

*What Does This Mean?*

# Catechesis in the Lutheran Congregation

A. L. Barry



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## Preface

DURING THE TIME I HAVE BEEN WORKING ON THIS LITTLE BOOK, I HAVE HAD the opportunity to speak with any number of people—pastors and laity alike—about our need for a reemphasis of catechesis within our Synod. What is “catechesis?” Catechesis is the art of teaching the Christian faith and life. It is a lifelong process of learning and growing in the Christian faith and life. Without exception, the overwhelming reaction to my desire to emphasize catechesis has been, “Yes! Yes! Let’s do it!” Will it take effort? Yes. Will it be a challenge? Most certainly. Will it take long and hard work from all concerned? Absolutely. Will there be some opposition? Yes, this will come too. But will it be a blessing to our beloved Synod? Without a doubt, yes. By God’s almighty blessing, yes! Therefore, this little book is being distributed to the pastors of our Synod with the prayer that it may help us all become more aware of the importance of catechesis in the life of the church. Others in our Synod are also concerned deeply about this area of church life, and so I welcome and encourage the faithful efforts of all those who are working to help our Synod strengthen its commitment to sound teaching and discipling in the Christian faith. May God bless and keep us all in His gracious mercy through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

— Dr. A. L. Barry  
Jude 24–25  
Reformation 1996





# Introduction

AS WE BEGIN OUR LOOK AT CATECHESIS WE NEED TO BE VERY CLEAR ABOUT one thing above everything else: catechesis is much more than simply imparting facts about Christianity. Catechesis is the ongoing application of the Word of God to the lives of people so that there is a renewing of their minds and hearts in conformity with the will of Jesus Christ. As St. Paul says in Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." True transformation and renewal take place by the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. It is a supernatural, miraculous and powerful gift from God when people are led into a deeper knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and all that they contain for them and for their lives as God's people. Needless to say, this is not a "one-time event" in our lives. It is an ongoing process of spiritual nature and formation. The Holy Spirit shows us our sin, shows us our Savior and thus continually creates in us clean hearts through the renewing grace of God, given through the forgiveness of all of our sins. Thus, St. Paul is able to exhort us to "put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt ... and be renewed in the spirit of your minds ... and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:22-23).

Perhaps we in the Lutheran church have grown too accustomed to thinking about catechesis only in terms of youth and adult confirmation. As a result, catechesis is viewed as a "program" which has a definite beginning, mid-point and conclusion. Obviously, a program of junior or adult confirmation must have a schedule and as we shall see, based on Holy Scripture, teaching and learning the truths of the faith is a lifetime of interaction with the Holy Scriptures, hearing them read and explained and applied to our lives, particularly in the context of the

weekly Divine Service of Word and Sacrament in the congregation, and also in Bible study classes, discussion groups, and all the other opportunities we have to be in the Word on a regular and ongoing basis. This lifetime of catechesis leads us into a deeper appreciation for the church's history, its doctrines, its practices and all that these mean for the Christian.

Catechesis is critical to the church's ongoing life and health. To the extent that catechesis is neglected in our church, it will falter and stumble. Without good catechesis the church will no longer be able to understand the teachings of the faith, but will only be able to bear witness to vague impressions or the emotional feelings that "being in church" may produce. Without consistently faithful catechesis, the church will slowly forget its history, its teachers, its traditions and its wonderful heritage of faith. Without sound catechesis, each generation of Christians will be led to think that they are the first ever to have come to a living relationship with the Lord, and thus will be cut off from the wisdom of the ages as men and women down through the years have struggled in life and have remained faithful. Stated very simply, catechesis is the key to the church's health and survival.<sup>2</sup> Just as our bodies become sick and weak when they are not properly nourished, so the Body of Christ suffers when it is spiritually starved, or put on minimal rations. Catechesis is all about teaching people the wonderful truth and meaning that is contained in Luther's beautiful explanation of why God sent His Son into this world to be our Savior: "... That I may be His own and live under Him in His kindgom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness."<sup>3</sup>

There is indeed a great treasure for us in good catechesis. Ours is the joyous privilege in each generation to unearth the treasures of the church and distribute them once again, as God continues to do His saving work through the church's ministry of Word and Sacrament. All praise to Him for His great blessing in this regard! What a joy it is to be able to share in the task of teaching God's people His truths for their eternal salvation and for their lives as God's servants here in this life. It is precisely because we live and exist as a Synod in a culture and soci-

## INTRODUCTION

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ety so desperately seeking truth that we must give primary attention to catechesis. We are able, under the blessing of God, to say with bold confidence, “This we believe, teach, confess—and practice.” Now is not the time for us to become tempted to water down, compromise or otherwise neglect any area of our Lutheran faith. The temptation to do this may be very great. As we face the hostility and ignorance of a society that no longer wishes to accept the concept of absolute truth, the notion of evil and sin, the idea that there is a right way and a wrong way to live, we can either shrink back in fear and trepidation, or we can all the more proclaim the full truth of God’s Word in a loving manner. We do so precisely in order that we may preach the wonderful message of the Savior, the source of hope in the midst of so much despair, and the light in the dark days that characterize so many lives in our culture. How good to know that as we do, our Lord’s promise is as true today as it ever has been: “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

Even popular Evangelical preachers are recognizing the significant challenges of renewing Christian catechesis in the church. In a remarkably candid assessment of Evangelicalism, John MacArthur points to a return to “Scripture and sound doctrine” as the key to a renewal in Evangelicalism. He notes a challenge that would also be good for our Synod to hear and to heed: “We evangelicals desperately need to recover our determination to be biblical, our refusal to comply with the world, our willingness to defend what we believe, and our courage to defy false teaching. Unless we collectively awaken to the current dangers that threaten our faith, the adversary will attack us from within, and we will not be able to withstand.”<sup>4</sup>

There is a sense all around us that things are “changing.” It is important that our Synod be aware of the deep structural issues that are a part of much of our culture’s changes and trends. A name has been applied to the philosophy behind many of our contemporary trends in thought: post-modernism. An LCMS professor, Dr. Gene Edward Veith, has written a very helpful book called *Postmodern Times* that I would recommend highly to anyone interested in learning more

about post-modernism and its consequences. Veith offers this challenge to us:

The church has always had to confront its culture and to exist in tension with the world. To ignore the culture is to risk irrelevance; to accept the culture uncritically is to risk syncretism and unfaithfulness. Every age has had its eager-to-please liberal theologians who have tried to reinterpret Christianity according to the latest intellectual and cultural fashion. Enlightenment liberals had the rational religion and the higher criticism of the Bible; romantic liberals had their warm feelings; existentialist liberals had their crises of meaning and leaps of faith; there is now a postmodern liberalism. But orthodox Christians have also lived in every age, confessing their faith in Jesus Christ. They were part of their culture ... yet they also countered their culture, proclaiming God's law and gospel to society's inadequacies and points of need.<sup>5</sup>

Veith says that the church faces a different set of challenges than it has in the past. In the past, the predominant challenge was for the church to defend its teachings against attack from those who wanted to disprove the faith. A large challenge to the church today is to help her own members come to terms with a culture that does not merely question the truth of Christianity, but challenges the very notion that any person, or any group, can actually make a claim for absolute truth.

It would indeed be very sad if our Synod did nothing more than wring its hands in despair at the incredible challenges that lie before us in terms of catechesis. It would be equally tragic if we were simply to cave in to the pressure of our modern culture and compromise our confession to fit the tastes of the contemporary world. Praise God that our Synod is committed to doing neither. We can and must do more than wring our hands. We certainly must never conform to the prevailing mood and climate of our day. Instead, we must continue to be the church. We must continue to teach all of humanity that which has been given to the church to teach, as we baptize them in the name of the Triune God, and thus make them disciples of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is not a "stage," nor is it a program. It is a lifelong gift from God.

It is a life marked and shaped by continuing catechesis in the Word. It is an amazing challenge, a joyful privilege and wonderful opportunity in the Lord.<sup>6</sup> Thus, we pray, “Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation; for Thee I wait all the day long” (Ps. 25:5).

In the chapters that follow, I want to underscore both our challenges and opportunities as we work together to emphasize and improve catechesis in our Synod. To do this we need to take a look at what Scripture has to say, what we learn from our Lutheran Confessions and what church history can teach us about catechesis. Then I want to conclude this book with a chapter in which I will offer practical encouragement to the church workers in our Synod as they approach the issue of catechesis in their congregations. You will notice that there are extensive endnotes included at the end of the book. I would like to encourage you to read and study these carefully.

Let me say a word about the overall goal of this book. My goal is to provide a series of “snapshots” of various aspects of the whole subject of catechesis, picking up information about catechesis as we go along as we take a look, first of all, at the meaning of the word: “catechesis.” Then we will take a walk through Old and New Testament Scriptures, then a look at the role and importance of our Lutheran Confessions for catechesis. Then we will visit the two periods of church history that had the greatest impact on catechesis, the Early Church and the time of Luther and the Reformation. Finally, our collection of pictures of catechesis will conclude with thoughts and observations of a practical nature about how go about the task of catechesis in our congregations, and the unique opportunities and challenges we face in this regard.

I might add that as I was working on this little book on catechesis, I was carried back to those years when I was privileged to serve as a parish pastor, as well as those years when I was privileged to work on a one-on-one basis with our pastors as a district executive and as a district president. These memories have made my work on this book all the more meaningful.

## CATECHESIS IN THE LUTHERAN CONGREGATION

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# Catechesis in the Holy Scriptures

## *The Word “Catechesis”*

Let's begin our study of catechesis by first understanding the terms we are using. The word “catechesis” is a word our English language has inherited from the Latin language, and a word that the Latin language took directly from Greek. “Catechesis” comes from the Greek verb *κατηχέω*, a form of the root verb *ἤχῃν* which means “to sound forth, ring out, peal.” It indicates a sound that descends down upon the listener. It does not indicate either a reverberating sound or an echo. The Greek word for echo is (*ἀυτηχεῖν*).<sup>7</sup> The Greeks used the verb to indicate receiving information (*κατηχεῖσθαι*) or to reach one with sound from above (*κατηχεῖν τινα*). The ancient Greeks used these words in various ways. The ancient Greek physician Hippocrates used the word to describe the oral instructions a doctor would give to his patient concerning how best to care for a disease or wound. Lucian used the word to describe how an actor related to his audience. Gradually the term became used to describe instruction given by one person to another. Our word “catechism” is derived from the term “catechesis” and refers either to the actual spoken instruction or to the written manual of “catechesis.” The “catechist” is the person who does the catechizing. A “catechumen” is one who is being “catechized.”

It is helpful to take a look at those places in the New Testament where various forms of the word catechesis (*κατηχέω*) appear. It becomes clear that the term was used early on to indicate Christian instruction. We read in the first chapter of St. Luke that he is writing his gospel so that Theophilus “may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.” In the Greek, “of which you have been informed” is “*ὧν κατηχήθης*,” meaning, literally, “the things which have come to your ears.” Theophilus has been taught the truths

of the life and works of Jesus Christ, and now St. Luke is writing for the purpose of confirming the “catechesis” which Theophilus has received.

In Acts 18 we meet Apollos, described as “an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures.” But most importantly St. Luke records that Apollos had “been instructed in the way of the Lord. ...” And, as we may expect, the word here for “instructed” is the perfect passive form of *κατηχέω*. This indicates that Apollos has been catechized, taught through oral instruction. But we note also the significant comment as to the content of this catechization: Apollos has been instructed in the “way of the Lord” (*τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ κυρίου*). The Christian faith was known first as the “the way,” indicating that the catechesis of the early Christians was understood to be much more than simply imparting “head knowledge”; rather, it also led and guided people into a way of life, a way of being, a new life. Christian catechesis, from the first days of the church, has been a renewing instruction.

The next place we run across a form of the word “catechesis” is in Acts 21:21. Here we read an account of St. Paul’s return to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey. St. Paul was warned by St. James and the elders that there was a rumor going around about him among the “thousands” of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem: St. Paul had been “instructing” the Jews who were living among Gentiles “to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs.” The Greek word for “instructing” is *κατηχήθησαν*. St. Paul was accused of “catechizing” them in a way different from that which they had learned as Jews, to the point that they were “forsaking” Moses. The word here rendered in English as “forsake” is “ἀποστασίαν,” indicating that the Jews were said to have been “apostasizing” from Moses’ teaching, due to St. Paul’s catechetical work. St. Paul was able to deal with the Jewish Christians, but later the same accusation led to his arrest.

Interestingly enough, it is only in the New Testament material written by St. Luke and St. Paul that “catechesis” is found. St. Paul wrote: “Let him who is taught the word (ὁ κατηχούμενος) share all good things with him who teaches (τῷ κατηχοῦντι)” (Gal. 6:6). Here is the source for our description of those people being taught the faith



prior to their reception into the church as being “catechumens.” Those who are catechized are to share all good things with the catechist.

In Romans we encounter this word when St. Paul writes, “... you are instructed (*κατηχούμενοι*) in the law” (Rom. 2:18). The last place a form of “catechesis” occurs in the New Testament is in 1 Corinthians. St. Paul writes, “I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct (*κατηχήσω*) others than 10,000 words in a tongue.” St. Paul was much more concerned with teaching the faith, than with speaking in unknown languages, or being caught up in emotional mysticism. Again, we note, the specific use of this word indicates oral instruction in the faith.

As I found myself working through this survey of the various contexts in which “catechesis” occurs in the New Testament, it became that much clearer to me that catechesis is all about leading people into the Christian faith and life, and then helping them to grow and develop in this life of faith. We have perhaps lost sight of this bigger picture when it comes to catechesis because we have, understandably so, associated it so closely with the notion of confirmation. Catechesis is all about teaching the Christian faith to individuals, to groups, to the young, to the old, to the new Christian and to the mature Christian. Having established a definition we can move into an examination of what the Holy Scriptures have to say about teaching the faith.

Teaching the faith is an extremely high priority in the Holy Scriptures, particularly for ministers of the church. The man who wishes to be a pastor must be “an apt teacher” “*διδασκτικόν*” (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24). This is one of the important qualifications established by God for the man who wishes to serve the church as a pastor.<sup>8</sup> This same qualification would apply to all those who occupy ecclesiastical offices in the church—not just the one divinely established office of preaching the Word, but also our teachers, our directors of Christian education, our deaconesses, our lay ministers and so forth. All church offices must be occupied by individuals who are able and willing to teach the faith.<sup>9</sup> What is this teaching all about? In what ways do the Scriptures speak of teaching the faith? The following two sections will provide an overview

of what we learn from the Old and New Testament. They will help us appreciate the primary importance of catechesis—teaching—that is consistently held before our eyes throughout the sacred Scriptures.

I would now like to spend a little time with you in the next two sections simply digging into the Word, walking through the Old and New Testament. I think you will find even as I did how the thread of “teaching” runs all the way through the Scriptures.

### ***Catechesis in the Old Testament***

In Exodus 4:12 we read of God’s assurance to Moses, “Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.”<sup>10</sup> What a powerful comfort this must have been for Moses—to recognize that in his speaking and teaching God would be with him, blessing his words in a very special and unique manner. Now certainly we would not want to suggest that God supplies the words for our teaching in precisely the same manner that He did for Moses. But as we teach God’s Holy Word, the Holy Spirit is providing us with the words and with the wisdom upon which we base all of our teaching. God truly is with us as we teach. It His will that we teach His Word and share His truths with His people. It is indeed an awesome privilege.

What are we to teach? Over and over again, the resounding message in Holy Scripture, over and over again, is that we are to teach God’s Word and all that it means. We read in Exodus 18:20, “... You shall teach them the statutes and the decisions, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do.”<sup>11</sup> Again and again, I have found that our people are genuinely hungry for this type of teaching. Our pastors cannot assume anything when it comes to teaching the faith. We need to continue teaching and teaching the truths of the Word over and over again. We recognize that as we teach them in this manner we will necessarily be teaching Law and Gospel. In teaching the people what to do, we will at the same time be revealing to them their failure to walk in the ways of the Lord and to do what He has commanded them. But it is necessary to teach the Law, not only for the purpose of revealing sin, but also for the purpose of helping people

recognize and understand what they are to do. God gave His people the “tables of stone with the law and the commandments” on them precisely for their “instruction” (Exod. 24:12).<sup>12</sup> It was precisely these commandments and instructions that were to be taught to the people of Israel (Lev. 10:11).<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting to note that when Moses departed from the people of God at the end of his life he once again reminded them that God wanted them to learn His commandments. Moses makes the very important point that it is not only the responsibility of the called servants of God to do the teaching. Parents are also given this high and holy calling in the Lord. Moses said, “You shall teach them diligently to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise” (Deut. 11:19).<sup>14</sup> We read in Deuteronomy 17:19, “He shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God. . . .” Please note what is said here: “all the days of his life.” As long as we have the sinful flesh clinging to us, we need to learn and to be taught the life-giving truths of God’s Word that guide us and keep us steadfast in the faith.

How concerned should we be in teaching theological truths? Is getting the details right really all that important? Do specific doctrinal truths really matter? So many sinful influences surround us in this life. What dangers are there for us in this respect? I raise these questions because they are similar to ones I hear when I travel across our Synod. The Old Testament example of God’s people provides a very clear answer. Just as we are able, by God’s blessing, to learn His Word and to be taught that which is good and pleasing in His sight, we also recognize that we learn and are taught many things which are totally contrary to His word. We face great competition from our modern culture when it comes to teaching and catechesis. The people of God in the Old Testament were warned that as they entered the holy land they would face many things contrary to God’s will. Thus they were warned about those who would “teach you to do according to all their abominable practices which they have done in the service of their gods, and so to

sin against the Lord your God” (Deut. 20:18).<sup>15</sup> Clearly, we recognize that we are surrounded on all sides by those today who would teach us things contrary to God’s Word. This is all the more reason why we must be deeply involved in the Word of God—in learning it, in discussing it, and in teaching it to our children, to our congregations and to all who will hear it.

Catechesis is quite easy to take for granted. In the Old Testament we read about the tragic time when “Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law” (2 Chron. 15:3). The people were led so far from God through their pursuit of false gods that they soon lost sight of the pure Word of God and the teaching that was so necessary for them. It was precisely when the people of God were led back to sound teaching that they once again experienced the mercies and blessings of God. We read about King Uzziah, who honored God by obeying His Word and then fell away from Him. Uzziah typifies the cycle of faithfulness/unfaithfulness that characterized so many individuals in the history of Israel. About Uzziah we read, “He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God; and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper” (2 Chron. 26:5).<sup>16</sup> But then, “when he was strong ... grew proud, to his destruction,” when he took matters into his own hands and usurped the duties of the temple priests in the temple (2 Chron. 26:16).

Other leaders of Israel discovered that it was precisely through devotion to the Word of the Lord that they received God’s blessings on all that they did. Ezra “set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10).<sup>17</sup> One who wishes to teach the Word, must be in the Word. An empty well produces no water. The Holy Scriptures offer us the example of Ezra, in order that we who teach the Word of God might also be men and women who are committed to studying the Word of God. It is not possible for me to emphasize this point strongly enough!

