at the core of dogmatics: all theology is embraced in Christology (Vol. I, 416). Hoffmann notes that orthodox Lutherans affirm the *enhypostasia*, the view that the humanity of Jesus Christ does not form a person of its own but is instead taken into the person of the Son of God. In other words, the flesh and soul of Jesus Christ are assumed by the eternal logos (Vol. I, 371). The *enhypostasia* is opposed to the *anhypostasia*, the theory that affirms an independent existence for the humanity of Jesus (Vol. I, 385). We should, however, be wary of how some Christians deny the *logos asarkos* (word without flesh) and affirm that God is "always also the man Jesus," as does Pannenberg (Vol. I, 411). Counter to those who see ancient Christology as an importation of Greek metaphysics into the Christian faith, the incarnation actually cannot be accommodated to Greek philosophy. In other words, the doctrine of the incarnation makes metaphysics speak in Hebrew.

No Lutheran presentation of Christology can avoid the long-standing disagreement between Lutherans and the Reformed over the ubiquity of Christ's humanity: that the humanity of Jesus Christ is present in all places and that Christ wishes to be present in a way that transcends space (Vol. I, 378). Naturally, *Confessing the Faith* does not back away from this debate. Counter to the Reformed who historically interpreted the "right hand" of God (to which Jesus ascended) as a particular locus (and so, at least for Lutherans, making Jesus unavailable in a ubiquitous way), God's right hand is properly seen as the exercise of God's almighty power and allows the risen and glorified Jesus to be present everywhere as God and as a human being (Vol. I, 374). This stance is maintained against Zwingli's *alloeosis* doctrine in which divine things cannot be predicated on the human nature nor human things on the divine nature

(Vol. I, 375). The debate was crucial because it bears upon whether Jesus is really present in the Lord's Supper. The locus uses robust, gripping language to describe this truth: "But, the Formula says, Christ meets Christians in his humanity not only during his days on earth but also today. . . . If this were not true, then only Christ's naked deity would be among human beings like a consuming fire on dried-up stubble" (Vol. I, 376). Said even more to the point: "The 'I' of him who speaks with his disciples in a little spot in Palestine is the 'I' of him by whom the world was created and in whom it subsists" (Vol. I, 381).

The discussion of the atonement is masterfully done. In sum, "God imputed to his sinless Son all the sin of the world as if it were his own sin. Thus, Christ became the sin-bearer who endured God's judgment and condemnation of sin" (Vol. I, 440). Author Henry Hamann eschews any notion that Christ's atonement somehow buys off God: "God is merciful because of Christ from eternity. . . . while Scripture in its teaching of 'redemption' and 'ransom' never directly states to whom the ransom is paid, orthodox theologians have not hesitated to state that 'Christ rendered satisfaction to God . . . [because] it was . . . the holiness and righteousness of God which demanded satisfaction" (Vol. I, 474, n. 49). Counter to the widespread rejection of vicarious satisfaction, Hamann notes that Luther maintained this perspective, "[Christ] stands in our place and has taken our sins upon his shoulders. . . . He is the eternal satisfaction for our sins and reconciles us with God the Father" (Vol. I, 486, quoting WA 21. 264). Making the locus even more relevant, he challenges the "New Perspective on Paul," which tends to reduce the gospel to an ethics of making the eternal kingdom visible in Christian fellowship.

The Holy Spirit

The late Howard Tepker presents the locus on the Holy Spirit. Here, we find the most extended description of justification by grace alone through faith alone (Vol. I, 568–576). The discussion is solid, but it would have made sense to describe how the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* is inadequate in light of a confessional approach to justification by faith alone. In a unique move, at least for Lutheran theology, the chapter argues for a "Spirit-Christology." The upshot is to show

a measure of continuity between Jesus' life and the life of his brothers and sisters, giving the church a *Christoform* character. The same Spirit who rested on the son as he spoke God's life-giving words now rests on the church as she speaks words of eternal life that point to Christ as the revelation of the Father's love. The same Spirit in whom the Son was faithful to his Father and the suffering Servant unto death now leads the church to be faithful to her mission and vocation in the world and to dies to self in order to make room for the neighbor who needs her service. (Vol. I, 609)

No doubt this Spirit-Christology anchors Lutheran doctrine on the Spirit in patristic views of both Christ and the Spirit.

The Word of God

Given the crises over scriptural authority, which occurred in the LCMS in the early 1970s, it is not surprising that there is a full locus on Holy Scripture. Many contemporary theologies would include a discussion on scripture as part of a wider topic—revelation. In these models, scripture is one of many possible ways by which God may reveal himself, some even apart from the scriptures. The LCMS wishes to uphold not only the inspiration but also the inerrancy of scripture. Primary author Samuel Nafzger explains that, for the Book of Concord, scripture is pure, infallible, and unchangeable (Vol. II, 643), the authority for what is to be taught in the church (Vol. II, 648). Biblicism is not being espoused here. The “Word of God” is a theological concept that encompasses both Jesus Christ as well as its written form (scripture) and its spoken form (proclamation) (Vol. II, 654). Nor should anyone think that there is anything arbitrary about the canon. Instead, as Oscar Cullmann maintained, the New Testament *forced itself* on the church (Vol. II, 670). In a sense, the church *receives* and does not *produce* the Bible (Vol. II, 677).

Pastors are not to be lords who domineer over congregations but instead faithful shepherds.