But now let’s turn our attention to the Psalter. One does not have to look twice to see that in the Psalms there is a wealth of truth in regard to teaching. Again and again, we read fervent prayers to the Lord

that He would lead the psalmist into knowledge. There are numerous prayers to God asking for His instruction and teaching: Psalm 25:4: "Make me to know Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation; for Thee I wait all the day long."<sup>18</sup> We learn from the Psalms that it is precisely the Lord's instruction to us that makes it possible for us to teach and to instruct others. Psalm 51 includes David's prayer to God, "...teach in my secret heart" and as a result, "... I will teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners will return to Thee." The constant prayer of the psalmists is that God would teach them. Their prayer is "Teach me Thy way, O Lord, that I may walk in Thy truth; unite my heart to fear Thy name" (Ps. 86:11).

Psalm 119 in particular is filled with the prayer to God that He would offer instruction and teach the psalmist His ways. Since it is somewhat popular again these days to emphasize meditation in the Christian life, it is good to note in Psalm 119 that meditation is not spiritual navel-gazing through which a person conjures up some sort of Christian "image" upon which a person focuses his attention. No, quite the opposite. Christian meditation is prayerful reflection on the Word of God, which alone gives us God's wisdom and instruction. Thus we read, "Teach me, O Lord, the way of Thy statutes; and I will keep it to the end" (Ps. 119:33), and "Teach me good judgment and knowledge; for I believe in Thy commandments" (Ps. 119:66).<sup>19</sup>

The truths we find in the Psalter concerning teaching and learning the Word of God, we also find in the Book of Proverbs. The Proverbs remind the Christian constantly that true wisdom comes from God alone: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight" (Prov. 9:10). Instruction in the Word of God is the key to true wisdom. Again and again, teaching the Word and receiving its instruction is urged in Proverbs. Wisdom is personified in Proverbs 7:2: "Keep My commandments and live, keep My teachings as the apple of your eye." Instruction in the Word of God is far better than silver and "knowledge" is greater than "choice gold" (Prov. 8:10). One who rejects sound teaching thereby rejects knowl-

edge: “Cease, my son, to hear instruction only to stray from the words of knowledge” (Prov. 19:27). We are admonished to “apply” our minds to “instruction” and our ears to “words of knowledge” (Prov. 23:12).

Moving on, we focus on the Old Testament prophets. As we consider the prophets, here too, time and again, we read of their urgent pleas to Israel to heed sound teaching, solid instruction and seek the Lord’s guidance. The consequences of rejecting His teaching are fearful. Rejecting the false prophets, the people of God are urged to the true knowledge, “... To the teaching <sup>20</sup> and to the testimony! Surely for in this word which they speak there is no dawn” (Is. 8:20).<sup>21</sup> Isaiah also warns against an empty form of religion which God rejects. Simply accumulating facts and being able to rattle them off is not acceptable to God either. God rebukes His people and says, “Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote; therefore, behold, I will again do marvelous things with this people, wonderful and marvelous; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hid” (Isa. 29:13–14).

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God laments the fact that “they have turned their back and not their face; and though I have taught them persistently they have not listened to receive instruction” (Jer. 32:33).<sup>22</sup> As we read in Daniel, all true learning is from God, Daniel and his companions were instructed in the language of the Chaldeans, and were “educated for three years” (Dan. 1:5), but we read that “God gave them learning and skill in all letters and wisdom” (Dan. 1:17). We need to keep this truth in mind: It is God who prospers our teaching and our people’s learning. We are too easily tempted to take pride in our great learning or achievement. But it is to God that we constantly turn, praying that He would both bless our teaching and our people’s learning. We recognize that we are not simply imparting interesting information, or “guides to living,” but sacred, life-giving truth that leads to eternal salvation. The teaching of the Gospel is precisely what is described by the Lord. Speaking through Micah, “Nations shall come and say: ‘Come

let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Judah; that He may teach us His ways and we may walk in his paths' ” (Mic. 4:2). It is this life-giving instruction that we who are entrusted with the public, pastoral ministry are to be all about. The true priest of God is described by Malachi in this way: “The lips of a priest should guard knowledge,<sup>23</sup> and men should seek instruction<sup>24</sup> from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts” (Mal. 2:7). False prophets cause men to stumble and fall through their false instruction showing partiality by not preaching the whole counsel of God as they are to do.

As we glance back over all those passages which we have referenced in the Old Testament, we are able to see clearly that teaching, instruction and learning the truth of God’s Word are very high priorities for God’s people and for His called servants. This fact simply cannot be underscored strongly enough. But now now let’s turn to the New Testament.

### *Catechesis in the New Testament*

At the beginning of this chapter, we noted those places in the New Testament where the various forms of the word “catechesis” are found. Beyond these six occurrences of the actual word forms there are many references to teaching in the New Testament that help us better understand what catechesis is all about for the church.

#### Teaching in the Master’s Ministry

It does not take long for a person to realize that for Jesus Christ, teaching the faith was of key importance in His earthly ministry. The gospels are filled with references to Christ’s teaching: “He went all about Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:23),<sup>25</sup> and again, “When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities” (Matt. 11:1).<sup>26</sup> It is clear this was a constant activity by the Master when He challenged those who had come to capture Him in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Day after day I sat in the temple

teaching, and you did not seize Me” (Matt. 26:55). And of course, there are the final words of the Lord in St. Matthew: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matt. 28:19–20).<sup>27</sup>

Again and again the crowds were “astonished” at our Lord’s teaching (St. Mark 1:22). They were “amazed” by His words of instruction (St. Mark 1:27). Why? Because He was teaching them not simply by way of requirements of the Jewish laws, but He was teaching the very truths of the Gospel itself. Thus, the common reaction, recorded vividly by St. Mark in his gospel: “On the Sabbath He began to teach in the synagogue; and many who heard Him were astonished, saying, ‘Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to Him? What mighty works are wrought by His hands!’ ” (St. Mark 6:2). St. Luke records the power of Christ’s teaching in this way: “They were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority” (St. Luke 4:32). Why? St. John records Christ’s words: “My teaching is not Mine, but His Who sent Me” (St. John 7:16). And then it is in St. John’s gospel that we read that Christ was so concerned about the teaching of the faith that He promised the church the Spirit of God: “The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (St. John 14:26).

We recognize that the Master had a genuine zeal for teaching. It is interesting to note some of our Lord’s teaching techniques. For example, parables were a favorite. He used the situations of real life to teach the great truths of the faith: a traveler robbed on the highway, a woman who lost a coin, a man planting a field, the story of the vineyard owner and his faithless employees, the rich man and the poor man, the house built on weak and solid foundations. Our Lord went out of His way to connect people with the great truths of God by first touching them right where they lived. Our Lord was consumed by a passion to teach the truths of God’s Holy Word. This consuming desire should also be a hallmark of His church yet today.



### Teaching in Acts and St. Paul

The Book of Acts emphasizes teaching the faith as strongly as do the Gospels. It is obvious that the apostles took their Lord's commission very seriously. The first Christians were devoted to the "apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).<sup>28</sup> The apostles were angering the leaders of the Jews because they were "teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2). They were repeatedly ordered to stop their teaching (Acts 4:18, 5:28) but "they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42). St. Paul and Barnabas spent a long time teaching in Antioch (Acts 15:35). St. Paul spent a year and a half in Corinth teaching the faith there (Acts 18:11).

In his letters to the various churches, St. Paul makes a point, time and again, to emphasize the importance of sound teaching. He reminds the Romans that they were once "slaves of sin" but had become "obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed" (Rom. 6:17).<sup>29</sup> It is significant here to note that St. Paul mentions the standard of teaching, implying that Christian teaching was not changeable or simply a matter of opinion from one teacher to the next. No, there was a "standard" of teaching, which St. Paul commends to the Romans. It is this standard to which they had been committed by God in their baptisms. He holds them accountable to a sound pattern of instruction, as well as rebuking them for their wild flights of ecstatic utterances, saying, "In church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than 10,000 words in a tongue" (1 Cor. 14:19).

St. Paul, speaking by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, specifically mentions that the ascended Lord gave to His church "pastors and teachers" for the sake of the Gospel ministry. Time and again, he admonishes the Ephesians to learn of Christ: "Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord" (Eph. 5:10). Fathers are to bring their children up in the "discipline and instruction" of the Lord. St. Paul reminds the Colossians that the apostolic ministry among them was to "proclaim" Christ, "teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every

man mature in Christ" (Col. 1:28). The Colossians were to "let the word of Christ" dwell richly among them, teaching and admonishing one another (Col. 3:16).

The Holy Spirit offers very specific admonition to His ministers, through the Apostle St. Paul, in the form of the letters St. Paul wrote to St. Timothy and St. Titus. There were to be no different doctrines taught in the churches St. Paul had established (1 Tim. 1:3). The bishop is to be a man capable of sound teaching (1 Tim. 3:2). St. Timothy was "to command and teach these things" and was to give special attention to "the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13). He was to take special care in regard to his "teaching" and was to hold to it (1 Tim. 4:16). Scripture itself is described by St. Paul as inspired by God and "profitable for teaching" (2 Tim. 3:16). The great admonition that St. Paul gave to St. Timothy rings loudly in the church today to all pastors: "Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). Then St. Paul warns that the time is coming when people will not "endure sound teaching" but will gather around people who just tell them what they want to hear, satisfying their "itching ears" (2 Timothy 4:2). To St. Titus, St. Paul gave similar instruction. St. Titus was told to appoint pastors in the church who "hold firm to the sure Word" so that they would be able "to give instruction in sound doctrine and to confute those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9). St. Titus too was to "teach what befits sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1).

So, we recognize that as was the case in the Old Testament, so in the New Testament there are repeated admonitions that we be faithful about teaching, diligent in sound doctrine and zealous to instruct both believers and unbelievers. We as a church body need to hear loudly and clearly this admonition of God's Word. But now we turn to an overview of catechesis in the Lutheran Confessions where we will once again see that here, too, a very high priority is placed on teaching the faith.

## Catechesis and the Lutheran Confessions

IN THIS CHAPTER WE DEAL WITH THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS for our catechetical work. These confessions are the basis on which we say before the world, “This we believe, teach and confess.” The confessions provide us with the basis for unity in the teachings of the Word of God. They are a powerful resource, both in their content and in their claim on our church’s teaching of the Christian faith. We have a great blessing in our confessions in that they norm our church’s teaching on the various articles of the faith contained in them. It is good for us to take some time at this point in our study to consider the blessings of the confessions for the sake of our catechetical work.

We need to begin by asking a very fundamental question. It is one of major significance when it comes to understanding the great benefits of the Lutheran Confessions for the church’s catechetical responsibilities and opportunities. It is the question: What is a confession? In a confession the church is first of all responding in faith to God who has spoken to it. Confession is an unconditional response to God’s Word in the spirit of, “We believe, teach and confess.” What does the church believe? What does it teach? What, therefore, does the church confess? The church believes, teaches and confesses that which God has given to it. It is a response that is Scriptural because it is based on Scripture. The writers of the Lutheran confessional documents again and again appeal to Scripture because we are confessing the truths of Scripture.

A confession is a summary of what Scripture teaches. It can be as short as the Small Catechism or as long and involved as the Formula of Concord. It can be very specific, or very general, but it is always taken from and based upon Holy Scripture. A confession describes, restates and applies what God’s Word teaches. Therefore, a confession is always a teaching tool in the church. It is never meant to be a museum piece, a legal document or a passing reference in a church’s constitution or

bylaws. The Lutheran church's confessions are catechetical documents by which the church teaches what it is that God's Word teaches on those points identified and found in the confessions.<sup>30</sup>

The Lutheran Confessions are binding because they are based on Scripture. The confessions can take any form, but they are always an authoritative summary of Scripture. They are binding, not because our forefathers wrote them, but rather because they are a correct exposition of Holy Scriptures. We can see, therefore, why a conditional or qualified promise to teach according to the Confessions is impossible. We subscribe to the Confessions *because* they are a correct exposition of Scripture, not merely *insofar* as they are a correct exposition of Scripture. Within the Lutheran church there are three levels of doctrinal authority: First, the Sacred Scriptures; secondly, the Lutheran Confessions, and finally, all other doctrinal writings or statements that conform to the Scriptures and the Confessions. The Lutheran Confessions are accepted in our church *because* they are summaries of Holy Scriptures. Other writings are accepted insofar as they reflect the Scriptures, and the Confessions, accurately. The Scriptures are rule and norm of all the church's teaching. The Confessions are the voice of the church, speaking boldly in response to Scripture, "Yes, this is what we believe. This is what we teach. This is what we confess."

Down through the years I have become increasingly aware of how important it is for our beloved Synod to continue to grow in its appreciation for the wonderful benefit of the confessions, particularly their benefits for the purpose of catechesis. These benefits are three in number. First, the Confessions are resources for teaching. Secondly, the Confessions are summaries of Scripture. Third, the Confessions norm all of our teaching. Our duty as teachers of the church is always to give expression to the faith that the church believes, teaches and confesses.

Another great benefit of the Confessions is that our church workers are bound to them and are required to state their unconditional agreement with the Book of Concord before they are accepted as church workers within our Synod.<sup>31</sup> While some may view this as slavish legalism, a binding to human authority, just the opposite is really

the case. A Lutheran church that wants to be and remain a genuinely orthodox Lutheran church recognizes the great blessing it receives in pastors, teachers and other church workers are who are pledged unconditionally to the Lutheran Confessions. When we subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions we are promising the church that we will make use of these confessions in our preaching and teaching. We will stand under their normative authority, while the Confessions remain always under the normative authority of Scripture. The Confessions are practical because the church is guaranteed that its teachers will remain within this distinct pattern of doctrine. The Confessions can be used, and must be used, to deal with doctrinal situations in our own day and time. They are not merely historical witnesses to a truth that was believed at some particular point in time. Rather they are as binding on the Lutheran church today as when they were first written.

The Preface to the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord makes it very clear that the Lutheran Confessions were not meant to be merely “historical witnesses” to the true doctrine, nor merely a collection of advisory opinions. No, the Confessions themselves state:

To insure that the truth may be established the most distinctly and clearly and may be distinguished from all error, and likewise to insure that familiar terminology may not hide and conceal something, we have collectively and severally come to a clear and express mutual agreement concerning the chief and most significant articles which were in controversy at this time. This agreement we have set forth as a certain and public testimony, not only to our contemporaries but also to our posterity, of that which our churches must believe and accept with one accord as the correct and abiding answer in the controverted issues.<sup>32</sup>

The Lutheran Confessions flow from the Reformation. The Reformation was an effort to renew the church’s task to save souls. For the sake of the church, and for the sake of the people whom pastors and other church workers are called to serve, our Synod continues to insist that our public servants subscribe unconditionally to the Lutheran Confessions. This then is the great benefit and blessing of the Lutheran

Confessions when it comes to catechesis in the church today: We have a standard of doctrine after which we are to pattern our own teaching, for this standard is a correct summary of Holy Scripture.

In a newsletter that Dr. Lance Steicke, President of the Lutheran Church of Australia, sends to his pastors, he included some very good comments on the value of the Confessions for the church. I think these comments are well worth our attention here. He was recounting a district pastor's conference at which a Lutheran theologian was speaking on the topic "Eight Reasons Why the Lutheran Confessions are Still Relevant for Today." Dr. Steicke provided the following quotation from this newsletter. I believe you will appreciate it.

We are not free-lance preachers and theologians but are subject to the discipline of our confessional loyalty. Surrounded by a host of Protestant churches where each congregation and pastor seems to do his own thing we are constantly subjected to the temptation to be more like the other—to blend into the general Protestant or evangelical scene. As one trained as a Baptist pastor, I can testify that the grass is not greener on the other side of the fence. There is great liberty and freedom in the discipline of being faithful to the Confessions. The chaos of congregational individualism is in reality a prison enjoyed for the most part only by those looking at it from without.

The Confessions are not only needed to bind us together doctrinally, but they also provide a model of disciplined obedience to the consensus positions of the church. We might not always fully understand some aspects of the Confessions, yet we agree to teach and preach in accordance with them and not in disagreement with them.

We are in danger of losing this model, however, in a day when an increasing number of pastors seem prepared to ignore consensus agreements and doctrinal opinions...and choose instead to teach and practice as they see fit. The problem with such polity is not so much an incorrect view of some issue or another. Indeed the free-lancers may well be right on a number of points. The problem, rather, is a deficient understanding of the doctrine of the church. In the Lutheran church each pastor does not simply

decide to practice as he see fits when that practice is contrary to his church's official teaching.

We might well advocate change or raise matters of doctrinal concern—and no one should prevent this being done in an appropriate manner. Until such time, however, as a new consensus is reached we are bound to observe in our public teaching and practice that which we have all agreed to abide by. A rediscovery of the Confessions as a model for disciplined obedience and loyalty to consensus decisions of the church is very much needed today. If we do not rediscover the genius of our confessionally modeled polity, we are in danger of falling prey to the chaos of Protestant individualism.

There is a great blessing in the Confessions of our church, both in the unity that they foster and sustain around God's Holy Word, and also in the form of the unity that is created. Sometimes we hear various voices saying that we are going to make people Christians first, then Lutherans. But there is never a "second stage" to Christianity. Some people think that there is, somewhere, a sort of "generic" or "one-size-fits-all" Christianity to which each denomination adds its particular shades of color, sort of like a base of paint to which one adds the particular tint required to get a certain color. Some would suggest that there is a certain "basic" Christianity to which Lutheranism adds its confessional identity, this confessional identity being only a matter of church history and opinion. This is a misleading view.<sup>33</sup>

The Lutheran Confessions claim our allegiance not because of tradition, but rather because of their claim to teach precisely what the Holy Triune God has taught in His Word. The Lutheran Church calls all to the evangelical faith in the Gospel. The Book of Concord addresses itself to the most important question that could be asked: What is the Gospel? The Lutheran Confessions want to express nothing more, nor certainly anything less, than one Lord, one faith, one church, one baptism. "Concord" means to speak with one heart, with one conviction, in harmony and unity. Therefore our Book of Concord is a tool by which the church is able to give joyful expression to its common confession of the Christian faith.

### *The Small and Large Catechisms*

Obviously, one of the first places we turn if we want to learn what our Lutheran Confessions say about teaching the faith is the section devoted to Luther's catechisms, both the Small Catechism and the Large Catechism. In the preface to the Small Catechism Luther laments "the deplorable conditions" he encountered while serving as a visitor to parishes in the fall of 1528 in Saxony, Germany. He says that he beheld "wretchedness." The "common people ... have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching."<sup>34</sup> The people, said Luther, although they are baptized and receive the Lord's Supper, do not even know the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed or the Lord's Prayer, and what is worse, they "live as if they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the Gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty."<sup>35</sup> This situation motivated Luther to write the Small Catechism, or as he put it, "this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching."<sup>36</sup>

Luther sets forth some key principles for the pastor who wishes to teach the truths of the faith to his people. Luther literally begs pastors to "take the duties of your office seriously" and "have pity on the people who are entrusted to your care." How best to do this? Luther makes a number of good points. First, says Luther, the pastor needs to "avoid changes or variation in the text and wording of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the sacraments, etc."<sup>37</sup> Instead the pastor needs to adopt one form and use that repeatedly, "year after year." Confusion will result if, from year to year, the words change—even if they change for the sake of making improvements. The bottom line: "Choose the form that pleases you and adhere to it."<sup>38</sup> The faithful pastor is to follow the same form, word by word, teaching it carefully to the young, having them repeat it until they memorize it.

What is the pastor to do when he meets up with resistance to catechetical instruction? Luther, in typical fashion, is rather blunt: Those who do not want to receive the pastor's instruction are to be told that they "deny Christ and are no Christians."<sup>39</sup> Luther even goes on to say



that people who refuse to be instructed in the faith are not to be admitted “to the sacrament, be accepted as a sponsors in Baptism, or be allowed to participate in any Christian privileges.”<sup>40</sup> Luther says that such people not only should be denied privileges in the church, but they should not be given food or drink and the prince should banish “such rude people from his land.”<sup>41</sup> Needless to say, this is somewhat of an exaggeration on Luther’s part, but it does drive the point home vividly. Perhaps we too need to take matters a bit more seriously.

After people have become familiar with the text of the catechism, it is important to teach them what it means. Luther offers a key caution: Don’t overload the learners or else “they will hardly remember anything at all.”<sup>42</sup> Luther offers another key suggestion, one that we have not followed as closely as perhaps would should have. He says that after the basics are mastered, people should move on to a more substantial treatment of the same material in order that people obtain a “richer and fuller understanding.”<sup>43</sup> Luther urges that every commandment be expounded, every petition and every part explained carefully. He encourages those who teach the faith to “point out their respective obligations, benefits, dangers, advantages and disadvantages” and then a very important suggestion is made: “Always adduce many examples from Scripture to show how God punished and blessed.”<sup>44</sup> Parents and others in authority are to be urged to rule wisely and to educate their children. They need to be shown their obligation to do so. If they do not, says Luther, “... they undermine and lay waste both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world and are the worst enemies of God and man.”<sup>45</sup>

As you move into the Large Catechism, Luther repeats many of the same things he has already mentioned in the Small Catechism, but does so in more depth. He begins the Large Catechism with a very stern admonition to pastors that they be personally diligent in their lives of prayer. Luther suggests that since the pastors of the church are now free from the practice of praying at seven set times every day, they would be well advised to “read instead at least a page or two from the Catechism, the Prayer Book, the New Testament, or something else from the Bible

and would pray the Lord's Prayer for themselves and their parishioners."<sup>46</sup> And so, we learn here that the catechism is not just for children, or the laity, but is also very much for pastors to use in their personal devotional lives.

We have a wealth of resources for our catechetical instruction in the Lutheran Confessions, not the least of which are the Small and Large Catechisms. We will be saying more about the catechism's application for our catechetical work in the last chapter of this book. Now it is time to take a look at the catechetical practices of the Early Church and Reformation era.

## Catechesis in the Early Church

OBVIOUSLY IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THIS BOOK TO PROVIDE A COMPLETE SUMMARY of the history of catechesis in the church; that alone would require a multi-volume study. We do, however, want to touch on two of the most important periods in the church's history for our discussion of catechesis: the Early Church and the Reformation eras.

If you had to pick a time in the church's history most similar to our own, that time would be the first few centuries of the Christian era. Ideas swirled about, competing with one another for adherents. There was a civil religion established to support the people's devotion to their government. There were strange and secretive mystery religions. The established religions of the day were challenged by numerous cults, borrowing from here and there. Ethics and morality were relative. A philosophy of "the end justifies the means" kept a huge government going. Relative peace was enjoyed throughout the known world. In a remote, out-of-the-way little province called Palestine, there arose a group of Jews who attracted even non-Jews to the worship of a man who claimed to be God—the man from Nazareth called Jesus.

Today we are faced with a situation remarkably similar to that of the Early Church, with one extremely significant difference. In our day we face the problem of a Christianity that has been established, but in many respects is now neglected throughout Western civilization. Many refer to our age as the "post-Christian" era, and in very general terms, this is true. It is for this reason that there has been a renewed interest in the catechetical work of the Early Church. Perhaps the most interesting fact for our purposes here is simply this: When faced with a situation remarkably similar to our own pluralistic environment, the church responded with a strong emphasis on teaching. It did not conform itself to the culture; instead, it offered the alternative of an uncompromising faith in the one true God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ,

and the expectation of a lifestyle that reflected the work of God in and through Holy Baptism. The church's message and commitment to the truths of the Holy Scriptures then was no more popular than it is today, yet the church persisted in its teachings, marshaling all of its intellectual and artistic skills to proclaim the Gospel. Indeed, there is much for us to learn from the Early Church.<sup>47</sup>

Generally speaking, there were four main periods of catechetical forms in the Early Church. First, there was the Apostolic and Post-Apostolic era (33–180 A.D.); second, the development of the graded catechumenate (180–325 A.D.); third, the high point of the Early Church's catechetical efforts (325–450 A.D.) and then the decline and decay of the catechumenate (450–600 A.D.).

### *The First Two Centuries*

One scholar describes the church's catechesis in the first two centuries this way:

Up until 313, the church had to survive under very difficult circumstances. Numerically, it had relatively few adherents, socially, its members were immersed in a pagan world; politically, it had no rights and was persecuted. But the difficulty of this situation made permanent demands that were ultimately the source of pastoral strength. The church exercised its apostolate in an eminently missionary context. It is precisely during this period that the catechumenate became structured and took on its most authentic form.<sup>48</sup>

One of the earliest references to catechesis outside of the New Testament Scriptures is found in the *Didache*.<sup>49</sup> Those who sought baptism were carefully examined and instructed. Another very early document from these years, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, from around the year 140 A.D., makes mention of this pre-baptismal instruction.<sup>50</sup> Some of the earliest and most extensive references to Christian catechesis during the earlier years of the church are found in the writings of Justin Martyr, specifically his *First Apology*. Justin describes the Early Church's reception of new members:

I will also relate the manner in which we dedicated ourselves to God when we had been made new through Christ; lest, if we omit this, we seem to be unfair in the explanation we are making. As many as are persuaded and believe what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them. They are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we ourselves were regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water.<sup>51</sup>

Further in the same document, Justin writes:

But we, after we have thus washed him who has been convinced and has assented to our teaching, bring him to the place where those who are called brethren are assembled, in order that we may offer hearty prayers in common for ourselves and for the baptized [illuminated] person, and for all others in every place ... there is brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup ... this food is called among us the Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins.<sup>52</sup>

Another early witness to the practice of the post-apostolic church is found in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus of Rome, an early bishop and martyr. There we clearly find clear evidence that by 200 A.D. a distinct order of the catechumenate had developed, along with an orderly process for bringing converts into the church. As such, it is interesting for us to note the following pertinent sections of the *Apostolic Tradition*:

Those who come forward for the first time to hear the word shall first be brought to the teachers at the house before all the people come in. And let them be examined as to the reason why they have

come forward to the faith. And those who bring them shall bear witness for them whether they are able to hear. Let their life [βίος] and manner of living be inquired into. ... Let a catechumen (κατηχούμενος) be instructed for three years. ... When the teacher finishes his instruction (καθηγεῖσθαι) let the catechumens pray by themselves apart from the faithful (πίστοις). ... After the prayer of the catechumens let the teacher lay hands upon them and pray and dismiss them.<sup>53</sup>

During the first 300 years, the church's catechetical work was characterized by what many scholars refer to as a "rigorist" tendency. There was intense scrutiny of an individual who expressed an interest in becoming a Christian. A person's lifestyle was carefully examined. This is understandable in light of the persecutions that Christians suffered periodically during the first two centuries. Before a person was accepted into a Christian community, he had to demonstrate a sincere and genuine willingness to endure the possible hardships that would come with being a Christian. Hippolytus demands in his *Apostolic Tradition* that anyone who was involved in any form of immorality immediately cease and desist from his or her sinful behavior. As he said, "let them cease or be rejected."<sup>54</sup> As one observer describes the situation, "The new convert had to be willing to make a sharp and probably costly break from the larger culture, and this turnabout was to take place not after some months, but from the very outset."<sup>55</sup>

### *The Fourth Century: The Golden Age of Catechesis*

In 313 A.D. the Roman emperor, Constantine, issued a decree that made Christianity a legal religion. Needless to say, this brought about an incredible transformation in the church. Christians were able to practice their religion freely without fear of persecution. But the negative aspect of this freedom was the fact that suddenly Christianity became somewhat fashionable. The church fathers, who worked closely after the date of the legalization of Christianity, often reminded Christians and potential Christians of the dangers of too quick a con-

version. An elaborate series of rituals and steps toward baptism developed and reached a high point during the fourth century. Some scholars believe that part of the reason for the elaborate "ritualization" of Christian initiation was the church's desire to offer something similar to the elaborate rights and ceremonies of the mystery cults. Even still, the process of Christian catechesis was by no means a quick one. Careful instruction took upwards of three years before the person was received into the church through baptism.

One of the problems that arose in connection with the various "grades" or "orders" of the catechumenate was that some people chose to remain in the lower orders of the catechumenate in order to avoid baptism. They recognized that life would be more rigorous once they were baptized. There was a faulty theological reason for the delay of baptism as well. At this time the church believed that only sins committed before a person's baptism were forgiven by baptism, but sins committed after baptism were able to be forgiven only through penance, which in some cases could be extremely difficult. In order to avoid this unpleasant experience some Christians delayed baptism until the very end of their lives.

In addition to having to deal with a near tidal wave of persons who wanted to become Christians, the church was shaken by doctrinal controversies about the person and work of Jesus Christ and the nature of the Holy Trinity. There was the problem associated with the Donatist<sup>56</sup> controversy in North Africa and, later, Pelagianism.<sup>57</sup> Pagan beliefs still persisted, along with remnants of Gnosticism<sup>58</sup> and Manicheism.<sup>59</sup> Again, we need to underscore that this was no "perfect era" for the church. But along with the many challenges facing the church in the fourth century, the church was blessed with an abundance of capable Christian theologians.<sup>60</sup>

During the fourth century, from what we know from the sources available to us, the catechetical process was as follows: A person who expressed interest in the church was given a very basic introduction, called an "evangelization." This stage was known as the "inquiry." The person who was interested in the church was examined by the church's

leaders so that they could learn of his lifestyle and the sincerity of his interest. After this introductory phrase, he was signed with the cross and was enrolled on the church's books as a member of the church's catechumenate. At that point, he was in the second order of the catechumenate. Catechumens would join the rest of the congregation and receive instruction through attending worship regularly. Generally this stage lasted at least an entire year, and unfortunately sometimes lasted for a very long time, as people delayed their baptism. This became a pastoral problem and the Early Church never did deal effectively with it.

During the catechumenate the most intense phase of catechesis occurred during Lent, when, through a combination of education and ritual, a person was prepared to be baptized. Throughout this period of the catechumenate there was still maintained what scholars have called the *disciplina arcani* (discipline of secrecy). Catechumens were not told about the Sacraments in much detail. In some parts of the church the secrecy was maintained until after a person's baptism, at which time he was given thorough instruction in the "mysteries" of the church. These lectures are known as "mystagogical lectures." Cyril of Jerusalem is a good source for this form of instruction. Other parts of the church would reveal the secrets just prior to baptism. We actually have one pilgrim's journal of her trip to Jerusalem where she witnessed first hand the mystagogical lectures by Cyril of Jerusalem.<sup>61</sup> The mystagogical lectures took place during the week after Easter, up until the time of Pentecost.

To summarize, during the fourth century there was an ordered, four-stage catechumenate: inquiry, catechumenate, candidate for Baptism, and then the post-baptismal instruction phase. The church was passionate about laying a solid and thorough grounding in Christian truth and Christian life. They did not wish to separate the two and did not view the primary method of forming Christians to be simply "lectures in doctrine." There was a combination of worship, modeling the faith, social interaction and formative instruction in Scripture. This all culminated in Baptism. This then was followed by additional instruc-



tion to reinforce and further illuminate what had been learned, and to help the new Christians appreciate what they had received in their baptism and first communion.

### *Decline of the Catechumenate*

Gradually, the sheer numbers of persons entering the church and the fact that, increasingly, infants were being baptized contributed to both a decline and a change in the process of catechesis. As long as the church still required careful examination of the baptismal candidates, a catechumenate of sufficient length, and a thorough instruction of the candidates for baptism, the integrity of the catechetical process was preserved. But evidence of the decline in the catechetical program is found at the Synod of Agde in 506 A.D. when it was found necessary to order that Jews had to remain in the catechetical program for at least eight months. In 610 A.D. another council found it necessary to order that there be a minimum of 20 days of instructions for those about to be baptized!

The Medieval church faced two great challenges: the decline in the quality of the catechumenate for adults and the lack of instruction for children who had been baptized as infants. The church dealt poorly with these two challenges, and conditions went from bad to worse in regard to religious instruction of the laity. The ritual of confirmation, once exclusively attached to baptism, was soon separated and became a rite, nearly devoid of instruction, administered only by a bishop. In 1122 Hugh of Victor referred to confirmation as the “second sacrament,” and by 1439 confirmation was universally recognized as a separate sacrament, distinct from baptism.

As we look at the history of the Early Church, some key attitudes and perspectives on teaching the faith become clear. The church recognized that it had to address itself to a culture that was hostile to its message. It had to engage the culture in relevant terms and modes of expression in order to communicate the message of the Gospel, but it had to do so without watering down or compromising the Gospel. To the Early Church, the notion of Christian education implied the acqui-

sition of a deep knowledge of the faith, moving beyond simply an intellectual grasp of facts. Some have described this sort of knowledge as “experienced knowledge” of the revealed truth of the Word of God as it was proclaimed through the church’s official teachers and doctrines. In this way the church itself became a school of great importance in the first few centuries of its existence. It was dedicated to reforming the world and it chose teaching as its primary method of accomplishing this goal. The church recognized that a convert to the faith was entering into a community of believers, a community that was sharply distinguished from others in the way it viewed life and lived out that life to the glory of God, for the good of the kingdom.

# Catechesis and the Reformation

## *Luther the Catechist*

With Luther we have an evangelical breakthrough in catechesis. Many immediately think of the Small Catechism when they read a comment like this, but the Small Catechism was the result of years of hard work and thought by Luther and his associates in Wittenberg. In 1516 Luther was appointed pastor of St. Mary's Church in Wittenberg, the city's main church. One of the first things he did was to begin to preach on the "catechism" which was understood to be the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and at first the Hail Mary and other documents. From June 1516 to February 1517 Luther preached sermons on the Ten Commandments. This was followed by a series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer, from February to April. These first catechetical sermons were printed and reprinted, again and again.

Luther described his daily activities to his friend Spalatin in a letter from March 13, 1519. He said, "I am too busy to translate my explanation of the Lord's Prayer into Latin. Each evening I expound to children and ordinary folk the Commandments and the Lord's Prayer."<sup>62</sup> It was Luther's intention to familiarize his congregation thoroughly with the texts of the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, to which he referred to as the "catechism." In 1520 Luther worked through the sermons he had preached on the Commandments and the Lord's Prayer and added an explanation of the Creed. This work *Brief Form of the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer* was his first major catechetical work. In the preface to this little book, Luther wrote:

The ordinary Christian, who cannot read the Scripture, is required to learn and know the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer; and this has not come to pass without

God's special ordering. For these three contain fully and completely everything that is in the Scriptures, everything that ever should be preached, and everything that a Christian needs to know, all put so briefly and so plainly that no one can make complaint or excuse, saying that what he needs for his salvation is too long or too hard to remember. Three things a man needs to know in order to be saved. First, he must know what he ought to do and what he ought not to do. Second, when he finds that by his own strength he can neither do what he ought, nor leave undone the things he ought not to do, he must know where to seek and find and get the strength he needs. Third, he must know how to seek and find and get this strength. When a man is ill, he needs to know first what his illness is—what he can do and what he cannot do. Then he needs to know where to find the remedy that will restore his health and help him to do and leave undone the things he ought. Third, he must ask for this remedy, and seek it, and get it or have it brought to him. In like manner the Commandments teach a man to know his illness, so that he feels and sees what he can do and what he cannot do, what he can and what he cannot leave undone, and thus knows himself to be a sinner and wicked man. After that the Creed shows him and teaches him where he may find the remedy—the grace which helps him to become a good man and to keep the Commandments; it shows him God and the mercy which He has revealed and offered in Christ. In the third place, the Lord's Prayer teaches him how to ask for this grace, get it and take it to himself, to wit, by habitious, humble, comforting prayer; then grace is given, and by the fulfillment of God's commandments he is saved. These are the three chief things in all the Scriptures.<sup>63</sup>

One reason for Luther's passion for good catechesis was his participation in the visitation of the parishes in Saxony. In October 1525, Luther urged the ruler of Saxony, Elector John, to do something about the problems faced by pastors and congregations in his territory. In many cases, pastors and their congregations faced dire financial difficulties. This was Luther's chief concern that motivated his call for a visitation of the parishes in electoral Saxony.<sup>64</sup>

Shortly after his participation in the visitation, Luther wrote to Nikolas Amsdorf: “We are visitors, that is, bishops, and have found poverty and every need everywhere. May the Lord send workers into his harvest. Amen.”<sup>65</sup> Luther found that conditions were appalling in some areas. The peasants in particular were totally ignorant of the Christian faith and life. He lamented the fact that they did not pray at all, go to confession or receive Holy Communion. He blamed this lamentable state of affairs on the way the Catholic bishops had neglected their primary spiritual duties. All of this was motivation to Luther to get busy on the project of preparing a good resource for pastors that could be used to educate their congregations.<sup>66</sup>

### *The Development of The Catechisms*

The Small Catechism was a result of 13 long years of hard work and effort and one of Luther’s greatest achievements. Luther discarded auxiliary material that had accumulated by this time, such as treatments of moral and venial sins, studies of the “Hail Mary” and so forth. Instead, he focused on the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. He believed these three elements reflected God’s work to save us. Luther took up the subject of the catechism and how best to instruct people, particularly children, in his 1526 *German Order of 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. This is why the candidates who had been admitted for such instruction and learned the Creed before their baptism used to be called catechumens. This instruction or catechization I cannot put better or more plainly than has been done from the beginning of Christendom and retained till now, i.e., in these three parts, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Our Father. These three plainly and briefly contain exactly everything that a Christian needs to know.<sup>67</sup>

Luther explains that rather than simply relying on rote memorization, it would be good to incorporate questions and answers. The goal, according to Luther, was to move the one being catechized to the point where “the heart may grasp the whole sum of Christian truth under two headings, or as it were, two pouches, namely, faith and love.”<sup>68</sup> Under faith, Luther suggested two further divisions, one that would gather together all ideas of our sinfulness and need for God’s mercy, and the other, the gracious promises of God, the “part of faith that trusts that through Jesus Christ we are all redeemed from this corruption, sin, and condemnation.”<sup>69</sup> Likewise love also could be further divided into two parts: “Into the one put this piece, that we should serve and do good to everyone, even as Christ has done for us: ... Into the other put this piece, that we should gladly endure and suffer all kinds of evil.”<sup>70</sup> Luther then suggests that once this basic framework is in mind, children can begin to “bring home verses of Scripture from the sermon and to repeat them at mealtime for the parents” and then place them into the pouches and pockets “just as pennies, groschen, and gulden are put into a purse.”<sup>71</sup> Luther offers examples of which verses could go in which pockets.