Even so, the human dimension of the scriptures is acknowledged, appreciated, and affirmed. The Bible is acknowledged a diverse collection of literature (Vol. II, 674). Neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth is rightly criticized as having a Manichean approach

to the scriptures, since for Barth the Bible is but a witness to the word of God, which may or may not be conveyed through them. The chapter has an excellent summation of recent approaches in biblical criticism: canonical, structuralism, narrative, reader-response, social scientific, and deconstruction (Vol. II, 734ff.). In the classroom, I would urge that seminary and college professors also refer to Johann Georg Hamann’s insightful critique of historical-critical approaches to the Bible based on his appreciation for different styles of narrative.

Sacraments, Church, and Ministry

Primary author Robert Kolb writes on baptism and primary author J. A. O. Preus III on the Lord’s Supper. Kolb notes that the sacraments are no mere external sign of an inward grace but are visible, active words that establish new conditions and realities for sinners. With Luther, Kolb affirms that there is “no greater jewel” than baptism (Vol. II, 766), the means through which the old creature decreases daily and the new

person increases (Vol. II, 768), since it unites believers into the death and resurrection of Christ and so equips them with the Holy Spirit (Vol. II, 763).

In contrast to Calvin's worry that orthodox Lutherans drag Christ from heaven and place him on earth in their view of the Lord's Supper (Vol. II, 880), we should side with Luther that

the sacrament is the gospel (Vol. II, 807), to the extent that in the Lord's Supper eating is a means of human communion with God (Vol. II, 815). In the Supper, we fellowship with Christ both spiritually and orally (Vol. II, 855). Since those who commune unworthily will come under judgment, open communion should be eschewed (Vol. II, 890–891). The sacraments are a ministry of the church. Primary authors, the late Eugene F. Klug and William J. Schmelder, who write on the church, claim that while the church is organically constituted by people (Vol. II, 918), it has mystical union, a spiritual relationship with God (Vol. II, 936). Given the importance of the clear expression of doctrinal agreement as the basis for church fellowship, the LCMS does not favor the "reconciled diversity" approach to fellowship in the Lutheran World Federation (Vol. II, 954).

Jobst Schöne and Eugene F. Klug write on the ministry. Pastors are not to be lords who domineer over congregations but instead faithful shepherds. "In matters clearly taught and required in God's Word, the Christian congregation owes its pastor respect and obedience. In matters that are indifferent or free (that is, not required or forbidden by Scripture), the pastor ought to seek a freely given consensus among his people, without binding consciences in a wrongful, unscriptural way" (Vol. II, 994).

The Christian Life, Eschatology, and Election

Primary authors Milton Rudnick and the late Martim Warth in their locus on the Christian life highlight the agency of the Holy Spirit in working holiness in believers. Though spiritual advance cannot be measured however (Vol. II, 1077), even so, Christians should strive towards greater Christ-like behavior. They should actively oppose their flesh (Vol. II, 1048), confirm to God's will (Vol. II, 1055), and delight in their instruction in God's ways (Vol. II, 1056). Indeed, they should seek to cultivate virtues in their life (Vol. II, 1033) and, following Luther, keep the law "willingly" (Vol. II, 1036). With respect to eschatology, primary authors Edward G. Kettner and Paul R. Raabe note that, in contrast to "soul sleep" in which the soul is not conscious in the intermediate state, Luther instead believed that the soul is "awake" in the intermediate state (Lectures on Genesis 5:74). Following the Book of Concord closely, the office of the papacy is seen as the antichrist (Vol. II, 1154).

The doctrine of election is sensitive to two truths: God rules all and yet humans are completely responsible for their behavior.

Confessing the Faith concludes with a locus on election authored by Robert Kolb. The doctrine of election is sensitive to two truths: God rules all and yet humans are completely responsible for their behavior. How these two seemingly contradictory statements are true is a paradox or “mystery” (Vol. II, 1196). To be clear, “God’s choice of his family members is based upon the work and merits of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer. This choice includes also God’s resolve to call all sinners to repent and trust the gospel message of Christ as it is presented in the means of grace, the Word of promise that comes in oral, written, and sacramental forms” (Vol. II, 1209). If Luther’s theology of the cross is true, then the essence of God is mercy or grace, not sheer, raw power. “If a term like ‘decree’ is to be used at all regarding God’s decision before creation to make some fallen human creatures his own, it must be emphasized that it is a ‘decree of love’” (Vol. II, 1220). The doctrine of election is not to be confused with determinism, which would undermine God’s holding all to account for their behavior (Vol. II, 1223).

What Does This Mean?

Confessing the Gospel clearly is a labor of love, bringing together voices over decades, including those who are now among the faithful departed, seeking fidelity to scripture and the confessions, and desiring to commend this heritage as relevant for today. Luther vowed in 1512 to preach and teach the truth when he received his doctorate. More than anything, the love expressed here is a same passion for the truth. If orthodoxy has been concerned for anything, it is the truth. So much so, that it will grant full fellowship to those who share in the truth. I also sense in *Confessing the Gospel* that the truth spoken here is also spoken “in love” (Eph 4:15). The authors here are apt to describe false beliefs, and not prone to demonize them. They withhold overkill and so speak with a more credible and authoritative voice. Thereby, the authors are faithful to the Lord’s command to spread the gospel to all nations in a winsome way, not forcing contentiousness, but straightforwardly commending the truth.

Confessing the Gospel is also sturdy. It has done a fine job alighting on the major players in theology in the last century. I have mentioned a few places where I feel *Confessing* could have addressed more vigorously certain themes now prominent in theology, but overall, *Confessing* has skillfully and solidly reached its goal of addressing contemporary theology. Just a few theologians who appear in *Confessing* are George Lindbeck, Avery Dulles, Bernard Lonergan, Gordon Kaufman, Sallie McFague, C. F. H. Henry, Hans Conzelmann, Edmud Schlink, Catherine LaCugna, John Macquarrie, Richard Swinburne, Langdon Gilkey, Teilhard de Chardin, Paul Tillich, Peter Singer, Jean Paul Sartre. The text is accessible, designed for seminarians; laity can read this text with profit as well.