Perhaps some would consider all of this to rather foolish, merely child’s play. To this Luther responded:

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 so enriched in Scripture and in the knowledge of God that of their own accord they would add more pockets ... and comprehend all Scripture in them. Otherwise, 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.<sup>72</sup>

As Martin Brecht notes in his masterful three-volume biography of Luther, Luther was concerned for the laity, particularly in regard to their participation in Holy Communion. "In order to take part intelligently in communion, one had to be informed about faith, prayer and the Lord's Supper. After 1524, in Wittenberg, it appears that an examination of one's knowledge of communion was connected with confession."<sup>73</sup>

In his 1527 commentary on Zechariah, Luther laments the fact that there were far too many preachers who had difficulties with catechesis. He is particularly critical of so-called "scholars" who do their work "with a lofty air and soar upward and nowhere, just as if they had long worn threadbare the common teachings of faith and love and the cross, they affect figures of speech, mysterious interpretations and allegories, and delight in beautiful thought."<sup>74</sup> He has little time for this. "They do not consider, however, whether they are teaching the poor common man anything but only consider how cleverly and brilliantly they may be able to teach."<sup>75</sup>

Luther says that perhaps if only the scholars would spend some of their time providing something useful for the common people the church might be able to tolerate their fanciful speculations, but this does not happen. The common people require "simple teaching of faith in Christ."

For I can see every day that there are very few preachers at this time who properly understand the Our Father, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments and are able to teach these to the poor people ... [who] flock to these fine actors, listen to them, and gape at them in great amazement. When the year is ended, however these people know neither the Our Father nor the Creed nor the Ten Commandments—and these, after all, are the principal things and the genuine old Christian catechism or common instruction for the Christians.<sup>76</sup>

What sort of preacher ought the church most highly regard? To Luther the answer was very clear:

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. There is no Gospel, either, from which a man could not teach these things if he only were willing and took an interest in teaching the poor common man. One must, of course, constantly prompt the people in these brief things—that is, in the Our Father, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed—and then insist on them and urge them upon the people in all Gospels and all sermons.<sup>77</sup>

After Luther had personally participated in the visitation, he preached a series of sermons on the catechism in December 1528. Luther's passionate commitment to good, solid catechesis is made clear in these remarks he made on the First Sunday in Advent, November 29, 1528, as he began his catechetical sermons:

It has hitherto been our custom to teach the elements and fundamentals of Christian knowledge and life four times each year and we have therefore arranged to preach on these things for two weeks in each quarter, four days a week at two o'clock in the afternoon. Because these matters are highly necessary, I faithfully admonish you to assemble at the designated time with your families. Do not allow yourself to be kept away by your work or trade and do not complain that you will suffer loss if for once you interrupt your work for an hour. Remember how much freedom the Gospel has given to you, so that now you are not obliged to observe innumerable holy days and can pursue your work. And besides, how much time do you spend drinking and swilling! You don't count that, but when you are asked to spend time on God's Word you are disgusted. Woe to you who scorn this treasure on account of your greed and will not give your servants a free hour to hear God's Word. Give them an hour off that they may come to know themselves and Christ more fully. But you fathers who have given your children, servants and maidservants time off and then



found that they did not want to come to church, I give you the liberty to compel them to come. Don't think, you fathers, that you have fulfilled your responsibility for your households when you say, "Oh, if they don't want to go, how can I compel them? I dare not do it." Oh, no, this isn't so. You have been appointed their bishop and pastor; take heed that you do not neglect your office over them. If you neglect this office in your homes, we shall fall into public disgrace, as we have seen this happen already. For you will have to answer for your children and servants whom you have neglected. If you have neglected their education inwardly or outwardly, see to it that this is corrected! See to it, then, that they come to hear this preaching. I hold the office of pastor and I will preach these sermons; I will do my part and even more than we are obliged to do.<sup>78</sup>

Luther again impresses upon his congregation the importance of knowing the basic parts of the catechism.

These portions, which you have heard me recite, were called by the ancient fathers the catechism, that is, an instruction for children, that children and all who want to be Christians should know. And one who does not know them should not be counted among the number of Christians. For when a person does not know this, it is a sign that he has no regard for God and Christ. Therefore I have admonished you adults to hold your children and servants and yourselves to this; otherwise we shall not admit you to Holy Communion. For if you parents and masters do not help, we shall accomplish little with our preaching, and if I preach all year long and the crowd only comes in and looks at the walls and windows of the church, it is of no use. A person who wants to be a good citizen owes it to his family to urge them to learn these portions of the catechism, and if they will not, do not give them any bread to eat. If the servants grumble, then throw them out of the house. If you have children, train them to learn the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. If you urge them diligently to do this, they will learn much in a year's time. But when they have learned this, there are many excellent passages scattered throughout the Scriptures; these they should learn afterwards; if not all, at

least some of them. God has appointed you a master and a wife in order that you should hold your family to this. And you can do this easily enough by praying in the morning when you rise, in the evening when you go to bed, and before and after meals. Thus they will be brought up in the fear of the Lord. I am not saying this for nothing; I am determined that you shall not cast it to the winds. I should never have believed that you were such ignorant people if I did not learn it every day. Every father of a family is a bishop in his house and the wife a bishopess. Therefore remember that you in your homes are to help us carry on the ministry as we do in the church. If we do this we shall have a gracious God, who will defend us from all evil and in all evil.<sup>79</sup>

It was in this spirit, that Luther devoted himself to the preparation of catechetical material and the catechetical task to the point that Luther was willing to say that a boy or girl in Wittenberg knew more than all the learned universities and scholars because they had been taught the true catechism, namely,

The Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, [and] what confession, baptism, prayer, the cross, living, dying, and the sacrament of the altar are, and about what marriage, civil government, father and mother, wife and child, man and son, servant and maid are. In sum, I have brought a good conscience and order to all the estates in the world, so that everyone knows how he is to live and serve God in his estate, and not a little fruit, peace, and virtue has been produced among those who have accepted it.<sup>80</sup>

Based on his sermons on the catechism of 1528, Luther worked on preparing both the Large and Small Catechisms in the first part of 1529. In early 1525, Nicholas Hausmann had urged Luther to pull together a book just for the instruction of children in the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. Luther asked Justas Jonas and John Agricola to prepare a suitable "Catechism for Children" (*Catechismus Puerorum*). They agreed to do this, but never completed the project.<sup>81</sup> His development of the catechisms was directly based on his sermons to the common people of Wittenberg. Martin Brecht notes, "A knowl-

edge of the faith that could be comprehended by the laity grew from his magnificently simple and understandable sermons.”<sup>82</sup> The Small Catechism began as a one-page poster, used to help preachers teach their congregations the basic parts of the catechism. It was also intended for use in homes. The visitation had convinced Luther that a very simple form was necessary and Luther urged the preachers to use it to teach their people. If they were unable to teach adequately, he urged them simply to have the congregation memorize the material printed on the posters.

Luther first prepared the Large Catechism, which became available on April 23, 1529. He believed that it was vital to produce the Large Catechism first so that parish pastors would have material to use when they worked through the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer with their people. Following the publication of the Large Catechism, Luther arranged for the publication of the materials that before had been available on large cards for use in the church. This project was completed on May 16, 1529.<sup>83</sup> So highly valued was the Small Catechism that it was accepted and was incorporated into the Book of Concord, along with the Large Catechism, as a formal confession of the Lutheran Church. This little book has had revolutionary implications for catechesis in the church. Michael Reu is probably not exaggerating too much when he describes the year 1529 as “the most momentous in the history of religious instruction.”<sup>84</sup>

### *Catechetical Work After the Catechisms*

Luther’s catechetical work was not confined to the Small Catechism, for in the same year he published still another book titled *Passionale*. This was a collection of 49 pictures with explanations. Eleven of them were from the Old Testament and 15 are devoted exclusively to the Lord’s suffering and crucifixion. It was designed to help households instruct their children in the basics of the passion history and other basic biblical history. Luther himself said he gathered this material together, “chiefly for the sake of the children and the simple folks who will remember the sacred stories more readily when you use pictures

and illustrations in teaching.”<sup>85</sup> The idea of preparing books of pictures for the laity was not unique to Luther. This was done throughout the Middle Ages. What was unique to Luther’s work was the fact that Luther removed all non-Biblical material from his collection. Also, Luther organized the pictures to follow the Bible’s own chronology and he added portions of the Biblical narrative to complement the pictures.

Throughout Reformation Germany, parishes adopted new practices in order to inculcate the catechism among their members. In Schoenewalde, during the Saxon visitation of 1528–1529, a new procedure was announced and adopted. By no means was it unique. The parish agreed to the following practice:

On the afternoon of every Sunday and festival day the pastor shall recite before the people the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. Then he shall in simplest manner explain the same, similarly as a printed chart has been issued, and finally repeat one, two, three, or four points, as time will permit, so that the people may understand them. During the winter time he shall also do this twice a week, on Tuesday and Friday, and during the sermon he shall examine the people as to the meaning of some of the articles. After he has so far succeeded that they know the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Prayer, he shall also preach to them the benefit of the Holy Sacraments of Baptism and of the Altar and point out what they find in them. Unless they have confessed and unless they have deplored their failings, the pastor shall give the sacrament to no one; likewise, unless they know the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. He shall visit the villages every two weeks and teach the catechism there.<sup>86</sup>

Wherever the Reformation was introduced, similar practices were adopted. One can see catechetical regulations in the church orders for Braunschweig, Hamburg, Luebeck, Pomerania, Denmark and Hildesheim.<sup>87</sup> The Church Order of Braunschweig served as a model for many other church orders throughout Europe in the 16th century. The order states:

Work of all the preachers: Morning services on Sundays and holy-days during summer, beginning with the Passion season. At 4 o'clock, at St. Martin's, St. Andrew's, and St. Magnus's, the catechism, that is, the Christian instruction from the Ten Commandments of God, from the Lord's Prayer, and Baptism and the Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, shall be preached in the simplest and plainest manner, so that the common people may thus learn what are true Christian commands, true Christian faith, true Christian prayer, and what one shall believe of the two Sacraments that Christ has by His eternal Word instituted and commanded in this world. At 5 o'clock this shall be done at St. Catherine's, St. Ulrich's, and St. Peter's. At 6 or 7 o'clock a sermon is to be preached on the Gospel-lessons at all the churches. In fall all the services may be held at a later hour but all pastors shall agree and adopt a uniform custom in all the churches.<sup>88</sup>

Wilhelm Löhe offers this eloquent praise for Luther's Catechism:

Luther's Small Catechism is a confession of the church, the confession which is most acceptable and familiar to people. No one can deny that no catechism in the world but this can be prayed. It is less known but still true that it may be called a genuine miracle when one considers the extraordinary fullness and the great richness of knowledge which is here put into so few words. Anyone who accuses it of poverty and meagerness certainly does not understand it. Justas Jonas said, 'It costs only six pennies, but it cannot be purchased with 6,000 worlds.' This he said because of its richness and fullness.<sup>89</sup>

The noted Reformation scholar Heinrich Bornkamm offers a fine summary of the strengths of Luther's catechisms:

The *Large Catechism* is one of Luther's greatest artistic achievements. From this initial work a second sprang forth, *The Small Catechism*. While the mastery of the larger work lies in the wealth and liveliness of its articulation of the faith, the beauty of the smaller work lies in the precision with which it made matters of faith luminous and memorable.<sup>90</sup>

Luther's catechisms, both Large and Small, were made available and became the basis for religious instruction throughout Protestant Germany. The catechism also became the primary reading textbook in all elementary schools. Catechism instruction provided a unifying factor in religious instruction since everyone literally was learning from the same page. In addition to the catechism, in the schools throughout Germany there was hymn singing, prayers before and after classes, worship services, religiously based grammar work and the study of commentaries on the Scripture. Thus, one of the major goals of the Reformation, religious instruction—or "catechesis" as we are calling it—was accomplished.

# Catechesis in the Church Today

HERE I WANT TO OFFER ENCOURAGEMENT TO OUR SYNOD TO DIG DEEPLY into the issues surrounding catechesis. We need to look upon the challenges we face today in regard to catechesis as wonderful opportunities for the church workers and congregations of our Synod. In this chapter I want to walk with you through a number of practical issues impacting catechesis in our Synod today. Again, my approach here in this more chapter is to offer a variety of “snapshots” or issues surrounding catechesis.

## *Concerns*

Perhaps the best way to begin is once again to emphasize the fact that our Synod needs to reorient itself around a more holistic view of catechesis. It is important for us to recognize the significant shift in basic attitudes that surround the church and impact it as well. Dr. Veith offers this pointed summary of the times in which we live:

Although we live in the age of the “mega-church” and the church growth movement, the percentage of Americans going to church is about the same as in the 1980s, and Protestant membership has actually declined. Contemporary Christians, who often seem to be at peace with an ungodly culture, lack staying power, spiritual commitment, and fidelity to Biblical moral standards. Many churches do well in quantity while doing poorly in quality. The end of the modern era opens up genuine opportunities for Biblical Christianity. However, instead of squarely facing the post-modern condition, many Christians succumb to the postmodernism plaguing the rest of the culture. Conservative and evangelical Christians did well, for the most part, in avoiding the temptations of modernism. Now with their modernistic enemy defeated, they are letting their guard down, naively giving in to the new cul-

tural climate. Many supposedly conservative churches now alter not only their style but their message in an attempt to appeal to contemporary society. It does not have to be this way. The church can be postmodern without being postmodernist. Christians can take advantage of the death of modernism to confess the historic Biblical faith to a lost and confused generation. To be relevant to the postmodern era, the church must simply proclaim the truth of God's Word, the validity of God's law, and the sufficiency of the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>91</sup>

We face other obstacles as well. The other day I received a letter from a concerned layperson who wrote to me to express her concern that her pastor told the junior confirmation class that they could "throw away" their copies of Luther's catechism, since they would not be using them in their classes. When some of the parents expressed concerns, the pastor reportedly said, "Luther's catechism is too hard for the children to understand." Throw away their catechisms? Absurd!

But it is not only in regard to the catechesis of children that I have concerns. I continue to hear reports about less-than-adequate adult instruction classes. I am concerned with an approach that we could describe as, "once over lightly, here is your box of offering envelopes, welcome to the church!" It is little wonder that within a short time a goodly number of folks brought into the church this way find themselves drifting out the back door. It was this concern that moved our Synod, meeting in convention in July 1995, to adopt two excellent resolutions on the use of good catechetical materials and a concern for good instruction of prospective members.<sup>92</sup>

One recent commentator referred to the phenomenon of the "once over lightly" approach to adult instruction as "Microwave Christianity." He wrote: "The trend is the requiring of shorter and shorter periods of adult instruction, prior to adult confirmation. One church offers three evening sessions. Another that recently came to my attention was getting the job done through two evening meetings and one Saturday, morning and afternoon. Still another confirms new adult members after a learning process that occurs on two Saturdays, morn-



ing and afternoon.”<sup>93</sup> I have even heard of a church that required only a Saturday afternoon session along the lines of a “get acquainted with us” seminar and then brought these folks into communicant membership.

The sad reality is that some congregations are moving toward this approach for those who have only a minimal exposure to the faith. I concur with the following remarks:

Microwave Christians? The shortest, easiest road to church membership? One would hope not. Such an approach shortchanges prospective members and stunts the growth of new Christians. There is no justification for it. Those who currently require a more extensive period of instruction are to be commended, and to be exhorted to work to improve their teaching ministry. Those who have slipped into the thinking here criticized should ... change and recapture the joyful opportunity to instruct adults as new members of our congregations, and more importantly, as members of the Body of Christ.<sup>94</sup>

Perhaps the greatest challenge for us today is to reorient our thinking about catechesis. It is all about forming a Christian mind and heart in our people. It is not just moving through a textbook or a set of facts. Nor is it seeing just how quickly this can be done in a minimalist approach. It is all about adequately preparing people to become active members of the body of Christ. It is about both the mind and the heart. But we must not for a moment swing too far in the other direction with this emphasis on the heart. There must be content to the teaching. The catechetical process must not be turned into some sort of “encounter” group where people focus only on their own feelings. This too is as much of a dead-end as a dull presentation of facts. There must be a proper balance between mind and heart. And this is certainly not accomplished in a quick series of lessons. As one person put it recently, “Does this trend toward fewer and fewer weeks betray an underlying intellectualistic understanding of the faith and hence of catechesis? In other words, is the faith seen primarily in terms of information that can be quickly downloaded so that we can move on to more important

matters (e.g. the discovery of spiritual gifts and other task-oriented activities)?”<sup>95</sup> This, to me, is one of the greatest challenge we have today in our catechetical work.

### *The Challenge of Confirmation*

As we noted in our historical survey, initially confirmation was attached to Baptism, until that time when more infants were baptized than adults. Gradually, the rite of confirmation was totally detached and became a separate Sacrament. Today we have a number of challenges in this area. One author described the situation well when he wrote:

Confirmation day has often become “graduation day.” The confirmands ... may feel that they now have their spiritual bags packed for the trip of life. Or a couple is heard to say that when their child is confirmed, they will stop attending church. A workman who has not been to church in years tells a pastor, “Oh, don’t get me wrong. I remember my confirmation.” He may “remember” it noetically, up in his head. But the sheer facts of memory have no effect in his daily life, which is absolutely devoid of worship, the sacraments, Bible reading and prayer.<sup>96</sup>

I have no doubt that many pastors who read these comments will be nodding their head in agreement. But they may also be saying, “Yes, I agree, but what would you suggest to help us overcome these misunderstandings about confirmation?” I can appreciate our pastors frustrations with their confirmation programs.

A key challenge for us is to make sure we are clearly communicating the fact that confirmation in no way “completes” or “finishes” Baptism. It is an affirmation of the gifts God has given us in Baptism. It provides a wonderful opportunity for our youth and adults to publicly express their commitment to their Lord, but it is in no way any sort of “fulfillment” of a “covenant” that God initiated in Baptism. This is a very important concern that requires our attention as we conduct our confirmation programs. We need to avoid any sort of impression

that would lead a person to suggest something like this: "When you were baptized a check was made out in your name to eternal life. On your confirmation day you cashed the check." The tragedy is that this comment was actually made by a noted Lutheran theologian a couple of decades ago!

We need to just keep on pressing the point in our sermons, in our instruction classes, in confirmation classes and among our congregational leaders. It needs to be said that such serious misconceptions about baptism are more recent developments, no doubt reflecting the unhealthy influence of less than Lutheran, or non-Lutheran theology on the church. Dr. Walther was clear on the point that confirmation is by no means a completion of Baptism. He wrote in his *Pastoral Theology*:

The preacher should certainly guard against presenting confirmation as an action which completes and perfects a Baptism received when the child was unaware, as if the child first now has to make his own the confession and vow spoken by the godparents. Rather the action of confirmation should serve mainly to bring the glory of Baptism received already in childhood to the living memory of the confirmand and the whole congregation.<sup>97</sup>

Our Lutheran Confessions clearly do not accept confirmation as a sacrament, contrary to the Medieval teaching. It is interesting to note that Veit Dietrich's German translation of Melancthon's *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* inserted a word that Luther used to describe confirmation: *Gaukelspiel*—humbug.<sup>98</sup> However, lest we be too hasty in dismissing confirmation, we need to recognize that confirmation continued as a valued part of the Lutheran church's practice. Martin Chemnitz in his magisterial analysis of the Council of Trent, presents the Lutheran rite of confirmation, and its benefits in the church.<sup>99</sup>

There is much we can do to strengthen our confirmation programs and overcome the misconceptions that one runs across in the parish. I am thinking here of suggestions I have heard about a series of

intensive catechetical seminars, workshops and study groups, just for young people. But our Synod must view catechesis as more of a life-long process, rather than simply a series of courses over a period of years. We may be able better to lead our children, from a very early age, into knowledge of the basic texts of the catechism, building on this as the years go by. As we do, it may well be that we will be able to overcome the tendency to view baptized children as somehow less than “real” members of the church.

### *Attitudes and Actions in Regard to Catechesis*

I think it is important for our pastors to review the history of the church and note the great importance catechesis has played in our Synod. The past teaches us that there have been great blessings from a strong program of catechesis. A well-educated laity is crucial for the ongoing work of the kingdom.

Equally important is the pastor's attitude about catechesis. I simply cannot underscore this fact enough. It is crucial that he be concerned about developing a strong program of catechesis in his congregation. There is a great need to recognize the past blessings, as well as the future blessings which can be gained by our church through catechesis. In the mid-to-late 1960s, with the influence of the social upheavels of the time, confirmation instruction de-emphasized cognitive learning and placed too much emphasis on emotion, feeling and so on. While in some respects this was a good thing, it is no surprise that we have a generation or more in our Synod today who have a very poor knowledge of basic Christian doctrine. The consequences of this situation and its impact on our present situation is more than apparent. Time and again I hear from concerned lay people who share with me their observation that when bringing in new members, their congregations do not seem to be providing for their thorough instruction in the faith.

The pastor needs to seek the help of his congregational leadership and, in fact, of the entire congregation. Citing the past blessings of a strong emphasis on catechesis, there can be great blessing when the

problem is faced openly and the challenges addressed honestly. Undoubtedly we will have to recognize and deal with the problems that have contributed to the erosion of our awareness of the important role of catechesis in the life of the church in more recent years.

It would be misleading to think that only within our own generation has the renewal of catechesis been of concern. The challenge has always been for us to recapture that zeal for catechesis that marked the church of the Lutheran Reformation. A number of decades ago, one of our Synod's seminary professors wrote:

As children of the Reformation, as successors of Luther in the noble work of building the church of the pure Word and Sacraments, let us, like Luther, glory in remaining pupils of the Catechism and preachers of the Catechism till our dying day. We are at times filled with gravest fear as to the future of our dear Lutheran Church. We know the dangers impending within and without; we know that indifference, worldliness, smug self-satisfaction, externalism, a lamentable unwillingness to work and sacrifice for God's kingdom, threaten to sap the very life-blood of our church. Are we pastors applying the proper remedy? Conditions are not worse today than in the day of Luther. Though then, as now, the whole head was sick and the whole heart faint, yet he began to preach the Catechism and continued to preach this Catechism. And, lo and behold, what marvelous success was gained, what seemingly impossible change was accomplished.<sup>100</sup>

### *The Catechism in Church, School and Home*

To me, the use of the Small Catechism in Lutheran catechesis is, simply put, a must. This is not to say that there are no other materials we can or should use, but we do need to use the Small Catechism in our catechetical work. This is not just a move only to increase cognitive knowledge in our people. We dare not neglect the actual teaching of the catechism, with its various parts and meanings, but this teaching must be an exercise in spiritual formation based on the text of the Small Catechism.

Wilhem Löhe includes an excellent discussion of the Small Catechism in his famous work *Three Books About the Church*. He was keenly sensitive to the over-intellectualization of catechetical instruction.

Some deal with the catechism as if it were a point of view from which one should go out, and around which one should draw the whole periphery of sacred doctrine. They explain the catechism in such a way that they cover it, hide it from view, and kill it with the multitude of their explanations and additions. It pleases them to use their catechetical instruction as opportunities to repeat their dogmatic lectures, for which they otherwise would have not time or desire. They deliver a long dogmatic monologue before their children, who get very little out of it. Every pastor, every school-teacher explains the catechism this way; he may perhaps profit a little from it, but what does the church get out of it? Even if thousands of explanations of the catechism are printed and form a veritable deluge, Luther's own words will remain the ark in the flood which saves a few while the deluge itself kills. <sup>101</sup>

Löhe lays an eloquent challenge before us as he describes the great unifying effect of a thorough knowledge of the catechism:

Home, school and church together become one church through the precious catechism. Why is the important factor of the home left out? The catechism is so wretchedly learned and recited and it sounds so wooden and stale because men treat it not as something for the home, not as something for daily life, not as wisdom for life, but as a lesson for children to learn in school. Just as a battle cry should be on the cry of all those who belong to an army, so the catechism belongs on all lips as a spiritual battle cry. The father, the children, the servants should use it, pray it, learn it, and treasure it; thus it will become like the widow of Zarephath's cruse of oil which never failed. Yes, when the catechism once again becomes a household book we shall learn what sort of strength comes from it for all the church's activities. It is a *norma normata*, a divine-human rule of faith—divine in text, human in its faithful "What does this mean?"—a symbol, a war cry which, when spoken from the depths of the soul, can topple the bulwarks of Satan!

Its use should be encouraged. Its divine basis in the *norma normans*, God's Word, should be demonstrated. It should be quoted and praised in sermons, so that it may help strengthen the unity of the church and that all men—great and small, learned and unlearned—may have something on which they are united and may know that amid the world's confusion they are one. It sounds very easy and insignificant, yet so much depends on it!<sup>102</sup>

We need to use all resources at our command to relate the cognitive content of the catechism to the daily experiences of our people, helping them to learn how to integrate their faith into their lives. As I look back to those years when I was yet in parish ministry, I seriously question now whether I carried the cognitive aspect of catechesis too far. I guess I just assumed that if the people knew what the Scriptures taught on a given issue, the Holy Spirit would pick it up from there and apply it to their lives. As I look back now, I recognize that I should have been more diligent to help people apply the catechism's teachings to their daily lives.

I think of the catechism in this way. When I was old enough to drive, I remember studying the state driver's manual. I was not studying to become a good driver, I was studying it only to pass the test and get my license. I am sure many pastors have experienced something similar when it comes to attitudes toward memorizing the catechism. We want to learn it, not just to pass a test, or qualify for something else, but in order to become better Christians and to be able to have our minds and hearts formed and shaped by the catechism's Biblical view of reality.

One author puts matters nicely when he proposes the following:

Perhaps the time has come for the church to re-examine what it seeks to accomplish through catechesis. Any inquiry into the subject of Lutheran catechesis must begin by taking into account the nature and purpose of those texts that have traditionally provided the form and content of catechesis, namely, the Small and Large Catechisms. Its prefaces and chief parts make it clear that they were never intended to be compends of systematic theology, much

less reference books for the dissemination of information. They are handbooks for Christian living. The catechisms lead a person into the fullness of the Christian life, a fullness that can best be described as the *ars vivendi fide*, that is, the “art of living by faith.” In other words, the Small and Large Catechisms seek to form within us a habit of mind and heart that is lived from faith to faith. To that end, Luther adopted the catholic components of catechesis inherited from the Early Church and adopted them in an evangelical manner. In his hands, the catechisms become commentaries on the Christian life in the light of faith. They address the question, “What does the Christian life look like in the light of faith in Christ? If I believe, what does my life look like?” They have been composed so as to shape every aspect and every activity of life in light of the doctrine of justification through faith in Christ. In the process they make it clear that faith is *not* primarily a knowledge of dates, places, concepts, and doctrines. It is not something that is lodged primarily in the intellect.<sup>103</sup>

That quotation accurately states the concern I have about limiting catechesis to the cognitive realm. It would not be true, however, that with this understanding we should get away from memorizing the catechism. No, not at all. Quite to the contrary, we need to have the catechism fixed firmly in our minds so that we can practice “the art of living by faith.”

Perhaps the connection between the living faith and the texts of the catechisms could be explained this way: A person who is learning to play the piano is not simply given a history of the piano, and a lecture on how wonderful it is to play the piano, and how great it makes you feel when you can produce beautiful music. Nor is that person given a couple of short introductory piano lessons and expected to go his own way. No, the first step is to have the person sit down in front of the piano and memorize where the keys are, becoming familiar with the notes and how they are put together. He has to be able to distinguish a false sound from a good sound, and this can happen only when he clearly understands proper technique—the difference between a sharp and a flat, a major key and a minor key, and so forth. Once the



basic tools are mastered, a person can begin to work on making beautiful music, a task that requires a lifetime of practice and learning.

And so it is with catechesis. We have to help our people “learn the notes”; that is, memorize the text of the catechism, so that this forms within them an instinctive, clear understanding of the “music of the faith.” That art takes basic competencies and knowledge. “At its heart theology is an art; it is *sapientia*—wisdom. It is learning to look at life not from our perspective (—that’s philosophy) but from God’s (—that’s theology). It’s learning to see things from the perspective of sin and grace, in terms of Law and Gospel.”<sup>104</sup> And this is precisely why it is, therefore, so important for us to emphasize the memorization of Luther’s catechism.

How can this best be accomplished? The old maxim “repetition is the mother of learning” is quite true. We should have our children memorizing the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed literally as soon as they are able to talk. Starting at a very young age, they should become familiar with these basic catechetical texts. If they don’t understand a word, we must not let that deter us. First, help them “learn the notes” and then they will be able to make beautiful music. As the children grow older, they can learn the meanings of the various parts of the catechisms and so forth. We will want to add Bible verses and hymn verses as we go along. We are storing up for them treasures from which they can draw later in life. I can’t even begin to guess at the number of people who have told me that in their adult lives, during the difficult times, their great strength came from the storehouse of memory verses and catechism texts they had been required to learn.

When it comes to teaching the catechism, one author put things very well when he wrote:

Luther considered the Word of God to be the one and only basis for being “rooted, built up, and established in the faith.” The Catechism was in his mind the evangelical imagination in the life of the church. It was the means of moving the believer into the Scriptures with evangelical expectation. That is, the Catechism articu-

lates on the basis of the biblical witness the message that is the good news from God. The Catechism, in other words, can be understood as the church saying to the individual believer: "I have been studying the Bible. Let me tell you what good news you may expect to find in this book." In this sense, catechesis is rightly understood as indoctrination to the dogma of the church.<sup>105</sup>

We should be concerned when the actual text of the Small Catechism is neglected. Our Synod went through a period of time when there was an effort to get away from the text and emphasize the personal meaning of the text for each individual, so completely separating the two that the text of the Small Catechism was not required by some to be memorized any longer. This was, and it is, a serious mistake. Now, I know that whenever the subject of memorization comes up, there are howls of protest heard from the children required to do the memorizing! And if we were to require some memorization from our adults, I am sure we would hear even more loudly very vocal and long protests. But memorizing the catechism has incredible value.

It is interesting for me to read in Dr. C.F.W. Walther's *Pastoral Theology* the following statement about the high priority the Synod placed, particularly in its early years, on instruction in the Small Catechism:

It is the preacher's duty to prepare those who want to be confirmed by thorough instruction in the Small Catechism and to carry out the ceremony according to the guidance of an orthodox agenda. Commentary One: The constitution of the Missouri Synod says: "The district synod is to exercise supervision so that its pastors confirm catechumens only when they can at least recite the text of the Catechism verbatim, without the exposition, and their understanding of it has been brought to the point that they are capable of examining themselves according to 1 Corinthians 11:28. The synod requires that more capable catechumens, where possible, be brought to the point of being able to prove the doctrines of the Christian faith from the clearest proof passages of Scripture and to refute the erring doctrines of the sects from them. Where possible, a hundred hours should be used to instruct

confirmands. The preacher should also see to it that his confirmands have memorized a good number of those good, churchly hymns that may serve to accompany them for their whole life.<sup>106</sup>

Lest any of us think that these rigid requirements were without evangelical application, it is interesting to note that Walther says:

The certainty that a catechumen bears a true life of faith in his heart cannot be made a condition of confirmation. Only notoriously wicked children, if all faithful use of God's Word bears no fruit, should not be confirmed. They would consciously be taking God's name in vain. Just as little should those be admitted to confirmation and the Lord's Table who are still so ignorant that they cannot examine themselves according to 1 Corinthians 11:28.<sup>107</sup>

It is vital that instruction in the Small Catechism occur in the home. The Scriptures offer us this encouragement: "You shall teach them diligently to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise" (Deut. 11:19). Parents should teach the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer to their children as soon as they can talk. And these should be repeated as often as possible. Then, when children are ready, the meanings can be taught. Broken down into manageable chunks, parents can go through the catechism with their children. Times together in the car can be used to say the catechism together. Morning and evening devotions are also very good times to work together on reciting the catechism with its meaning. Through repeated recitation, the catechism is learned. Parents can work on applying the catechism to their children's lives, talking about the Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. I have always appreciated Luther's emphasis on the role of parents in teaching their children the catechism. I genuinely sense that we have really lost ground here. How clearly I can still recall my grandma and grandpa, and my mother, teaching me the truths of the catechism, not just leaving this up to the pastor. I don't think it is possible to overemphasize

how important it is that parents take the time to teach their children the catechism. Church workers should repeatedly make it a point of encouraging this among the families of the children in our schools and our church.

As I was working on the final preparation of this book, I had the privilege of attending a special Mission Fiesta emphasis in Albuquerque, New Mexico. From beginning to end it was a wonderful celebration. As one of the brother pastors was driving me back to the airport he said, "Would you be willing to jot a note of encouragement into the little blue catechisms that I am now using with children?" I recall thinking at the time how great it was to see the emphasis this pastor was putting on the catechism in the lives of his children. The first catechism he handed to me was the one his middle son was already using. This young man had told me over the weekend that he wanted to be a pastor like his Dad. In his catechism, I penned a note encouraging him in his commitment to His Lord and to his goal of being a pastor some day. I encouraged him to continue his study of the Word of God and the catechism with His dad. As I sat at the airport waiting to for my flight to St. Louis, I thought about this and once more could not help but be reminded of how important it is for our parents to take the time to study the catechism with their children.

### *Creative Catechesis: Sharing Our Ideas*

It is vital that we share with one another our ideas for increasing the level of catechesis in our congregations. I am going to share a number of ideas and observations in the hope that this will be encouraging to my fellow pastors and church workers. We need to discuss all these things with one another.

What can we do about memory work? Many things. First, the more our people are exposed to the catechism texts, the better. This means, among other things, that the catechism could be used in our worship services much more often than they are now. We have seen how this took place in the 16th century, and I think it does present us with some ideas. For instance, how about a program of reciting the cat-

echism over a period of Sundays? Throughout the church year? This would not have to become a cumbersome thing. We would surely not want to recite the entire Creed with explanations for each article all at once, but we could work through smaller portions of the catechism, one Sunday at a time.

Most congregations have various publications. For those churches that have a school, how about including portions of the catechism, with explanations, in the school newsletter? Perhaps it would be possible to structure a memorization program that parents could use at home with their children during their family devotions. This would have the additional benefit of getting our adult members back into the catechism as well, as they work through it with their children. The same thing could be done in the congregation's newsletter: Print portions of the catechism and suggest that for the month these portions be said daily, committing as much as possible to memory.

Another good resource is the Sunday School program. No matter what the curriculum might be, it would be great to devote a small portion of the class time to reciting parts of the catechism, followed by a few words which apply the material just recited to the children's lives. This could be done every Sunday. Organized well, the entire Sunday School could move through the catechism each year. And, of course, for the congregation which has the fantastic resource of a Christian day school, memorizing the catechism must be an essential part of each grade level. Wouldn't it be fantastic if by the time children reached confirmation instruction in the later grades they already had the catechism firmly fixed in their minds? Then pastors and teachers could spend more time on application, and not have to concentrate so much effort on getting down the very basics.

I would especially like to encourage a very purposeful effort toward making use of the best technology we have to make the catechism and Bible teaching even more attractive to our children and adults. The possibilities with computers fascinate me. What if we were to develop a very high quality, interactive CD-ROM for Bible instruction combined with catechism instruction? There are already some

software resources available, but it would be good for us to develop even more.

We need genuinely to encourage one another and share our ideas. There are any number of ways in which we can increase knowledge of the catechism among us. We should devote time at our professional church workers conferences to sharing ideas, techniques, resources, etc. Of course, not every idea will work for every congregation, but many will. For example, I recently heard of a pastor who brought adult lay members of his congregation into his youth and adult confirmation classes to explain what the catechism's various parts meant to them in their lives. Other ideas are out there. Some circuits form teams in their youth groups to play "Bible Challenge" games which encourage the young people to study various portions of Scripture very carefully. Other circuits organize catechetical seminars, devoting a week or two to intensive catechetical instruction, immersing the young people in the catechism and its application to their lives. Surely there are many other excellent ideas and programs throughout the Synod.

Recently I heard still another excellent suggestion. It was simply that our pastors should ask our master teachers in our schools to offer them advice and practical guidance for teaching. Often our pastors are able to communicate the truths of the catechism, but may need some help managing a formal program of instruction, or may need some advice on how to maintain good classroom discipline, how to prepare lessons, how to develop a long-range curriculum and so forth. This is especially true in view of the rapidly changing nature and use of new educational technologies in our schools today. Our teachers could be of great help to our pastors, helping them structure a course of study for children or adults. They can help our pastors identify effective teaching techniques and so on.

Another whole area for catechetical work is to be found in our pastors' visits. Whether it be a sick call, a shut-in call or a home visit, the pastor has a great opportunity to review the catechism and then apply it to the person's life. The pastor can, and should, reference the catechism in his sermons, in his devotions, during meetings, etc. These

are ways to get the catechism out in front of our people. Why not use a portion of the catechism for devotions with the sick, or shut-in? How about conducting home visits around the themes of the catechism over a year or more? There are many ways a pastor can integrate the catechism into his activities and duties. It is time for us to be much more purposeful about this in our pastoral ministry. And of course, the same must be said to all of our church workers. At every opportunity, we should be using the catechism in our work, be it with children, youth or adults.