Confessing is written in an approachable way for students and pastors yet pushes them to think through how their faith bears upon contemporary trends and how

these trends impact faith, all without undermining the centrality of faith.

Finally, the text implicitly seeks, as all good Lutheran theology does, to give glory to God alone. It is written from faith and to faith, seeking to make faith in Jesus Christ even stronger and

move it more fervently to witness. This work conveys an energy that can help pastors to be faithful evangelists as well as catechists and shepherds.

Finally, the text implicitly seeks, as all good Lutheran theology does, to give glory to God alone.

Homiletical Helps

The Question-Answered Design

David R. Schmitt

In part, the art of preaching involves moving from scattered notes on a desk and flashes of insight during the week to a coherent sermon on Sunday. To do this, the pastor uses sermon structures: methods of ordering the ideas and experiences proclaimed in the sermon. All structures involve the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, but at different times and in different ways in the sermon. To intentionally choose a sermon structure, the pastor considers what divine work will be predominant in the sermon and what structure best communicates that work among his people. Consider now one such sermon structure used in service to God's work: the question-answered sermon structure.

In Scripture and the history of God's people, answers to theological questions do not simply drop down from heaven. God doesn't enter and work apart from the human struggle for comprehension and search for understanding. Rather, he chooses to work through it. God begins a conversation at a burning bush or in a boat out on the Sea of Galilee and, through question and answer, prophets and people are drawn into the working of God. For example, the bringing of God's kingdom to the Gentile nations did not come easily to the people of Israel. It involved long nights of prayer in the belly of a whale, a vigil outside of Nineveh, the correction of disciples wanting to call down fire from heaven, an afternoon dream and a visit to the house of Cornelius, a council held in Jerusalem, a public confrontation of Peter in Antioch, and a Pauline letter to the churches in Galatia. Through questions and answers, struggles for comprehension, God made his ways known among his people. To be a part of God's kingdom is more than knowing the right answers. It involves learning how to think theologically as one encounters God's work in the world. The sermon can be a place where the pastor helps God's people to think theologically about God's work in their world.

Doctrinal sermons typically present the basic teachings of the faith. How one presents such teachings, however, is a matter of structural consideration. On the one hand, the doctrinal sermon can simply give people answers. It can provide a clear

Editor's note

This article, in which, apropos to this issue's themes, Prof. Schmitt provides strategies and resources for preaching doctrine, is reprinted from "Sermon Structures: The Question-Answered Design," Concordia Pulpit Resources 11.4 pages 5-11, © 2001 Concordia Publishing House. Used with permission.

exposition of a teaching, set forth in a propositional form so that hearers can readily list the points.

Such a structural form is helpful and certainly has a place in preaching, but when used as the only means of preaching doctrine it can give the illusion that such teachings are easily formulated. It may seem to a parishioner that God intervenes in the world with heavenly answers, easily accessible, able to be found quickly and recited verbatim from a book. On the other hand, the doctrinal sermon can also form them to think theologically when making confessions of faith. The question-answered structure is helpful in this type of hearer formation. It does not replace the propositional structure in doctrinal preaching but rather is used as an addition to it.

Through the question-answered structure one leads the hearers through the process of answering a question that ultimately teaches them a truth of the faith. In this structure, the hearers not only learn the teachings of the faith but they also learn to think theologically. They are guided by the preacher in answering a question and, through such guidance, learn the teaching and how to arrive at such a teaching. The sermon provides an answer, a basic teaching of the faith, but it also provides an experience of arriving at that answer through theological contemplation. Such experience forms hearers in the task of thinking theologically in the complex context of their world. The question-answered structure has long been a part of preaching. H. Grady Davis spoke about “A Question Propounded” as an organic sermon form,¹ and Gerhard Aho listed “The Question Answered” as one of his outlines for preaching.² Most recently, Robert Hughes and Robert Kysar in their work *Preaching Doctrine for the Twenty-First Century* revive this structure for use in doctrinal preaching. Much of what follows is based on their perceptive work.³

Sermon Structure

The question-answered sermon structure has four parts: the focusing question, the first false answer, the second false answer, and the final Gospel-based answer.⁴ Consider how to form the sermon in each of these parts.

The Focusing Question

The introduction begins by posing a focusing question. There are three qualities essential to this question. First of all, it should be one for which there are several reasonable answers. The question should not be one that can be easily or obviously answered. Part of the dynamic of the sermon, the learning experience for the hearers, involves carefully working through reasonable or common answers as one relates them to the faith. To offer a question that can be easily answered on the part of your people hinders this dynamic and runs the risk of boring or, worse yet, insulting your hearers.

Second, the question should be simple and easy to remember. It will be spoken, not read, and will also serve as the unifying thread throughout the sermon. The simpler the question, the easier it is for the hearers to concentrate on the process of arriving

at an answer. To compose a simple question, however, may be difficult. Often, only after the entire sermon has been written is the preacher able to finally articulate precisely what question he has been answering. That's fine. Simply revise the sermon accordingly.

Third, the question should be significant for the hearers. It should carry real consequences for their daily living. Perhaps this question needs to be asked in order to reflect on past actions or to consider future behavior. Or, it may be necessary for people to know the answer in order to make sense of a biblical text or to relate to God's mission in the world. The introduction is the place where the preacher develops this significance for his hearers. Rather than simply state the question, the preacher begins by depicting a current situation or considering the text, and then he slowly leads the hearers to the central question that will become the focus of the sermon. Sometimes it is necessary in this process to identify matters that, although significant, will not be discussed in the sermon. This helps to focus the attention of the hearers on the central question of the sermon rather than wait for the preacher to finish that question and address other concerns they might have. The introduction of the question-answered sermon, then, begins by leading the hearers to a focusing question that has several reasonable answers and is simply stated and significant.

The First and Second False Answers

The next two sections of the sermon take the hearers through a process of posing, evaluating, and dismissing two false answers to the focusing question. The first false answer is either more commonly held by the people or more easily dismissed in evaluation. The second false answer requires more development than the first. The hearers move rather easily through the first false answer and its dismissal and then enter into a somewhat more complex consideration in the second. The first receives minor development. The second receives major development. For each false answer, however, the process remains the same: posing, evaluating, and dismissing the false answer. Since the same process occurs with each false answer, these two sections will be considered together here.

After the statement of the focusing question, the preacher poses a possible answer. The answer is not offered as a patently false delusion of non-Christian people but rather is stated as a reasonable and possible resolution that many might hold. The preacher considers for a moment why they might hold this position. This approach to the false answer is important. After all, some parishioners might be tempted to hold this false answer and, even if they don't, the preacher is offering hearers a model of how Christians seriously consider and compassionately work through the beliefs of others. Such a model of theological reflection forms Christians in the practice of maintaining both compassionate dialogue with and faithful witness to others in relation to the teachings of God.

After posing the false answer, the preacher then evaluates it. The criteria for evaluation are important at this point. In the question-answered structure, people learn more than an answer; they also learn to think theologically. How the preacher evaluates the false answer models such thinking for his hearers. For example, one false answer offers an interpretation of a passage of Scripture that contradicts its larger context. The preacher considers this false interpretation in light of the larger context and, on the basis of such a contradiction, dismisses it. In this process, the preacher models a principle of biblical interpretation for his hearers: namely, that scriptural passages are to be read in context⁵ and not simply lifted from the pages of Scripture and made to mean whatever one's heart says that they mean. Through evaluation like this, over time, the preacher models principles of interpretation for his hearers, reminding them how Scripture interprets Scripture or how Scripture is centered in Christ. In evaluating false answers, however, the preacher must avoid raising distracting issues that lead hearers away from the main question-answered design of the sermon.

The preacher poses a possible answer, evaluates it, and then, having revealed its error, dismisses it as a false answer. This dismissal prepares the hearers to consider another possible answer to the question. At the end of each section, then, the preacher offers a clear transition for the hearers. He states the false answer, returns to the original question, and poses the next possible answer. These sections that work through two false answers constitute the Law proclamation of the sermon. In evaluating and dismissing the false answers the preacher wants to proclaim how they affect one's relationship to God and to others. False answers involve trust and life. In these two sections of the sermon, the preacher reveals how far people fall away from God in both thinking and living, being troubled by and trusting in that which is untrue.

The Final Gospel-Based Answer

As the false answers have revealed sin in both knowledge and life, the final answer proclaims forgiveness, offering faith and life as God's gift. In this section, the hearers learn a basic teaching of the faith in answer to the question in the context of God's grace. The preacher communicates the true answer to the question in relation to God's gracious work in Christ. The answer might lead to that work or it might flow from it. Either way, the answer is placed in the context of Gospel proclamation. For example, a question about prayer could finally be answered when that question is heard in terms of the relationship between a child and a father. Hearing that God has graciously made us his children in Christ creates a context in which the true answer is heard. As the false answers reveal how far people wander from God's ways, the final answer reveals how far God goes to bring life to the world. God recognizes the error, intervenes through his Word and even now in this public proclamation, reveals faith and life according to his design.

At this point, it is important that the preacher not change the question being asked in the sermon to arrive at a Gospel-based answer.⁶ To do so is to answer a question

that was not being asked. This either tricks the hearers into thinking that you really have answered the question or shames them for “asking the wrong question” all along. Such a technique insults the hearers and models the idea that they are woefully inept at ever thinking through matters of faith. In the question-answered structure, the preacher seeks to model theological reflection. He retains the original question throughout the sermon and, ultimately leads the hearers to a Gospel-based answer. By so doing, he reveals how hearers can pursue questions in theological reflection and how such thinking leads to a deeper understanding of and trust in God’s gracious ways. The basic teachings of the faith are seen to flow from the Gospel, and theological reflection brings hearers in repentance to the gracious presence of their God.

The question-answered sermon structure offers preachers another method for doctrinal preaching. Like other doctrinal sermon structures, it conveys the basic teachings of the faith. It does so, however, in a formative way: it guides hearers in the practice of theological reflection and thus equips people for witness. In addition to clarifying doctrinal teaching, the question-answered sermon structure also emphasizes God’s work. It participates in God’s preparation of his people “to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet 3:15).

Endnotes

- 1 H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958) 154–57.
- 2 Gerhard Aho, *The Lively Skeleton: Thematic Approaches and Outlines*, The Preachers Workshop Series, Book 4 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977) 33.
- 3 Robert G. Hughes and Robert Kysar, *Preaching Doctrine for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) 101–7.
- 4 For an example of the question-answered sermon structure, see the sample sermon for the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost included in this issue.
- 5 This example illustrates in a minor way what Voelz calls the “integrity principle.” James Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995) 357–58.
- 6 There is a sermon structure that works on the basis of contrast and “asks the wrong question” only to ask the “proper question” at the end of the sermon. This type of development, however, is not appropriate for the question-answered sermon structure.

Reviews

Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?: 12 False Christs.