Addressing current problems and concerns in regard to catechesis needs to be a part of our professional church workers' conferences. Pastors genuinely need to discuss with one another the problems that they are experiencing in catechesis, and then offer pastoral and brotherly encouragement to one another. Teachers need to do the same. Comments like: "The LCMS pastor down the street doesn't require that ..." are often viewed as a threat by the brother pastor and may tempt him to relax what he knows is good catechesis.

I am not so naive as to believe that as a pastor pursues a strengthened program of catechesis within his congregation there will not be storm clouds and moments of discouragement. But the end benefit will certainly outweigh the frustrations involved in this work. It will take time to reclaim lost ground here. But the struggle is certainly worth it, not only in the lives of the people being instructed, but also in the ministry of the pastor. I was talking to a brother pastor recently when he mentioned that he had brought in almost fifty new adult members into his congregation over the past two years. He was a bit discouraged that he had now lost a number of new members. He indicated how discouraging this can be to a pastor when it comes to the whole area of adult membership instruction. I encouraged him to recognize that once he has planted the seed of the Word of God into a person's life, he had no idea in what way this would bear fruit, and furthermore, could not assume the responsibility for this anyway — this is the Holy Spirit's work. I told him that he needed to take a broader view of what was happening through his ministry in the church at large. He needed to

trust the Spirit of God that at some point in the future, what he had taught those who had left would again surface in their lives, bringing them back into a meaningful faith relationship with the Lord.

### *The Challenge and Opportunity of Junior Confirmation*

Just a few thoughts here in regard to junior confirmation. I think we can easily recognize that junior confirmation has changed through the years, along with the attitudes of young people. But the important basic principle of a strong junior confirmation emphasis is still needed. Included in this would also be the importance of memory work. But memory work must be meaningful. It must not be just cognitive knowledge, but knowledge that will impact their lives and give direction to what they are doing. Coupled with this would be the implementation of a good catechesis program in the Sunday School on the part of the teachers. Meetings with parents prior to the beginning of junior confirmation will underscore the importance of confirmation instruction and emphasize how important their participation will be. Clear expectations should be carefully explained so that everyone is aware of what is required so that there is no confusion about the standards if difficulties should arise with the young people not completing their work or missing classes, etc. We are doing no good for the child or his family by lowering our standards and expectations. The support of the congregational leaders for such a program is also important for the future life and strength of the church. Faithful confirmation instruction should be highly valued and strongly supported by the members of the congregation. The pastor is required to be faithful in his ministry, and that faithful ministry must be upheld by the congregation's leadership.

Our publishing house has been working to improve both the content and the appearance of our junior confirmation materials, trying to balance the need to communicate in ways that are understandable to young people today with the importance of good content. But even when we use the new materials, we must not neglect the catechism itself. You can tell from what I have already said that I am a big fan of



the synodical catechism. I think it is an excellent resource, and I have heard from any number of pastors who use it exclusively in their confirmation programs, borrowing ideas from this source and that, but really using the catechism itself to teach young people and prospective members. At this exciting time when nations like Russia and Kazakstan are rejoicing that they have the Small Catechism translated for them, we should not walk away from the catechism as though it were archaic and unable to be a modern teaching tool.

Preparation is also a key factor in the pastor's catechetical instruction. Just as the pastor needs to be fully prepared for his Sunday-morning worship service, devotions and Bible studies, he should also be fully prepared to inspire and inform others in the whole area of catechesis.

### *Catechesis and the Life of Worship*

Another aspect of catechesis that needs our Synod's attention is the important connection between catechesis and the worship life of the Lutheran congregation.<sup>108</sup> Here I want briefly to highlight the important connection between catechesis and Sunday morning worship. We need to be very aware that a primary forum for catechesis in our Lutheran congregations is the Sunday-morning Divine Service. It is in that hour or so that the pastor reaches more people than at any other time during his week. Tremendous amounts of time can be given to one-on-one pastoral care, and this is crucial. But perhaps it might become tempting for pastors, given the incredible press of their duties, to overlook or simply forget that the most important pastoral duty they have is what happens on Sunday morning. In the service of God's Word and Sacraments, the pastor is proclaiming the truth of God's Word to more people than he can in other settings.

To the extent that our congregations become more purposeful about catechesis, their worship services will become better and our pastors' sermons will become better. We need to anchor our catechetical work firmly within the worship life of the congregation. It would be good to use the cycle of the church year in our catechetical work. As we catechize, we are also leading our people into a richer and more mean-

ingful life of worship, personal devotion to the word, and greater zeal for the Lord's house and gathering with their fellow believers. What a fantastic opportunity we have to help our people grow in their awareness of and appreciation for the Lord who works in their lives through the preached Word and the administered Sacraments!

In the Lutheran parish, we have the exciting opportunity to say, with all conviction, "Are you looking for Jesus? Are you looking for a personal encounter with God? Are you searching for spiritual depth and meaning? Are you looking for more in life? Come to the service of Word and Sacrament and encounter God as He chooses to be known. Here you can have a personal encounter with Him, through His Word and through His Sacrament!" Through our worship services, we are privileged to saturate our people with the Word of God as they hear the readings, sing the Psalms and the various parts of the liturgy, hear the sermon and gather around the Lord's Table. There is much work being done in the Roman Catholic church to reconnect catechesis to the church's liturgical life. Scholars within our own Synod are giving attention to this concern as well. An important lesson we can learn from the Early Church is that catechesis disconnected from the community of faith is a catechesis that is doomed to fail. How good it is to observe a renewed interest across our Synod in being very purposeful about teaching the faith in our congregations, during the worship services.

And we can be very purposeful about integrating the catechism into the worship life of our people. In our historical section, and in the endnotes that accompanied that section, we have pointed out how many Lutheran church orders provided for a regular reading and recitation of the catechism's parts within the worship service itself. The inclusion of the catechism in the Sunday worship services is something that we need to consider seriously. I was part of a worship service recently that included a recitation of the first commandment in the service. They were working through the commandments, part by part. After the pastor has moved through this material with his people in the worship service, he then encouraged them to take their bulletin home, in which the first commandment and its meaning was printed, and

work on memorizing it at home during the week. He also indicated that the Sunday School would be working on this section later that morning. It would be good if more of our congregations would do this on a regular basis.

### *The Special Needs Associated with Adult Catechesis*

It would seem that as we approach the end of this century and prepare to enter a new millenium, we are facing situations remarkably similar to the first 300 years or so of the church's history, with one critical and crucial difference. Let me explain:

The culture surrounding the Early Church did not have a basic acquaintance with the church and its teachings. The culture in which the Early Church found itself was very much pagan. Today the church exists in what is quickly becoming a post-Christian era. The church then was in a pre-Christian era. By post-Christian we mean simply that involvement in organized Christianity is on the decline, but the general culture remains somewhat conversant, or at least familiar with, the concept of the Christian church. This was not the case in the days of the Early Church before Christianity was legalized.

This is a critical difference and presents us with an even greater challenge, in many respects, than was faced at the time of the Early Church. The closest we might come to something similar would be the days of the Reformation, for in these days, as we have seen, Luther faced a culture that was decidedly "churched," but in terms of actual knowledge and commitment, was also very much "unchurched."

Both for Luther and the Early Church, the solution to the particular challenges of the day was nothing more, and certainly nothing less, than a strong, vibrant effort to catechize the people; in other words, to teach the people of God the truths about God. And it has always been this way. Our Lord directed His church in the last chapter of St. Matthew to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them—let me repeat that—*teaching them* all things that He has commanded. The goal then is the same today: to make disciples through baptism and teaching. Adults who are evange-

lized and brought to the church bring with them not only the erroneous presuppositions of our secular culture, but also a hefty level of misinformation about the Christian faith. Perhaps they come to the Lutheran Church with preconceptions about the Christian faith based on what they heard in other churches as younger people. We must work overtime, not only at inculcating a genuine Christian mind within them, but also helping them sort through the incorrect teachings they had received earlier.

A group of scholars within our Synod is working to incorporate some of the ideas of the Roman Catholic Church's Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) into our own catechetical work with adults.<sup>109</sup> The goal is to provide a more structured and "holistic" approach to catechesis with adults, thus avoiding the "Microwave Christian" syndrome we discussed a bit earlier.<sup>110</sup> They want to work toward a purposeful effort to incorporate the catechumen into the worship life of the parish, rather than simply assigning the catechumens to a classroom setting. The program involves a period of instruction over a longer period of time than we have become accustomed to.

It may be that one important aspect of the ancient church's catechetical practice that we may wish to use today is a more complete role for sponsors. Today, sponsors are little more than people who are there to witness a person's baptism. In the days of the Early Church the sponsor was a mentor, a model and a trusted friend who supported the catechumen on his walk toward Baptism and the Lord's Supper. In some of our Synod's congregations, sponsors join the catechumen during instruction classes. It would seem wise to incorporate a structured integration of sponsor and catechumen. Of course, this will not always be practically possible, but wouldn't it be a blessing if we could train a group of our members in our congregations to serve as catechetical sponsors? They could assist the pastor in catechetical instruction and serve as a friend and personal advisor to the person who wishes to join the church. As our society becomes more openly antagonistic toward Christianity, it will become more important than ever for people wishing to join the church to be placed into a loving and caring network of

Christians who can provide them with support and encouragement as they go through their catechetical training.

It is clear to all who take a closer look at issues touching upon adult catechesis that we need to do a much better job reaching out to bring people into the church, incorporating these people into the life of the parish, and offering them a substantial and holistic integration into the church's faith and life. This would be a blessing both to those who seek membership and to our present members. An enlivened and renewed sense of the possibilities with adult catechesis will no doubt be a great blessing to our entire Synod for we will be able to focus our creative energies and efforts precisely where they are needed most—teaching the faith.



## Where from Here?

I WOULD LIKE TO OFFER A FINAL WORD OF CHALLENGE AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, words of encouragement to our Synod in regard to catechesis. First, the challenge. I would like here to mention something I saw on television on Easter Sunday during *60 Minutes*. The segment was devoted to a study of the Mormon Church. With a variety of questions Mike Wallace the interviewer, kept asking, “Your church [which we would call a cult] tells its people that they cannot drink alcoholic beverages, smoke, drink coffee, tea or caffeinated beverages of any kind, cannot have premarital sex, must be faithful during marriage, give a high priority to the family, give 10% of the family income to the work of the church ...” and the list went on and on. After rattling off all these things, Mike Wallace looked at their president and said, “But you are one of the fastest-growing churches in the United States today. To what do you attribute this?” The answer to that question surfaced again and again, and not just from the leaders of the church, but also from the laity and especially from the young people who were interviewed. The answer was this: “Our church stands for something. People are looking for a church like that and where this is not happening people are not growing in size, but only declining.”

Now isn't it amazing and just a bit upsetting that we have to learn this lesson from the Mormons? I believe that we in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have a fantastic theological and confessional heritage in the Lord. We dare not be ashamed of it, nor apologize for it, nor play it down. We need to continue to be faithful to that which we believe, teach and confess on the basis of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. We too must “stand for something” as we proclaim the Word of God in all its truth and purity. We must, as a caring church body, reach out boldly to others with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Catechesis will play a critical role in all of this.

Has our Synod lost ground in the area of catechesis? Without a doubt, we most certainly have. Perhaps an illustration will help make my point. As many of you may know, I grew up in southwestern Iowa. If you have ever been through that part of the country, you will no doubt remember seeing miles and miles of cornfields, and you will remember that it can get pretty hilly. As a teenager I would occasionally go out and work on one of my uncles' farms. One of their big problems was erosion. At the beginning, an eroding ditch was not all that big a problem, but if left unattended, the ditch would grow wider and wider and still wider until the time came when my uncle would no longer be able to get across it with his wagon. I see this happening among us in regard to catechesis. We need to recognize the erosion that has taken place and take steps to make sure that it does not continue. We need to reclaim lost ground. Will there be some frustrations along the way? Yes. But will it prove to be a blessing? Definitely! Definitely! Definitely! For God the Father will be with and bless the teaching of His holy Word among us, for the sake of His Son, our precious Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

What an exciting challenge we have! What a fantastic opportunity! In our generation we have the opportunity to grasp anew what catechesis is all about. As the challenges around us increase, so also do the opportunities. As our culture continues its downward spiral into a near anarchy of "values" and "personal points of view," what a great opportunity we have to provide the answers God gives in His Holy Word. For persons who are groping for a genuine "spirituality," how good to be able to hold out the true and living God as He comes to us in His Word and Sacraments, and as He provides for us within a community of believers. As our society continues to separate individuals from one another, through such tragedies as family breakups and through daily competition in the workplace, the church offers an eternal family of believers whose Lord is Christ and whose living body the church truly is. As more people go searching for "personal encounters" with the Lord of the Universe, we are able to proclaim with full confidence, "Here is the Lord and He is here for us. He came among us as a real



human being. He knows what it is to be human and He wishes to bring us into full fellowship with the all-powerful God of the Universe. He wants to have a real and living relationship with each person as they are brought into His body, the church." This is an exciting privilege which is ours. The opportunities are many, along with the challenges. Indeed, we are fortunate to have this chance to renew and strengthen the whole concept of catechesis in our church.

But I can imagine someone reading this saying, "Well, this all sounds good, but it is too much. It is too hard. The task is too huge. We can never get the job done. Things have gone too far down the road for any of this." I often sense discouragement among our congregations and among our pastors and teachers and other church workers. They grow weary and tired of the struggle to teach and to reach out to their people. Discouragement leads to frustration and this in turn can produce irritation and anger and a feeling of hopelessness. We look out at the many challenges and may simply feel like giving up. I want to share an experience I had that helped me put these concerns in perspective.

I attended our Synod's Volunteer Teacher's Convention recently. It was held in Memphis, Tennessee. The hotel I was staying in was right along the Mississippi River. I was sitting in my room looking out over the river. I noticed there the tugboats pushing the barges upriver. It seemed that their progress was so slow. At times it must have looked to people passing by that they were going nowhere at all. But they were moving ahead, slowly, gradually and carefully. They just kept pushing and pushing and then pushing some more. As they came close to a bridge they slowed down so that they would not knock down the pillars supporting the bridge. Once they had cleared the bridge, they kept on pushing ahead. Before long they had passed by my hotel and went on their way up the Mississippi. Needless to say, it would have been much easier, oh so much easier, for them to push downstream and just go with the flow of the river. But they kept pushing upstream, doing the job that they had to do, in a patient and careful manner. Not stopping, and not slowing down, but just continuing to move ahead.

I think this is the way it is with the church's catechetical tasks. The

going is slow, of that there is little doubt. At times it may appear that the process is going nowhere. Perhaps at times you may even feel as though you are being pushed downstream by the current. But like the tugboat, we just need to turn up the throttle a bit and keep on pushing. Others have felt frustrated at times. We think of the prophet Jeremiah, who lamented his condition; of Elijah, who felt that he was all alone; of Job, who felt abandoned by all around him; of even our Lord, who struggled mightily in the garden; of St. Paul, who endured such terrible hardship in his task to reach out to the world with the Gospel. We think of the many faithful men and women of God who down through the years have continued to hold high the banner of the faith and teach the Word and inculcate the catechism in the lives of the people whom they were called to serve. And of course, we remember the greatest catechist in the Lutheran church, Dr. Martin Luther. We have reviewed here briefly his enormous catechetical labors. Think of the long and hard years he devoted to this task. Blessed Martin Luther said: "Every morning, and whenever else I have the time, 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, yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the Catechism, and I do it gladly."

My prayer is that God would permit all of us, always, to be and to remain children and pupils of the catechism, for the sake of our ministry and for the glory of God and the spread of our Savior's kingdom. What does this mean? It means that we will be concerned about and excited by the possibilities of catechesis in our congregations. How is this done? Through plenty of patience, hard work and solid commitment, but most importantly, it will be done by the blessing of our Heavenly Father. May God bless our Synod with a love for catechesis and a commitment to the same. For indeed, even as He has promised, the Lord will be with and bless us. God bless always!

## Endnotes

1. Our Lutheran Confessions tell us that there is value in remembering the saints. “Our Confession approves giving honor to the saints. This honor is threefold. The first is thanksgiving: we should thank God for showing examples of his mercy, revealing his will to save men, and giving teachers and other gifts to the church. Since these are his greatest gifts, we should extol them very highly; we should also praise the saints themselves for using these gifts, just as Christ praises the faithful businessmen (Matt. 25:21, 23). The second honor is the strengthening of our faith: when we see St. Peter forgiven after his denial, we are encouraged to believe that grace does indeed abound more than sin (Rom. 5:20). The third honor is the imitation, first, of their faith and then of their other virtues, which each should imitate in accordance with his calling. Our opponents do not require these real honors; they only argue about invocation, which, even if it were not dangerous, is certainly unnecessary” (AC Ap. XXI, 4–7; from Theodore G. Tappert, translator and editor, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959], pp. 229–230; hereafter indicated by “Tappert” followed by page number).

2. George Barna, who has become somewhat of a “guru” for many Protestant churches, produced a book called *Evangelism That Works: How to Reach Changing Generations With the Unchanging Gospel*. In it he raises some serious concerns. Barna says, “Half of all adults who attend Protestant churches on a typical Sunday morning are not Christian” (p. 43). What does he mean? He is making reference to the high level of ignorance about the Christian faith so prevalent in many Protestant church bodies these days. And then he puts his finger on a key point for our purposes in this presentation: “Most of the cutting-edge evangelistic churches have major problems with low retention of converts” (p. 100). Barna attributes this problem to: “inadequate disci-

pleshship efforts. Evangelistic churches tend to major on outreach rather than on inreach. Ideally, however, the Body of believers needs a balance of the two ... ” (p. 100). Also, he notes, that although evangelistic churches make a big point of emphasizing and encouraging the importance of building relationships with nonbelievers, there is a “noticeable lack of emphasis upon the mature believer taking responsibility for discipling the new believer” (p. 102). Barna is talking about the crisis in catechesis. It is a crisis impacting other churches, but I do believe we need to recognize that it is a crisis facing our Synod as well. While we would like to imagine that we do not have this challenge, we need to realize that indeed we do.

3. Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism in Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), p. 14.