By Matthew Richard. Concordia Publishing House, 2017. 261 pages. Paper. \$14.99.

Matthew Richard has written a timely and helpful book for Christian laity and pastors. It addresses a question that Jesus himself raised, “Who do people say that I am?” (Mk 8:27). This was variously answered in Jesus’s day and continued to be over the centuries. Today many people are confused about the real identity of Jesus. In a culture where people have been granted unofficial license to make Jesus into whomever or whatever they desire, a book that calls out and addresses custom-designed christs while giving a clear biblical witness to Jesus’s real identity is much needed.

In *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?*, Richard uses an easy-to-follow story format describing encounters with various people holding to false views of Jesus. He states that the reader is to view this as a work of fiction based on real events from the author’s own life. It is a good approach in a post-modern context where people allow stories, even those with which they might not agree, to speak to them.

Richard’s introduction draws on theological insights to explain the source and purposes of false christs in general. This he relates to all people, Christians included. He refers to the Apostle Peter’s own confusion about Christ whom he confessed and states, “Tragically, we Christians—with the culture—commandeer this great confession and



then redefine who Jesus is according to our hopes and our dreams and our desires. We do this because it is this way with our idolatrous hearts” (xviii).

The twelve false christs cover a wide variety of claims about Christ. Richard labels these with popular jargon but often connects them to specific ideologies. He begins with “The Mascot,” a christ for the ethical hedonist. There is “The Option” for the religious pluralist. He presents a prosperity gospel Jesus (“The Giver of Bling”); a christ from liberation theology; a feminized Jesus; as well as christs molded for various types of mysticism, patriotism, legalism, and moralism. He concludes with “The Teddy Bear,” which he describes as “a crossless christ with no blood, no wounds, and no suffering” (186).

This final false christ brings the reader back to Peter's original misgivings for which he was rebuked by Jesus. Richard then makes this very personal in confessing his own idolatry and his own need for the real Jesus. This real Christ is presented throughout the book in pastoral conversations with key characters in each story. He concludes by inviting his readers to relate; "Regardless of our circumstances, one thing is certain: we all need the real Jesus" (204).

There are a number of helpful features in addition to its easy-to-follow style and writing. Throughout Richard teaches concepts and defines theological terms using small shaded blocks inserted within the stories. This allows him to use precise theological language in the stories as he teaches the reader its meaning. He concludes each chapter with a study guide and has an appended leaders guide enabling the book to be used for personal or group Bible study.

There are also a couple of areas that could be improved. With this format, helpful as it is, the characters can come off as caricatures, implying that people can fall into neatly labeled categories of false christ worshippers. In reality, people are more complicated and tend to have a variety of false christs just as we have our various false gods. A short introductory explanation regarding this would provide greater authenticity and better prepare the reader to contextualize the neatly crafted stories. Another weakness is what might be a need for a thirteenth false christ, "The Holy Expert." In a desire to have the right teaching about Jesus, one

can fashion a christ who saves only those who have their doctrine exactly correct. A word about the "felicitous inconsistency" and a slightly more humble pastoral dialogue would enhance this work. As a whole, this very helpful book can be read by an individual but can also be used in churches for Bible classes, small-group studies, newsletter articles, and sermon series.

W. Mart Thompson

The Old Testament Is Dying: A Diagnosis and Recommended Treatment. By Brent A. Strawn. Baker Academic, 2017. 336 pages. Paper. \$29.99.

Most American Christians know only a few bits and pieces, a few sound bites from the Old Testament. As a result, they easily buy nonsense . . . literally; nonsense is sold as a bestseller. Some years ago Bruce Wilkinson's book, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life*, became a big success. On a short (thirteen words in Hebrew), obscure prayer in 1 Chronicles, taken out of context and to the neglect of everything else the Old Testament says against such an individualistic, narcissistic quest for prosperity (e.g., the lament Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Job, the life of King David, the lives of the prophets) an entire, highly profitable industry was built. Joel Osteen promotes his "prosperity gospel" from snippets from Proverbs and bits and pieces from elsewhere, again taken out of context and twisted. Yet, the Joel Osteen

industry and its ilk are big business indeed.

Another example comes from the “New Atheists.” Richard Dawkins in his bestseller, *The God Delusion*, asserts about the God presented in the Old Testament: “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully” (84).

Such a grotesque distortion would convince only those who know practically nothing of Old Testament theology, who certainly do not know the Old Testament in any kind of holistic and contextual way. It takes the gems of a beautiful mosaic depicting a majestic king and re-assembles them into a picture of an ugly dog (Irenaeus uses this analogy in *Adversus Haereses*). Or to use the analogy of a language, it does not understand the entire linguistic complex of the Old Testament, how the overall language and grammar and lexicon work. Instead it takes a reductionist approach to Old Testament narratives and picks and chooses some snippets to critique.

A third example of disparaging the Old Testament can be seen in a de facto Marcionite approach. Such views pit the two Testaments against each other: The Old Testament God is a God of wrath but the New Testament God is a God of love; the Old Testament says “an eye for an eye” but the New Testament says,

“Turn the other cheek,” and so on. Or they simply ignore the first thirty-nine books.

These three examples illustrate the thesis of Brent Strawn in his provocative book, *The Old Testament Is Dying: A Diagnosis and Recommended Treatment*. His thesis argues that for people today the Old Testament resembles a dying language. In their study of languages, linguists describe what happens when a language dies. It becomes pidgin. Fluency is lost; the grammar gets oversimplified; the lexicon is reduced. Then later in the death process this pidgin transitions into a new and different language, creole. A creole language exhibits only faint echoes of the original language. Strawn considers New Atheism and new Marcionism to resemble pidgin; and what he calls the “happiology” of Osteen and company he likens to creole.

Strawn illustrates his thesis in other ways as well, for example, the rare preaching from the Old Testament and the rare teaching of Old Testament books. He then offers suggestions to help people regain fluency in the Old Testament “language.” He points to Deuteronomy as a model with its practice of repetition. He advocates for regular use of the Old Testament and its theology in family devotions, preaching and teaching, hymns, and lectionaries. Strawn’s book is well written and quite persuasive. When a language is dying, it needs to be resuscitated. That also holds true for the first thirty-nine books of the Bible.

Paul R. Raabe

CALLED TO BE HOLY IN THE WORLD: An Introduction to Christian History. By Timothy H. Maschke. *Wipf & Stock, 2016.* Paper. 370 pages. \$47.00.

Writing an effective one-volume survey of Christian history would seem an impossible task, but in many respects, Timothy Maschke pulls it off. There are some necessary limitations to such a task. For example, the majority of the book must be dedicated to ecclesiastical and theological history. This somewhat limits its value for understanding the context of the issues discussed. Nevertheless, Maschke succeeds in bringing in some of the political and social issues that affected the church, particularly in the period leading to and through the Reformation. In subsequent time periods he is forced to narrow his contextual discussion mostly to very large figures and movements with some history of secular ideas in order to give the church matters even spotty coverage. However, the matters that are covered are treated in a deep, if dense, manner. This one-volume reference is useful for pastors and laity alike, and could be used for introductory courses at colleges and seminaries. Although the book is a part of a series from a Lutheran perspective, that becomes apparent only occasionally, such as when C. F. W. Walther and other prominent American Lutheran leaders get some treatment. Toward the end of the book, I would have liked to have seen a bit more Lutheran coverage.

As to the content, Maschke brings a muscular treatment to the early and

medieval periods of the church. Major and minor heresies both receive good treatment, as does creedal development and the historical compilation of the canon of scripture. Schools of thought and major figures of the early and medieval periods are well covered. He covers the Renaissance, although some of the thinking is dated and there appears to be a reading back of secular humanism into the Italian Renaissance ala the early nineteenth-century position of Jacob Burkhardt. The Reformation is well treated with separate chapters for the Reformation situation, Luther, and the other Reformers. In addition, he rehearses scientific developments as well as the rise of individualism through philosophers, Anabaptists, Baptists and Pietists that would presage the Enlightenment. Romanticism receives some treatment, particularly in the form of transcendentalism, with the post-Enlightenment treatment becoming thinner on context and more geared to major figures and what is actually going on in the church. The book ends up treating elements of post-Modernity, ultimately reaching an endpoint in the 21st century.

It would have been helpful to have a few more pages to bring in more of the secular issues of the post-Enlightenment era as well as a fuller picture of the global situation in Lutheranism, but this would have also made the book quite unwieldy and so is completely understandable. One thing I would caution educators about with this text is its density. Perhaps when assigning this text it should be taken as two volumes of 350 pages rather than one. It is a slow read because it

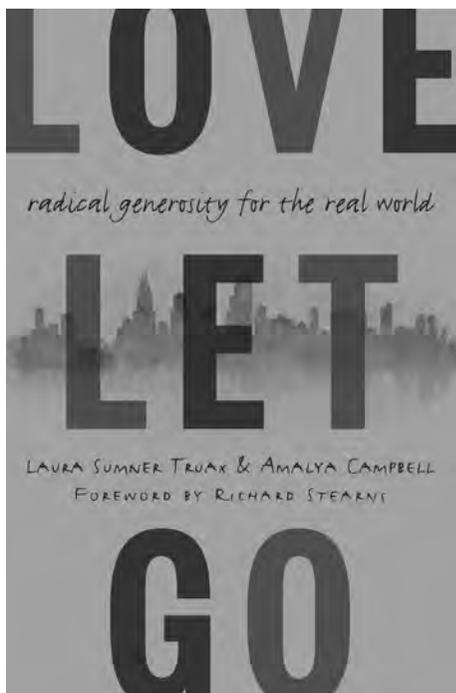
attempts within a limited space to make so much known. To his credit, Maschke provides pertinent questions and follow up readings at the end of each chapter. While the book has a conservative Lutheran tint, this does not run so deep as to make it ineffective for people of other persuasions. In other words, it represents an effective presentation for a broad set of classrooms in which the history of Christianity is studied.

Timothy Dost

LOVE LET GO: Radical Generosity for the Real World. By *Laura Sumner Truax and Amalya Campbell*. Eerdmans, 2017. 203 pages. Hardcover. \$21.99.

Much has been written on the topic of generosity recently. *Contagious Generosity* by Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, *Generosity Rising* by Scott McKenzie, and *Revolution in Generosity* edited by Wesley Willmer are just a few helpful books on the subject written in the last ten years. Generosity, however, is nothing new. St. Paul encourages Timothy to charge God's people to be generous. "They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they make take hold of what is truly life" (1 Tim 6:18–19).

Laura Sumner Truax and Amalya Campbell describe how one congregation, LaSalle Street Church in Chicago, Illinois, had the opportunity to be generous through its "Love Let Go" campaign. The church had joined with others in



the 1970s to build low-income housing in their community. When the property was later sold the four churches involved in the initial project each received a check for over one-and-a-half million dollars. The question the congregation now faced was, "What are we to do with all this money?"

The authors use the word "scarcity" to describe LaSalle Street Church. The church has experienced a history of just barely making ends meet. In spite of that, the church also has consistently been involved in its community. The challenge was to use the money in such a way that it would be a blessing both to the church and to the community.