4. John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1993), p. 195. MacArthur's book is all the more remarkable when one bears in mind the fact that MacArthur has enjoyed all the outward signs of “success” so sought after by many Christian pastors and congregations. His congregation, Grace Community Church, in Sun Valley, Calif. has an average worship attendance every Sunday of 10,000, and sponsors a very popular nationwide radio program. These facts make MacArthur's penetrating criticism of the hype and hoopla that accompany many mission strategies today all the more interesting. His words challenge not only his fellow Evangelicals, but also we who wish to be and remain confessional Lutherans:

“Any end-justifies-the-means philosophy of ministry inevitably will compromise doctrine, despite any proviso to the contrary. If we make effectiveness the gauge of right and wrong, how can that fail to color our doctrine? Ultimately the pragmatist's notion of truth is shaped by what seems effective, not by the objective revelation of Scripture. A look at the methodology of the church growth movement shows how this occurs. The movement studies all growing churches—even those with false doctrine at the core of their teaching. Liberal denominational churches, extreme charismatic sects, and militant

hyper-fundamentalist dictatorships all are held up to the specialist's scrutiny. . . . Utterly missing from most of the church growth literature is any critical analysis of the faulty doctrinal platform on which much contemporary church growth is built" (pg. 78).

Another important analysis from one outside our circles is provided by the evangelical scholar Mark Noll in his book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994).

5. Gene Edward Veith, Jr. *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994), p. xii.

6. G.K. Chesterton offers us this perspective on the church's potential to the "modern" man, the skeptic, the searcher for truth: "A man cannot expect any adventures in the land of anarchy. But a man can expect any number of adventures if he goes traveling in the land of authority. One can find no meanings in a jungle of skepticism; but the man will find more and more meanings who walks through a forest of doctrine and design. Here everything has a story tied to its tail, like the tools or pictures at my father's house; for it is my father's house. I end where I began—at the right end. I have entered at least the gate of all good philosophy. I have come into my second childhood. . . . All the real arguments about religion turn on the question of whether a man who was born upside down can tell when he comes right way up. The primary paradox of Christianity is that the ordinary condition of man is not his sane or sensible condition; that the normal is an abnormality. . . . It is only since I have known orthodoxy that I have known mental emancipation." (G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy: The Romance of faith* [New York: Doubleday, 1990], pp. 154–156).

7. "The etymology of the word catechetics therefore disproves the explanation widely spread by Melanchthon though not originated by him, according to which this term indicates instruction in the form of questions and answers" (from Michael Reu, *Catechetics: Theory and Practice of Religious Instruction* [Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1927], p. 3). This is an important point to keep in mind as we discuss

catechesis. By no means is the “question-and-answer” method to be disregarded. It is still one of very best ways of teaching. But, we do need to realize that the “Q-and-A” approach is not the only one that may be used effectively in our catechetical programs.

8. The concept of teaching in the New Testament is a recurrent one. During his earthly life, our Lord was concerned with teaching; that is, declaring to the people the news of the life and work of Jesus. Christ makes it a continuing work for the church in His words in St. Matthew 28:20. What is to be the content of the church’s teaching? Christ says that it is to be “all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” We are to teach what He has taught. We are to speak His words, not just words about Him. The church’s teaching is not only about interpreting Old Testament verses or instruction in a moral life, it encompasses the whole revelation of God in Christ Jesus. The church’s teaching reaches its culmination in the call for repentance. Hence here in St. Paul’s letter the requirement of the bishop is that he be “able to teach.” (See Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 volumes), translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromily [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964], II:135ff [Hereafter abbreviated “TDNT” with volume and page number following]).

9. Here we recall Dr. C.F.W. Walther’s Thesis VIII on the Ministry in his book *Church and Ministry*. Dr. Walther writes, “The Preaching Office [*Predigtamt*] is the highest office in the church, and from it stem all other offices in the church” (C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, translated by J.T. Mueller, [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House ], p. 289. Note: Mueller based his translation on the 1875 edition of *Kirche und Amt*). German quotations are from the first edition of *Kirche und Amt* (C. F. W. Walther, *Die Stimme unserer kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*. [Verlag von Andreas Diechert: Erlangen, 1852]). Dr. Walther clearly distinguishes between the one divine established office of ministry in the church, the pastorate, and those offices which the church establishes in Christian freedom, to assist in the administration of the one divinely established office. Commenting on the establishment of other offices in the church, Dr. Walther quotes Acts 6 and then com-

ments: "That is to say, with the Apostolate the Lord has instituted only one office in the church. ... every other public office [*öffentliche Amt*] in the church is part of the Preaching Office, or a helping office [*Hilfsamt*]" (Walther, *Church and Ministry*, p. 289; *Kirche und Amt*, p. 396). Walther includes among the "helping offices" the office of "*Schullehrer*" or "school teacher." The Mueller translation omits a very significant portion of Walther's commentary about the office of schoolteacher. The German indicates, immediately after Walther uses the word "*Schullehrer*" the following: "who have to teach the Word of God in their schools" ("*welche Gottes Wort in ihren Schulen zu lehren haben*"). This is the critical factor in what follows further in Walther's commentary. Summarizing various helping offices, Walther writes that all these offices are to be regarded as "churchly, holy offices" ("*kirchliche heilige Aemter*") for they "bear a part of the one church office" ("*welche einen Theil des Einen Kirchenamtes tragen*") (Mueller translates "tragen" as "take over," but a better translation might be "bear"). Walther also notes that besides bearing a part of the one office, the helping offices "support the Preaching Office" ("*dem Predigtamte zur Seite stehen*") (Walther, *Church and Ministry*, p. 290; *Kirche und Amt*, p. 386–387). The point to be made is that while it is certainly true that there is only one divinely instituted office, the Preaching Office, the office of pastor, it is also true that the other offices established in Christian freedom in the church that involve the teaching of God's Word are genuinely ecclesiastical and holy offices. In the case of our school teachers, they exist in our church precisely for the sake of "teaching the Word" in our schools, and thus "bear a part" of the one office in the church and must be accorded the respect and dignity that is appropriate for an office that has this important responsibility in the church.

10. The word in this verse translated as "teach" is a form of the Hebrew word יָרָה. This verb's primary meaning is "to throw" or "to shoot." In the Hiphil form, in which it appears in this verse, the verb means "to teach." Another derivative of the verb is "torah," which appears in the Old Testament some 221 times, and means "law" or "teaching."

11. Here the Hebrew word for “teach” is נָהַר. It appears here in the Hiphil perfect form. Its root meaning is “to be light, to be shining.” In this form it means, “to give light, enlighten, instruct, admonish, teach or warn.” It is interesting to note in Exodus 18:20 that Moses’ father-in-law advised Moses to give primary attention to “teaching” the people the Law of God. In Ezekiel 3 and 33 the meaning is “warn” and describes the responsibilities and duties of the watchman, to warn people under his care. Warning is connected to teaching.

12. Here the word for instruction is יָקַח. See note 11 for a discussion of this word.

13. We clearly recognize that the Law always points us toward a recognition of our sin. Our Confessions state: “For the Law always accuses and terrifies consciences” (Ap. IV.38). However, the Law also serves as a guide for the Christian. We remain throughout our lives both saint and sinner, and therefore require the Law also to know what is pleasing in God’s sight. For this reason, the Epitome of the Formula of Concord clearly rejects the notion that “the Law is not to be urged, in the manner and measure above described, upon Christians and genuine believers, but only upon unbelievers, non-Christians, and the impenitent” (FC Ep. VII.8). Thus, the Epitome states that Christians “have been redeemed by the Son of God precisely that they should exercise themselves day and night in the Law (Ps. 119:1).” We must not hesitate to urge our people to obey God’s Law, for as the Epitome makes clear, we have certainly not reached a state of perfection in this life, after our regeneration. No, “It has only begun. ... believers are in a constant war against their flesh ... which clings to them until death.” Therefore “It is necessary for the Law of God constantly to light their way lest in their merely human devotion they undertake self-decreed and self-chosen acts of serving God” (FC Ep. VI).

14. The word here for “teach” is לָמַד. Here it appears in the Piel perfect form. The root form of the word means “to exercise in, learn.” In the Piel form it means “to teach.” In the Pual form it means “to train” as in training soldiers (Isa. 29:13), or training singers (1 Chron. 25:7). Here the emphasis is on the continued exercise of children in the Law



of God. This is what we would call ongoing catechesis. The concept includes training as well as educating. In Psalm 119 this word is used when we pray that God would “teach” us His statutes, His judgments, etc. (See Psalm 119:12, 26, 64, 66, 68, 108, 124, 135, 171). The Greeks used two different words for “learning” (*μανθάνω*) and “teaching” (*διδάσκω*), but the Hebrew language used only one root for both concepts because all teaching, and all learning, is grounded in the fear and knowledge of the Lord (Deut 4:10; 14:23; 17:19; 31:12). It is interesting that this word is used in Isaiah 40:14 where we read that nobody teaches the Lord anything. He is the source of all truth and knowledge.

15. “Teach” here is לָמַד, see note 14.

16. The Hebrew for “instructed” is the Hiphil participle of the verb בִּין which means, in its root form, “to discern, to make distinct, to make to understand.” Here it means “to be skilled in giving instruction.” Zechariah was a skilled teacher who was able to help Uzziah distinguish truth from falsehood. This verb and its various forms occur 247 times in the Old Testament. Its main meaning is “understanding” or “insight.” It is closely linked to the preposition in Hebrew which means “between.” This verb refers to knowledge that is more than simply a collection of facts. The emphasis is on the wise use of knowledge, thus making for true wisdom and understanding. The term for “knowing” in Hebrew (יָדַע), describes the way in which knowledge is acquired, through experience with particular things or situations. בִּין refers to the ability to judge properly between opposing concepts. It is possible to use one’s eyes to “discern” the truth (Prov. 7:73) or ears (Prov. 29:19). One can feel the correct thing to do (Ps. 58:10). The Hiphil stem of the verb, which we have here, especially emphasizes the ability to understand, but this is not a mere human ability. It is a gift from God Who gives human beings the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. We pray for good understanding (Ps. 119:34). We are urged to seek after good understanding (Prov. 2:1; Ruth 1:21ff).

17. The Hebrew word for “study” is דָּרַשׁ. Its root meaning is “to seek.” It was used in other cultures to refer to rubbing over and effacing a monument, and to treading out the grain from wheat stalks.

It was also used as it is here, in a figurative sense, referring to the concept of reading repeatedly, thus studying.

18. In this verse we have two significant verbs. We are praying that God would make us to “know” His ways, and then in the parallel thought, we pray that God would “teach” us. The Hebrew for “know” is the Hiphil imperative form of the verb יָדַע. In the Old Testament it is one of the most common words for “know.” Here it means, “make known”, “declare” or “teach.” A similar thought is expressed in Exodus 33:13. The root form of this verb occurs 944 times and denotes the acquisition of knowledge through the senses. The word here for “teach” is the verb לָמַד.

19. Luther said that Psalm 119 teaches us how to study theology, by means of *Oratio* (prayer), *Meditatio* (meditation), and *Tentatio* (*Anfechtung*, spiritual struggles). (See Martin Luther, *Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings: Dr. Martin Luther's Preface* (1539), translated by Robert Heitner in Volume 34 of *Luther's Works: American Edition*, edited by Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 285. Hereafter abbreviated “AE” with volume and page number following.

20. The Hebrew here for “teaching” is תּוֹרָה. This word is so commonly known that we have imported it into English as “torah.” “Torah” has a rich meaning. On the surface it means simply “law.” However, in a better theological sense it means “God’s authoritative self-revelation of both himself and His will for us.” It would be incorrect to think of “torah” only as “law” in the sense of our theological concepts of Law and Gospel. Dr. Horace Hummel offers a very helpful explanation of the true significance of the word, “Torah”: “The conventional translation of ‘Torah’ with ‘Law’ is most lamentable, however. If it were possible to turn back the clock and expunge fateful and misleading renditions from our Bibles, this would surely be the place to start. It indisputably is one of the major culprits in reenforcing the stubborn prejudice that somehow the Old Testament is more ‘legalistic’ than the New, or at least contains proportionately far more ‘Law’ than ‘Gospel.’ If it were possible, it might be better not to translate, but simply to translit-

erate ‘Torah,’ as is the common Jewish practice ... It relates both the impossible demand of God upon fallen man as well as the good news of God’s own meeting of His demand in the covenant—and in the promises attached to it. Of course, it also includes ‘law’ in its more popular political (‘first use’) and ethical sense (‘third use,’ ‘sanctification’). Alternatively, ‘Word of God’ would often be a superb ‘dynamic equivalent’ of Torah, because God’s Word always confronts us in both Law and Gospel ... These passages are also important *sedes* for the proposition that the Bible is the Word of God. Hence ‘Torah’ comes to be applied to the inscripturated Word, especially the Pentateuch, but sometimes by extension to the whole Old Testament.” (From Horace Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979], pp. 62–63).

21. This verse is very important for our purposes. Luther provides an excellent summary of the meaning of the verse. “The Law must be consulted rather than the mediums. The teaching must be sought from God alone, so that one may be your master, Christ, as St. Matthew 23:10 says. But this takes place through the medium of Scripture and oral preaching. The ‘Law’ is Scripture, and the ‘testimony’ is oral preaching. He who reads Scripture in an unfeigned and humble spirit does not read it without fruit. In this way you have recourse to the Law. That is to say, the Law and the testimony should be consulted” (*Lectures on Isaiah, Chapters 1–39* (1527), AE 16:25).

22. The word for “instruction” is the Hebrew noun מוֹסֵר which means “discipline, chastening, correction.” The Septuagint translated this word with the word παιδεύω thus denoting an educational emphasis. But the evidence from other Semitic languages indicates that מוֹסֵר means “chastening” as well as “instruction.” The point here is that correction from the Lord results in education. Various forms of this word are found almost 90 times in the Old Testament. It is particularly intriguing to note the appearance of this word in Isaiah 53:5 where the Suffering Servant is said to be the one who has born the “chastisement that makes us whole.” For our purposes, it is important for us to under-

score with our catechumens that in life, difficulties and troubles are used by our Lord as means by which we are instructed to turn to Him for His help and mercy.

23. The word here for “knowledge” is the noun *דַעַת*, a form of the verb *דָעַת*.

24. The word here for “instruction” is actually *תּוֹרָה* (torah).

25. Teaching (*διδάσκω*) and preaching (*κηρύσσω*) are two predominant motifs in our Lord’s ministry. There are two verses that include “healing” (*θεραπεύω*) in this sort of description of Jesus’ ministry. They are found only in St. Matthew, here and in St. Matthew 9:35. The more common description includes only “teaching” and “preaching.”

26. Is there a difference between “teaching” and “preaching”? This is an interesting question as one takes a look at the New Testament Scriptures. The teaching of Christ is not to be distinguished from His preaching. He taught the message of the Kingdom of God and He proclaimed that in Him the Gospel has been fulfilled. He came to proclaim “good news” as He taught with the full authority of His divine and human natures; thus, His teaching amazed the crowds who heard Him.

27. There is so much that could—and perhaps should—be said about these words of commission from our Lord. Suffice it to say that teaching here is a critical part of “discipling” all nations. We are to make disciples, period. How? By baptizing and teaching. Teaching what? All things that our Lord has commanded.

28. Acts 2:42: (*ἦσαν δὲ προσκατεροῦντες τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς*). The key here was the church’s devotion to the apostles’ teaching, that is, devotion to the Word of God, given through the apostles; and then devotion to the fellowship which God establishes through the faith which is a gift to us; and then devotion to the Lord’s sacred meal, referred to in St. Luke as the “breaking of bread”; and then finally, devotion to an ordered life of prayer and worship (*the prayers*).

29. “In context the teaching can be described as the mould and

norm which shapes the whole personal conduct of the one who is delivered up to it and has become obedient thereto" (TDNT VIII:250).

30. Needless to say, the fact that a particular point of doctrine is not mentioned in the Lutheran Confessions does not mean that it is not a doctrine. Our Synod has had to deal with this issue in the 19th century with the Iowa Synod that held to this concept, and more recently at the time of the controversies in the 1970s when it was said by some that if the Lutheran Confessions do not treat a specific issue, it is not a doctrine. The Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations took this matter up in 1971 in their document; "An Opinion of the CTCR on the Interpretation of A Review of the Question 'What is a Doctrine?'" We read in that report: "Holy Scripture is the sole standard for determining what is 'doctrine' and whether 'doctrine' is true or false. The Lutheran Confessions, because they are 'drawn from the Word of God' (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, 10), are a secondary norm for the faith and life of the church. But the confessions do not claim to deal with all doctrinal questions. Treatment or non-treatment in the confessions is therefore not a criterion for determining whether a question is doctrinal. Accordingly, questions not treated in the confessions but dealt with in the Scriptures may well be 'doctrinal' questions."

31. C.F.W. Walther was particularly concerned to explain the importance of confessional subscription to the Synod. Why is it not adequate for our church workers to state simply that they accept what the Bible teaches? Walther answers: "Since all divisions within Christendom appeal to Scripture, the mere confession that one believes what is in Scripture is not a confession that clearly distinguishes the confessor from the false believer. For, in spite of this confession, no one knows whether one accepts Scripture in the true sense or not or whether one is a Papist, or an enthusiast, or a Rationalist, or an orthodox Christian. Therefore an unconditional subscription is indispensable. For the sake of clarity it is necessary to declare how one understands and interprets Scripture and the articles of faith that are contained in it. It is essential to keep in mind that the purpose of our Symbols is a) that our church

clearly and unequivocally confess its faith and its doctrine before the world; b) that it distinguish itself from all heterodox bodies and sects; c) that it may possess a united, certain, general form and norm of doctrine for all its teachers, on the basis of which all other writings and teachings can be judged and regulated.” C.F.W. Walther, *Why Should Our Pastors, Teachers and Professors Subscribe Unconditionally to the Symbolical Writings of our Church*, translated by Alex. Wm. C. Guebert. (Concordia Theological Monthly 23 [April 1947]), pp. 244–245.

32. In a critical omission, the Tappert translation of the Formula omits the word “must” from the phrase “which our churches must believe.” The Jacobs translation renders this portion more accurately when it translates: “... so that there might be a public, definite testimony, not only for those now living, but also for our posterity, as to what is and should remain the unanimously received understanding and judgment of our churches in reference to the articles in controversy ...” (from Henry E. Jacobs, translator and editor, *The Book of Concord* [Philadelphia: Westcott and Thomson, 1882], Vol. I:538).

33. Before his death, Dr. Henry Hamann, the Australian Lutheran professor, wrote a small book and addressed the commonly heard statement, “It is more important to be a Christian than to be a Lutheran.” He comments on this sentiment:

I am sure that many who express this thought do so to excuse their complete non-commitment to the Christian faith. ... Christian in such a context is so loose in meaning as to lose all meaning. ... In such a context, the sentence, “It is more important to be a Christian than to be a Lutheran” becomes meaningless twaddle. ... There is another possible meaning which that quoted sentence could have. It could be a boastful claim, a sign of an inner spiritual arrogance. ‘You’re only a Lutheran—I am a Christian, occupying a spiritual state far in advance of yours.’ ... Those Christians who have their own personal commitment to the Christian faith will not misunderstand me when I say, ‘I am a Lutheran because I am a Christian.’ They will know that my strong commitment to the Christian faith leads me to the Lutheran confession of it because I see in such confession the true and appropriate expres-

sion of that faith. ... The sentence "I am a Lutheran because I am a Christian" asserts (1) that the Christian faith is clearly revealed, (2) that it can be grasped and understood, (3) that it can be accurately stated, taught, and confessed, and (4) that this has been done in traditional Lutheranism. It is a further consequence of this conviction to hold that convinced members of other denominations would think exactly the same way about their view of the Christian message—and, thinking that way, would reject my views which are specifically Lutheran. It is only for such persons—those who take seriously their own view of Christianity and that of Christians who disagree with them—that I have any real respect. The big enemy of the true Christian faith is compromise, toleration, the spirit that we are all right—as if the important thing is not to be Lutheran, but to be Christian without any denominational confession whatever.