The first step in their "Love Let Go" campaign was to give each member a \$500 check. The checks were distributed

at a celebratory lunch after a worship service that focused on serving one's neighbor. The members were given the funds to distribute to people in need in as many creative ways as could be envisioned. They were simply instructed to "go do God's work with their checks." They also realized that some members faced hardships in their own lives and might well spend the money on themselves. They trusted their members to make those kinds of decisions.

The book contains a number of stories about how members used their money. One member, Stephen, used his check to gather a number of homeless people he knew and treat them to a real restaurant meal along with a number of other activities. His purpose was to help them feel, for just one day, that they weren't homeless. Another member used her money to establish a "green space" on congregational property. Chris used his \$500 to start a chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes for at-risk teens at the school where he volunteered. Others endorsed their checks back to the church. The point was to help the members see that God's generosity to them could and should move them to generosity toward others.

The leadership of the congregation then entered into a nine-month period of prayer and reflection to determine what to do with the remaining \$1.4 million. As they wrestled with that question they intentionally rooted themselves in the identity of the congregation. "We listened closely for ideas aligned with an element of LaSalle's DNA, the characteristics we talked over: sharing the gospel, meeting

immediate needs, advocating for others and for Jesus, addressing racial and economic disparity, and reducing violence" (76).

An important part of the process was to get as much input from congregational members as possible. To do this they conducted interviews with members. They were intentional in not using a "garden-variety, tic-the-box" kind of survey. They started each interview with basic questions about the person's history at LaSalle, how they were attracted to the church, who in the church was the biggest influence on them, and what kept them attending. It was only at the end of the interview that they sought suggestions on how to spend the money.

As the leaders of the congregation moved through this process, they emphasized the importance of gratitude and generosity. In the end, they decided to model generosity by distributing the remainder of the funds in four categories: supporting the local community, supporting global neighbors, sustaining LaSalle, and investing in people.

This book is not a theological treatise on generosity. There are a number of biblical references interspersed throughout the book that illustrate generosity, but its purpose is to share how one church used the opportunity of a financial windfall to teach its members how to be more generous and model generosity as a body of believers.

The book includes a study guide with questions for reflection and discussion for each chapter.

*Wayne Knolhoff
Saint Louis, Missouri*

**PAUL'S TRIUMPH: Reassessing
2 Corinthians 2:14 in its Literary
and Historical Context.**

By Christoph Heilig. Peeters, 2017.
338 pages. Hardcover. \$109.00.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:14, “Thanks be to God who is *triumphing* (*thriambeuonti*) us at all times in Christ and through us making clear the fragrance of his knowledge in every place.” This verse is notoriously confusing. What does Paul mean by *thriambeuo* (“to triumph”)? Paul uses the image of the Roman triumph—but how is he using it? Is he saying that God is the conquering general parading through the streets? If so, then who is “us”? Is the “us” captives brought back from war, are they the incense bearers walking, or are they in fact in league with the conquering general? Further, how does “in Christ” fit here in relation to the triumph? There is no scholarly consensus on the topic, primarily because the speculation has been so vast with so little to ground it. Heilig’s book is an important contribution to this scholarly discussion because of his careful emphasis on what we can know based upon the available evidence—primarily recognizing the difference between what is *lexically* possible in the verb *thriambeuo* as compared to what might be *conceptually* linked to the *idea* of the Roman triumph. The latter is far less convincing.

Heilig examines all the uses in Greek for the verb *thriambeuo*, particularly those that are transitive. He then creates a range of meaning but recognizes that usage of a particular term does not include the full range of meaning in

every usage. He looks for what the verb means *lexically* as a transitive verb. He defines the verb as “To cause sb. or sth. to move (before oneself) in a triumphal procession in order to display sb. or sth. to the watching crowd” (101). He suggests that lexically this is the most probable meaning and that other definitions, for example that Paul is thinking of the “us” as an incense bearer, implying leading to death, or offering the sacrifice after the triumph, are not convincing because *thriambeuo* does not have this usage in any other literature. He does not deny that many of these frequent associations *could have been made* based upon the *conception* of the triumph in the mind of the hearers, but that this should be seen as a *secondary* movement because these are based upon the *conception of the idea* and are not found within the *lexical character of the verb*.

Once Heilig establishes the main lexical meaning, he crafts an interpretation that defines the roles using the most basic aspect of the lexical verb—captives on public display. This relatively minimal definition is based upon the lexical meaning and a reconstruction of what Paul could have known about the Roman triumph which was certainly secondhand (given that only one triumph occurred in Paul’s lifetime, Claudius in AD 44, which Paul was not yet in Rome to observe). He argues that since Paul never actually viewed a triumph, it is more likely Paul is basing his thought on the lexical meaning of the verb rather than the conceived idea of the triumph in general. Heilig then logically interprets Paul’s conception of the triumph based

upon this lexical meaning. He claims Paul imagines God as the *triumphator* and the “us” as Paul and his coworkers (based upon other uses of “us” in Paul). The Corinthians, therefore, are the ones observing that public display.

This leads to the question of the context of the entire verse. If this is the basic idea in the verb, then how can that fit with the language of “at all times” in 14a and “fragrance” and “in Christ” in 14c? He notes that triumphs do not happen “at all times” and that “fragrance” was usually not a primary part of them. He does allow that frequently sacrifices occurred in triumphs, but he suggests that this would be a conceptual link rather than a lexical use and therefore should be limited. Instead, he argues for distance between “fragrance” and “triumph.” Further, he calls for distance of the “in Christ” language here; he does not see this as adverbial in the triumph metaphor but only as an adjectival descriptor of Paul and his coworkers. He allows that there is a logical connection between the triumph and the rest of the verse, but it is a conceptual connection that is not part of the same metaphor. Therefore, Heilig has a relatively limited approach to the meaning of the triumph metaphor within the text. The context is said to be relevant, but only conceptually linked, not internally built into the metaphor.

Finally, Heilig engages with the current question of any anti-imperial undertone in this passage. He suggests that the primary purpose for Paul’s letter is not an anti-imperialist message,

but that there might be an anti-imperial “echo” since Paul uses the language of the *triumphator* to describe God the Father, not Caesar.

Heilig’s approach is hermeneutically valuable in that he uses a methodology focused on the lexical possibilities within the term itself. The value of the study is that he has found real grounding to help constrain readings of this pericope that are often dominated by vague speculation. However, this merit is also the book’s greatest drawback—he does not fully explore what significance this meaning for triumph would have on the whole book or even fully explain what this reading would mean for the concept of “fragrance” in 14c. While Heilig’s emphasis on the lexical meaning could be quite accurate, that does not mean conceptual connections are not there.

Heilig’s definition for *thriambeuo* is certainly accurate, but is that all that is being said in this verse? Conceptual connections are very real connections that deserve attention. Heilig’s book, however, is a very helpful foundation for further explorations of the conceptual connections. It is not the final word on the topic, but provides a rich source of data from multiple possible secondary readings and interpretations.

Benjamin Nickodemus
Saint Louis, Missouri

2018 SUMMER WORKSHOPS

**Plan now to attend one of our
2018 Summer Workshops**

Workshops are held May through August
and explore contemporary topics that
influence the practice of ministry.

- Hosted by LCMS congregations nationwide
- Featuring Seminary faculty
- Three days of intense study

**Ten workshops offer an opportunity
to delve deeply into topics including:**

- Being confessional
- Creation debate
- Preaching and the arts

Register

www.csl.edu/summerworkshops

Questions?

Contact Concordia Seminary
Continuing Education
at 314-505-7286 or ce@csl.edu



**Concordia
Seminary**
ST. LOUIS

**COMING
TO A TOWN *NEAR YOU!***

FOR PASTORS, CHURCH WORKERS & CONGREGATION MEMBERS

#WhoWillGoForUs

REFER A PROSPECTIVE STUDENT

Who is our next church worker?

Below is the name of a person I think would be an excellent pastor or deaconess.

(If you don't know the information requested, name and congregation/city is sufficient.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Email: _____ Approximate age of candidate: _____

Congregation: _____

City: _____

Additional comments: _____

I have discussed the possibility of studying to be a pastor/deaconess and he/she is interested.

I have not discussed this possibility with him/her, but I feel that he/she has been blessed with the necessary gifts to serve as a pastor/deaconess.

Please return this form to the Seminary's Ministerial Recruitment and Admissions office at the address below. Concordia Seminary will send information to this prospective student.

You also may contact the office at 800-822-9545 or admissions@csf.edu.

"And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me!'" (Is. 6:8 ESV)

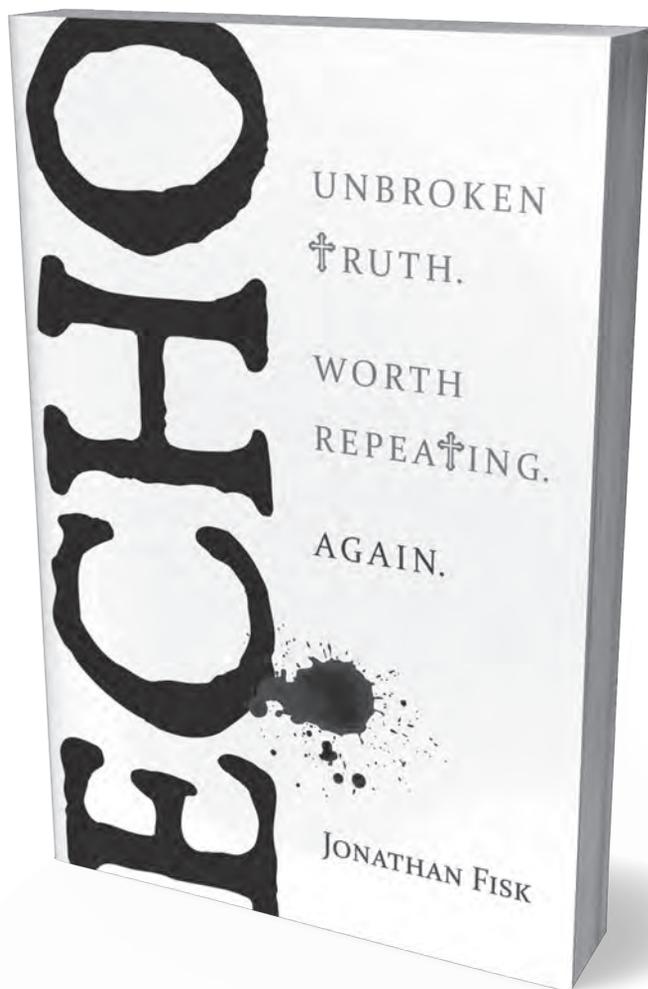


Concordia
Seminary
ST. LOUIS

801 SEMINARY PLACE • ST. LOUIS, MO 63105 • 314-505-7000 • WWW.CSL.EDU



No fluff. No frills. Just clarity.



Catechesis like you've never seen it before.

LEARN MORE AT CPH.ORG/ECHO.



1.800.325.3040

© 2018 Concordia Publishing House



Concordia Seminary
801 Seminary Place
St. Louis, MO 63105