Henry Hamann, *On Being a Christian: A Personal Confession* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1996), pp. 10–12.

34. Tappert, p. 338.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Tappert, pp. 338–339.

38. Tappert, p. 339.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Tappert, p. 340.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Tappert, p. 358.

47. One of the most recent studies of the catechetical methods of the Early Church is a study of St. Augustine's catechetical method by William Harmless in his work *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Col-

legeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995).

48. Michael Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries*, translated by Edward J. Haasl (New York: Sadlier, 1979), p. 30.

49. We read in the *Didache*, Chapter VII, "Concerning baptism, baptize thus: *Having first rehearsed all these things*, baptize, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," (*The Apostolic Fathers*, translated by Kirsopp Lake, Volume II in *The Loeb Classical Library* [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1913], p. 319). The Early Church clearly recognized a responsibility not simply to practice a mysterious initiation rite, but to engage in teaching, imparting a body of truth. What this content was at this early stage is believed by many modern scholars to be the content of the gospels, perhaps using the gospels themselves for this teaching.

50. See *Shepherd of Hermas*, III, vii, 3: "These are they who have heard the Word and wish to be baptized" (Lake, p. 45).

51. Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, translated by Maraes Dod, George Reith and B.P. Pratten in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Volume I (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted 1985), p. 183.

52. ANF, Vol. 1:185.

53. Gregory Dix, editor and translator, *The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome* (London: The Alban Press, reissued with corrections, 1992), pp. 23, 28, 29, 30.

54. Harmless, p. 41.

55. Ibid..

56. "The rivalry between Catholics and Donatists was bitter and drew out Augustine's most combative instincts. This split within the African Church dated from the 310s. It originated with the disputed election of Caecilian as bishop of Carthage. Opponents charged that the unpopular Caecilian had been ordained by a *traditor*—one who had 'handed over' copies of the Bible to Roman authorities during the



persecution of Diocletian and who had thus made himself an apostate. In some African eyes, this polluted Caecilian's ordination. Soon after, some bishops ordained a rival who was succeeded, in turn, by Donatus of Casae, the man from whom the schism gets its name. Before long, rival churches existed not only in Carthage, but throughout North Africa, and in time, in many areas, the majority of Christians were Donatist. ... The Donatists held that since Caecilian was outside the church all sacraments rendered by him were null and void" (from Harmless, p. 214).

57. Pelagianism held that man can take the initiative in his salvation by taking steps that would lead to salvation, by his own efforts, apart from God's grace.

58. Gnosticism is the name given to a wide-ranging number of teachers and philosophies which all basically believed that there was a secret knowledge of the universe's mysterious ordering that could be known only to a certain few adherents. It tended to downplay the physical aspects of existence and thus led to two major schools of thought: Ascetic Gnosticism, which taught that man must subjugate the flesh in order to free himself from it and Libertine Gnosticism, which taught that man may indulge whatever desire he has, since the flesh was of no account. There is good evidence that Gnosticism, although originating in certain philosophies from the East, borrowed heavily from Christian theology, even rewriting gospel accounts of Jesus' life. This is what we have today in the form of the so-called "Lost Gospels" which, from time to time, are touted as "the rest of the story of Jesus' life." Unscrupulous scholars foist this on an uninformed public.

59. Manichaeism, named after Manes, the founder, was a branch of Gnosticism from Eastern Persia. Manes was a big fan of St. Paul, or at least certain portions of St. Paul). It was noted for its dualism; that is, its belief that there was a primal conflict between light and darkness. The goal of religion was to release the particles of light that Satan had stolen from the Realm of Light and imprisoned in man's brain. Manes taught that Jesus, Buddha, the Prophets and, of course, he himself, had been sent to help man do this. Manichaeism was the ultimate form of

Gnosticism. It was the most complex and elaborate working out of Gnostic beliefs about the universe. Even the various phases of the moon and the movements of the sun were believed to contain great cosmic truths. An extremely severe asceticism was believed to be essential to the release of the light within man. Augustine, for a time, was attracted to Manichaeism, but upon his conversion, became one of its most eloquent and effective opponents.

60. It is rather amazing to realize that within the lifetime of St. Augustine (354–430) the following church fathers were working: Athanasius (295–373), Cyril of Jerusalem (315–386), Basil of Caesarea (329–379), Gregory of Nyssa (335–394), Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390), Ambrose (339–397), Jerome (349–420), John Chrysostom (344–407), Theodore of Mopsuetia (d. 428), Paulinus of Nola (353–431), and Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444). This remarkable outpouring of theological insight marks the fourth century as truly one of the church's "golden eras."

61. See *Egeria: Diary of A Pilgrimage*, translated and annotated by George E. Gingras, Volume 38 in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, edited by Johannes Quasten, et al. (Newman Press: New York, 1970). A quote from this work will illustrate the process of catechesis as we know it from various sources: "It is the custom here, throughout the forty days on which there is fasting, for those who are preparing for baptism, to be exorcised by the clergy early in the morning, as soon as the dismissal from the morning service has been given at Anastasis. Immediately a throne is placed for the bishop in the major church, the Martyrium. All those who are to be baptized, both men and women, sit closely around the bishop, while the godmothers and godfathers stand there; and indeed all of the people who wish to listen may enter and sit down, provided they are of the faithful. A catechumen, however, may not enter at the time when the bishop is teaching them the law. He does so in this way: beginning with Genesis he goes through the whole of Scripture during these forty days, expounding first its literal meaning and then explaining the spiritual meaning. In the course of these days everything is taught not only about the Res-

urrection but concerning the body of faith. This is called catechetics” (p. 123).

62. AE 48:113. See note 10 in the AE for a detailed history of the editions of this sermon series.

63. Martin Luther, *A Brief Explanation of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer*, translated by Charles Jacob in Volume II of *Works of Martin Luther: The Philadelphia Edition* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1915, reprinted by Baker Book House, 1982), Volume II, p. 354–355 (WA 7:194ff). This work was one of the key foundations for Luther's Small Catechism. In 1522 Luther had the *Kurze Form* reprinted with some changes and additions and titled it *Betbüchlein*. This is translated in the American Edition of *Luther's Works*, in Volume 43, pp. 5–45 (WA 10 II).

64. For extensive detail, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521–1532*, translated by James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 261ff. The development of the visitation articles spawned the first doctrinal controversy among the adherents of Luther's Reformation. Consult Brecht for further details.

65. Brecht, p. 270.

66. This would in part explain the continued concern of the Lutheran Church that its clergy maintain their professional competence in doctrine. Martin Chemnitz prepared his *Enchiridion* for the purpose of examining clergy under his supervision in Brunswick. In answer to the question “What then is the office of ministers of the church?” Chemnitz provides the following three key functions: “I. To feed the church of God with the true, pure and salutary doctrine of the divine Word. Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Peter 5:2. II. To administer and dispense the sacraments of Christ according to His institution. Mt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23. III. To administer rightly the use of the keys of the church or of the kingdom of heaven, by either remitting or retaining sins (Mt 16:19; Jn 20:23), and to fulfill all these things and the whole ministry (as St. Paul says, 2 Tim. 4:5) on the basis of the prescribed command, which the chief Shepherd Himself has given Him ministers in His Word for

instruction. Mt 28:20." Martin Chemnitz *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, translated by Luther Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), p. 26.

67. AE 53:64-65.

68. AE 53:66.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. AE 53:67.

73. Brecht, p. 273.

74. AE 20:155.

75. Ibid.

76. AE 20:156.

77. AE 20:157.

78. Martin Luther, *Preface to the Sermon of November 29, 1528* in AE 51:135-136.

79. AE 51:137.

80. Brecht, p. 275.

81. Agricola prepared for Eisleben a simple catechism in 1525. In 1527 he produced *Christian Discipline for Children in God's Word and Doctrine*; then, in 1528, he prepared *One Hundred Thirty Common Questions*. He did not produce the shorter work that Luther was requesting in 1525. Brecht, p. 273-274.

82. Brecht, p. 275.

83. cf. Reu, p. 93-94. Reu notes that the form of the catechism we have today is based on the edition of 1531.

84. Reu, p. 96.

85. Reu, p. 97.

86. Quoted from Reu's *Quellen* by Theodore Laetsch, "The Catechism in Public Worship" (*Concordia Theological Monthly* 5), p. 237.

87. So insistent were some areas on teaching the catechism that it

was made mandatory for preachers to recite, from the pulpit, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the words of Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar, word for word, after their sermons on Sunday mornings. Denmark's church order was sent to Luther for his personal approval in 1537, and returned by Luther and delivered by Bugenhagen as Luther's personal representative in July 1537. Here we read of the catechetical program formally adopted in Denmark:

"In the Matins on Sunday [traditionally the first Sunday service] and holidays three psalms ... shall be sung before the sermon. After them the boys shall read in a medium voice, without changing, the Catechism, while the teacher shall always chant the heading. In this manner: First the teacher: 'These are the commandments of the Lord, our God.' Then the boys, changing about in order, the rest: 'I am the Lord, Thy God. Thou shalt have, etc.' The teacher: 'These are the articles of our faith.' The pupils: 'I believe, etc.' ... After breakfast the Catechism shall continually be preached to the pupils, yea, to all: first the Ten Commandments; then the Articles of faith; thereafter the Lord's Prayer; finally the institution and use of the Sacraments; however, in this manner, that always one single part be completed at one time and that in the end one certain, sure and uniform exposition be regularly used, as it is found in Luther's Catechism. For here one must not show his learning and ability, but all must serve for the edification of the congregation, so that the same may always be heard by all and the people be made certain in their indoctrination by this very uniformity. As long as the points of any one part are being explained, the part in its entirety shall always be repeated, but in proper order, so that the pupils and all others may silently, for themselves follow. ... The Catechism, once finished, shall always be repeated from beginning to end (p. 239).

88. Laetsch, p. 238. The *Braunschweig Church Order* devoted a separate chapter to the topic "On the Four Special Seasons of the Catechism, That Is, of Instruction." Here the Order states: "Although, as has been said, the catechism is being preached every Sunday in the early morning by the other preachers, there are also set aside four seasons in the year when such sermons shall be preached by the superintendent

and his assistant [adjutor] throughout the city. ... These times are: In the Advent season two weeks on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. In the first four full weeks in Lent in the same manner. In Cross-week [the week of Ascension Day] and the week following in like manner, with the exception of the day of the Lord's Ascension. Two weeks after the harvest, before the hops are gathered, in the same manner. Therefore these two preachers shall briefly and plainly compile the catechism for the unlearned, so that it can be finished in these eight sermons. In the mean time the other pastors shall cease and rest with their lessons or work-day sermons; only on Wednesdays shall they preach in all churches during the weeks of the catechism" (p. 238).

89. Wilhelm Löhe, *Three Books About the Church*, translated, edited and introduced by James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), pp. 170–171. In his *House, School and Church-Book for Christians of the Lutheran faith* Löhe provides this explanation of the catechism. See Wilhelm Löhe, *Questions and Answers to the Six Parts of the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther*, translated by Edward T. Horn, Second Edition (Decatur, Illinois: The Johann Gerhard Institute, reprinted 1996).

90. Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career: 1521-1530*, edited and with a foreword by Karin Bornkamm, translated by E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 601.

91. Veith, pp. 209–210. Veith offers this challenge to the church today: "Biblical churches with doctrinal integrity will have a stronger witness than muddled, eager-to-please-everyone congregations that do not stand for anything in particular. Confessionalism should not mean 'dead orthodoxy,' the insistence on some kind of doctrinal purity at the expense of a warm, personal faith. The goal should be 'live orthodoxy,' a faith that is both experienced and grounded in truth, with room for both the feelings and the intellect. At times in church history doctrine has been overemphasized, but that will hardly be a danger in a society whose every tendency is to deny truth altogether. ... Postmodern Christians must not, however, expect to fare particularly well at the hand of the postmodernists. Christians will be excoriated for 'thinking

they have the only truth.' They will be condemned for their intolerance, for 'trying to force their beliefs on everybody else.' Christians can expect to be excluded from postmodernists' invocations of tolerance and pluralism. As the culture becomes more and more lawless and brutal, Christians may even taste persecution. The church may or may not grow in such a climate. I suspect that it will shrink to a faithful remnant. But the church of Jesus Christ cannot be overcome by the gates of Hell, much less by a culture" (Veith, p. 223). This is a very perceptive observation and our Synod would do well to bear it in mind as we move into the years ahead.

**92. To Reaffirm Lutheran Catechetical Instruction**, Resolution 2-09a, WHEREAS, The Word of God is the only rule and norm of Christian faith and life; and WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions, which include Luther's Small Catechism, are a faithful exposition of the truth of God's Word; and WHEREAS, The historic hymns and liturgy of the Lutheran Church are also faithful expositions of God's Word; and WHEREAS, Some catechetical instruction, especially for adults, does not stress the use of Luther's Small Catechism and a Lutheran hymnal; therefore be it *Resolved*, That pastors and congregations of the Synod provide thorough Lutheran catechetical instruction that uses the Holy Scriptures, Luther's Catechisms, and a Lutheran hymnal with all who desire communicant membership.

**To Avoid Overemphasis on Numbers and Encourage Thorough Instruction of New Members**, Resolution 2-10a, WHEREAS, Increase in numbers is regarded as a mark of success in temporal businesses; and WHEREAS, Some have equated growth in numbers with spiritual success in evangelism and church work; and WHEREAS, Every congregation and every Christian has the obligation both to keep the message straight and to get the message out; and WHEREAS, Scripture indicates that God wishes His church to grow but points quite clearly to the fact that this growth must come through the working of the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament; therefore be it *Resolved*, That the Synod, its districts and congregations, be reminded that the gaining of converts must be accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who works through Word

and Sacrament rather than through a variety of human techniques; and be it finally *Resolved*, That the Synod, its districts and congregations, be reminded of the importance of thorough instruction in the Word before individuals are accepted into church membership.

93. Jeff Gibbs, "Microwave Christians" *Concordia Journal* 22 (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, January 1996), p. 9.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

95. Charles Arand, "Does Catechesis in the LCMS Aim for the *Ars Vivendi Fide*?" in *Concordia Journal* 22 (January 1996), p. 57.

96. Donald Deffner, "Confirmation" in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, edited by Fred Precht, authorized by the Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), p. 387.

97. Walther, p. 190.

98. Precht, p. 389.

99. We read this excellent summary of a truly Christian confirmation ceremony from Martin Chemnitz:

"Our theologians have often shown that if traditions that are useless, superstitious, and in conflict with Scripture are removed, the rite of confirmation can be used in godly fashion and for the edification of the church, namely in this way, that those who were baptized in infancy (for that is now the condition of the church) would, when they have arrived at the years of discretion, be diligently instructed in the sure and simple teaching of the church's doctrine and, when it is evident that the elements of the doctrine have been sufficiently grasped, be brought afterward to the bishop and the church. There the child who was baptized in infancy would by a brief and simple admonition be reminded of his Baptism, namely, that he was baptized, how, why, and into what he was baptized, what in this Baptism the whole Trinity conferred upon and sealed to him, namely, the covenant of peace and compact of grace, how there Satan was renounced and a profession of faith and a promise of obedience was made. Second, the child himself would give his own public profession of this doctrine and faith. Third, he



would be questioned concerning the chief parts of the Christian religion and would respond with respect to each of them or, if he should show lack of understanding in some part, he would be better instructed. Fourth, he would be reminded and would show by his confession that he disagrees with all heathenish, heretical, fanatical, and ungodly opinions. Fifth, there would be added an earnest and serious exhortation from the Word of God that he should persevere in his baptismal covenant and in this doctrine and faith and, by making progress in the same, might thereafter be firmly established. Sixth, public prayer would be made for these children that God would deign, by His Holy Spirit, to govern, preserve, and strengthen them in this profession. To this prayer there could be added without superstition the laying on of hands. This prayer would not be in vain, for it relies upon the promise concerning the gift of preservation and on God's strengthening grace. Such a rite of confirmation would surely be very useful for the edification of the young and the whole church. It would also be in harmony with both Scripture and the purer antiquity. For the account in Acts 19:1-7 clearly shows that when the Apostles laid their hands on someone an examination with respect to the doctrine and a profession of faith was made. Also, there are examples from the apostolic church of exhortation to perseverance and of confirming through the Word in the once-accepted doctrine and faith (Acts 14:22; 15:30-32; 18:11). And the account in Acts 8:14-17 shows that public prayer was added. Thus Canon 7 of the Council of Laodiceae and Canon 8 of the Council of Arles speak concerning an examination and profession of doctrine and faith in confirmation, as we have noted above. And for this reason a canon of a Council of Orleans requires a ripe age in the confirmand. To this fits beautifully what Dionysius says at the end of the *Ecclesiastica hierarchia* about the teacher of catechetical instruction, to whom the children who had been baptized in infancy were brought for instruction in order that they might be led through instruction and exhortations to take upon themselves and preserve the profession of faith, the renunciation of Satan, and the promise of obedience made in Baptism (from Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part*

*II*, translated by Fred Kramer [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978], pp. 212–213).

100. Laetsch, p. 240.

101. Löhe, p. 171.

102. Löhe, p. 173.

103. Arand, p. 58.

104. Arand, pp. 58–59.

105. Thompson, p. 264.

106. Dr. C.F.W. Walther, *American Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, translated and abridged by John M. Drickamer from the Fifth Edition, 1906 (New Haven, Missouri: Lutheran News, Inc., 1995), p. 188.

107. *Ibid*, p. 190.

108. See Alvin Barry, *The Unchanging Feast: The Nature and Basis of Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: The Office of the President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1995).

109. For an excellent collection of essays on issues concerning adult catechesis please see *Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976).

110. At the present time a committee in our Synod is working to think of ways to incorporate some of the good points of the RCIA program into our congregations' adult confirmation programs. They will be offering some initial training and then testing some of their ideas and concepts in various congregations. I think we will be able to offer some very good suggestions to the congregations of our Synod through this process.



*Catechesis is the key to the church's health and survival. Just as our bodies become sick and weak when they are not properly nourished, so the Body of Christ suffers when it is spiritually starved, or put on minimal rations. Catechesis is all about teaching people the wonderful truth and meaning that is contained in Martin Luther's beautiful explanation of why God sent His Son into this world to be our Savior: "...that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness."*

— Dr. A. L. Barry  
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod