

John G. Morris

Concise Introduction to Luther's Catechisms



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A Concise Introduction To Luther's Larger and Smaller Catechisms

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By John G. Morris

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Contents

[Also Available from LutheranLibrary.org](#)

[About The Lutheran Library](#)

[Contents](#)

[Preface by Lutheran Librarian](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Luther's Larger and Smaller Catechisms](#)

[An Extensive Influence on Protestantism](#)

[Earlier Related Writings](#)

[The Need for Such Writings](#)

[The Occasion of Writing](#)

[Publication](#)

[Appendix to the Five Articles of the Smaller Catechism](#)

[Questions For Those Who Would Prepare Themselves to Receive the Lord's Supper](#)

[The Contents of the Two Books](#)

[The Larger Catechism](#)

[The Order](#)

[Conclusion: On the Benefits of Catechising](#)

[Copyright Notice](#)

[How Can You Find Peace With God?](#)

[Benediction](#)

[More Than 100 Good Christian Books For You To Download And Enjoy](#)

Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking authentic spirituality.

JOHN GOTTLIEB MORRIS (1803-1895) attended Princeton and Dickinson Colleges, and Princeton Theological Seminary and was a member of the first class of the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg. Dr. Morris founded the *Lutheran Observer* and was president of both the Maryland and General Synods. Morris was a frequent lecturer before the Smithsonian Institution and author of the *Catalogue of the Described Lepidoptera of North America* (1860), among other scientific and religious publications. He and his nephew founded the Lutheran Historical Society. [Source: William and Mary Special Collections Database.]

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Introduction

WE REGARD IT as a very favorable sign of the times in our church, that the ancient and salutary practice of catechetical instruction, has of late, engaged more than ordinary attention among us. The different periodicals have uttered their almost oracular voice, and not a few of the Synods have passed resolutions commending it to pastors and people. It has been the theme of elaborate pulpit discourses, and of frequent discussion in conferences and at occasional clerical meetings. All this promises the most beneficial results, and is an unmistakable evidence of the revival of genuine church feeling, as well as of an increasing interest in the proper religious training of the younger members of the household of faith.

It was never true, as has elsewhere been stated, without reason or authority, that the practice has been generally abolished in our church in this country. It was certain, however, that here and there, one pastor might be found, who esteemed himself wiser than his fathers, and suffered himself to be deterred from the performance of it either by his own distaste for a plain ministerial duty, by his dislike for extraordinary labor, by the senseless jeers of uninstructed sectaries around him, or by an overweening fondness for every species of innovation. There are few men among us, who are willing to have it said that they have abolished it in their churches. Some who were suspected, have even taken pains to correct the false report, conscious that their loyalty to the church might very naturally be called in question, if they have given up a practice sanctioned by apostolic usage, by the ancient church, by the reformers and by all the good and great men of every age down to the present time. There are very few now who wait for the extraordinary manifestations of grace for the conversion of their young people, without employing the ordinary means, or that they find a religious meeting of some days continuance a good substitute for the old catechetical system. We are glad to hear that most of our pastors give catechetical instruction, even to those who have been awakened at such meetings, before they have been admitted to confirmation and the Lord's Supper, and this must be re-

garded as a decided improvement on the system that prevailed to some extent not very long ago. It may be a question, whether, after all, the most wholesome *protracted* meeting for young people would not be one of three or four months' duration with a catechetical class.

Luther's Larger and Smaller Catechisms

Happily, there is not a periodical in our church that is not an ardent advocate for the practice, and it would really be an anomalous *Lutheran* journal, if it were not so. For is it not one characteristic of us as a people? Is it not one of those distinctive qualities by which we are known from many other religious families around us; and is it not especially Luther's catechism, which we all use in one form or other—a book which, if sincerely believed in *all* its teachings, will sufficiently distinguish us from our Christian neighbors? We want no broader line than the catechism draws; but then we do not want that line whitewashed out by a diluted and false liberalism, so as nearly to obliterate it. We desire to see it remain in its original breadth and depth, so that we may consistently and honestly reply to the query: "What are the distinctive doctrines of your church?" "You will find an epitome of them in Luther's Smaller Catechism."

An Extensive Influence on Protestantism

Next to Luther's translation of the Scriptures, none of his books exerted so extensive and wholesome an influence on the Protestant cause, as his Larger and Smaller Catechisms. The latter, particularly, was translated into all the modern languages of Europe, and into Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, and Latin. Even the Malabars of India, and other eastern nations, read it in their own tongue. It has been illustrated in many a ponderous tome—it has been made the basis of sermons by the most celebrated preachers of the church—learned professors have used it as the ground of their doctrinal lectures—historians have made it the theme of many a curious and elaborate volume—commentators in scores have expended their strength upon it, and the enemies of the Reformation have assailed it with demoniacal rancor and hate. So much did the Jesuits of a later day fear its overwhelming influence, that they committed in relation to it one of the most villainous frauds that is to be found in literary history. They concocted a catechism, by perverting Luther's words, so as to make it appear a defense of popery, and published it as his own. Even poets, scholastics, astronomers, grammarians, and astrologers not excluded, have expended much ink and paper in versifying and explaining it on the principles of their respective theories. All these numerous writings on so small a book, have continued through a period of more than three hundred years, and constitute a literature so extensive, that no man can boast of having a thorough acquaintance with it. Even to the present time, the catalogs of German book-sellers announce additional illustrations, and analyses of Luther's Catechism, some of which, however, must be designated as obscurations, for they darken his words, dilute his doctrines, and pervert his meaning. They corrupt instead of correcting; they falsify instead of verifying—"*Quot correctiones, tot corruptiones.*"

Earlier Related Writings

These two books were not the first of a similar character which the Reformer wrote and published. Even as early as 1518, he had issued an Explanation of the Ten Commandments and of the Lord's Prayer, and in 1520, a brief "*Direction for Studying the Commandments and the Creed, and for us-*

ing the Lord's Prayer." All the catechisms used in the church of Rome up to that day, embraced only these three heads, and Luther, very wisely, did not abruptly depart at that early period of the Reformation, from the universal custom which had been sanctioned by so many centuries.

Though he was the first of all the Reformers, to prepare such writings for the common people, yet he was not the only one who labored in that department of literature. Not a few of his noble coadjutors, among whom were Tolzen, Bugenhagen, Melancthon, Brenz, and others, also wrote books of this character before Luther published the two catechisms now under consideration. But this did not deter him from bringing out his books. He was not influenced by that false modesty which often holds back a really good book, nor by fear of the critic, nor by feelings of questionable delicacy to his compeers, who had already occupied the field. He saw that their writings for popular use were deficient in system and order, and that they were not so well adapted to the instruction of beginners in Christianity, whether adults or children. He resolved, then, to publish the two books, called the Larger and the Smaller Catechism, and both appeared in 1529.

The Need for Such Writings

The necessity of such writings for that generation, will abundantly appear from the state of catechetical instruction and the prevailing ignorance of gospel truth. Though this mode of teaching had not been altogether abolished in the church of Rome, yet the books used were wretched compilations of legendary tales, silly stories of saints of questionable sanctity; the truth was obscured by grievous errors, and neutralized by the mixture of impious superstitions. Luther himself tells us, "that there was no divine among the Romanists who knew or understood the decalogue, the creed, and the Lord's Prayer, as well as the children who had been taught by him and his helpers;" and Matthesius, a contemporary of Luther, who preached and published seventeen sermons on Luther's Life, says: "that he does not remember to have heard in twenty-five years, any thing from the pulpit, in the

Romish church, relating to these chief parts of Christian doctrine, nor was any thing of the kind taught in the schools.”

The Occasion of Writing

The direct occasion of writing these catechisms, was the church visitation which Luther and others performed in 1527-8, by order of the Elector of Saxony, in the dominions of that prince. A full account of this is given in Seckendorf's *Historia Lutheranismi*, Lib. II., p. 101, and we wish we had room for a more extended notice than we are permitted here to give. Melancthon was appointed to draw up "*The Instructions to the visitors of the pastors in the Electorate of Saxony*," which were sanctioned by Luther and Bugenhagen. At the request of the Elector, Luther wrote a preface to the Instructions, and they were then published together. He therein defends the measure, and derives arguments from both the Old and New Testaments, to show the propriety and expediency of commissioning prudent and pious men to visit the pastors and churches. This office of visitation has been renewed in this country by the Missouri Synod of our church, which will probably derive much benefit from it. It may be well adapted to their pastors and people, who have been trained under different ecclesiastical influences from ours. It would not suit us in the East, nor our church in this country in any section, whose pastors and people have been brought up uncontrolled by ecclesiastical authority beyond that of their own congregation, and where they are exceedingly jealous of the most harmless aspirings towards ecclesiastical power, on the part of the clergy.

The design of this visitation in Luther's time, was to ascertain the state of the churches—the doctrines of the preachers and hearers—their morals and religious attainments—the condition of the schools—the improvement of the pupils, and the qualifications of teachers. They were instructed to prescribe a better mode to preachers and teachers of discharging their respective offices—to advise the people to support public worship, and to proceed rigorously against the obstinate and perverse; in a word, to make a full examination into every thing: that related to ecclesiastical affairs.

To Luther was assigned the electorate of Saxony and the districts of Meissen, and Jonas and Bugenhagen were to take his place if he should be prevented. He found things in a wretched condition—the ministers and people were pitiably ignorant—the plainest truths of the Gospel were misapprehended, and its most common precepts were misapplied.—But a few extracts from Luther will vividly represent the true condition of affairs. In the preface to the Smaller Catechism he says:

“Alas! what a sad state of things have I witnessed! The common people, especially in the villages, are so utterly ignorant of the Christian doctrine, and even many pastors quite unprepared and unqualified to teach, who yet are all called Christians, are baptized and partake of the holy Supper, but know neither the Lord’s Prayer, nor the Creed, nor the Decalogue, and act like irrational creatures.”

In his letters he says:

“We every where find poverty and want; may the Lord send laborers into his vineyard.”—“Our visitation progresses; alas! what wretchedness we behold!”

Luther’s soul was moved to compassion, and he at once determined to write the catechisms for the especial benefit of that ignorant people. He tells us that he was compelled by their heart-moving spiritual wants, to present the truth in such a simple form, and he acquitted himself of a duty which lay heavily upon his conscience.

Publication

Both these catechisms were published in 1529, and although there has been much discussion on the subject of the priority of publication, the weight of the testimony is in favor of the Larger. Most probably that was issued in January, and the Smaller in October of the same year. To the three principal parts, viz. the Decalogue, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer, which were usually comprehended in all the previous catechisms, Luther added

two others, viz.: Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Some of the earlier writers designate six parts in the catechisms, including Directions for Confession and Absolution; but even if Luther wrote this, he did not design it to constitute a distinct head. There is, however, some doubt whether the Reformer wrote it, and hence some ascribe it to Bugenhagen. The ideas at any rate, are taken from Luther's other writings, and almost in his own words. It appears in the second edition of the catechism, and was doubtless, sanctioned by him. In the book of Concord, it is inserted between the articles of Baptism and the Lord's Supper of the Catechism, but it is not separated from the latter; subsequently, there was added another part, called *The Power of the Keys*, founded on *Matt.* 16:19, 18:18, and particularly *John* 20:33. It is well known that these passages have been shamefully perverted by the church of Rome, for her priests claim the absolute power of pardoning sin. Absolution with us, is nothing more than the *power bestowed on ministers of announcing the pardon of sin to true penitents*. It is merely *declarative* and *hypothetical*, and not *collative* and *judicial*. We do not confer absolution—we only declare it on condition of repentance, faith and holiness. The minister does not set himself up as a judge, but only announces the promise of God. Any other Christian could just as well pronounce absolution, but for the sake of church-order and fitness, the exercise of the right has been limited to ministers. This article in the Catechism was not written by Luther. It does not appear in the earliest editions, nor in any part of Luther's writings, nor in the book of Concord. It has been attributed by some to Knipstrow, and by others to Brenz, and Carpzov tells us that it was doubtless prepared and inserted in the Catechism when the Calvinists tried hard to abolish Confession and Absolution in the churches.

Appendix to the Five Articles of the Smaller Catechism

To the Five Articles of the Smaller Catechism, Luther added an appendix, consisting of questions and answers relating to family religion—do-

mestic, civil and ecclesiastical duties. These appendices are, at least, attributed to him, inasmuch as they appear in the earlier editions of the book.— There are two other additions which were considered important in that early period of the Reformation; one, A Form for the celebration of marriage, and the other, for the Administration of Baptism. These were designed for the use of unlearned pastors, and, of course, constitute no part of the Catechism proper. It is not easy to determine when they were first appended to the book, nor even whether they were written by Luther. They were not printed in the first edition of the Book of Concord, which appeared in Dresden in 1580. This gave great offence, not only to the Helmstadt divines, but the Elector of Brandenburg and Duke William of Lüneburg, were also deeply concerned about the omission, and, *of course*, not a few *pro* and *contra* pamphlets were exchanged.

Questions For Those Who Would Prepare Themselves to Receive the Lord's Supper

The “Questions for those who would prepare themselves to receive the Lord's Supper,” were not written by Luther, but most probably by Dr. Lange, one of his friends. They do not appear in the earlier editions, and were not printed at all during Luther's lifetime. No one ever pretended that “The Order of Salvation” came from the pen of the Reformer, but it was written many years after by Dr. Freylinghausen. It follows, then, that *Luther's* Shorter Catechism consists exclusively of the “Five Principal Parts” as we have them in the Book of Concord, and all the other appendices must be carefully distinguished from the original work.

The Contents of the Two Books

The contents of the two books may be summed up as follows: We take them in their original unity, unrefined and unimproved by modern hands.

The *Smaller* contains an Introduction, which is not printed in the modern editions. It gives an account of the occasion and design of the book, and directions for its proper use, with admonitions against the neglect of catechetical instruction. It exposes the corruptions of popery, and urges on pastors, parents and rulers, the duty of indoctrinating the ignorant and the young in the truths of the Gospel. It is written in Luther's most powerful style, and reminds us of Melancthon's words: *Fulgura erant linguae cuncta, Luthere, tuae.*¹ Walch says of this preface, C 'lectu dignissima est ,"[^bdm] and we wish it were within the reach of every pastor and parent.

The first chief part consists of an Epitome of the Decalogue, and in the division of the commandments Luther followed that which had been in use for centuries. On this subject, it will be necessary to say a few words in explanation. In all the European, and in most of the American editions, that which is usually called the second commandment, and which forbids the worship of images, is omitted, and in order to make up the ten in number, that which is the tenth in some other catechisms, is divided into two. What was Luther's design in this omission? Did he favor the worship of images and the invocation of saints? No man ever wrote, argued and preached more powerfully and successfully against them. They were both, objects of his implacable hate. Why, then, leave out this commandment?

1. That which is usually regarded as the second commandment, was considered by Luther and multitudes of other learned and good men, in every age of the church, as an expansion and illustration of the first; and as he studied brevity for the sake of the ignorant of his day, he did not insert it.
2. Some of the others are abbreviated for the same reason, particularly the one relating to the Sabbath. He looked upon them both as containing amplifications which he did not think it necessary to insert in his book.

3. There is no division of the Decalogue into numbers in the Scriptures, and hence any division is legitimate, if the ten are retained and the subjects are properly conjoined.
4. The ninth and tenth were divided, because they relate to different objects, and the difference between the numbers must be founded on the diversity of objects. The General Synod's edition is thus divided, but it inserts the illustration of the first and the third.

The Lutheran division of the commandments is usually styled the Augustinian, because Augustine was the most distinguished of the fathers, who adopted it. Before him, it was adopted by Clemens of Alexandria, and after him by Beda, Nicholas de Lyra, and a host of other great divines. It was also the one in common use among the Jews, although Josephus and Philo do not follow it. The other division is called the *Origenian*, and was followed by Ireneeus, Jerome, Ambrose, and many others.

Each commandment is followed by an explanation which in a few words develops the whole truth contained in it. Never were these "ten words" of God more distinctly and forcibly illustrated in so brief a space. The very kernel of each is brought to light and exposed to the eye and the mind of the reader.

The Second Part contains that ancient symbol of the church, the Apostles' Creed. In his German translation of the third article, Luther very properly has it, *eine heilige christliche Kirche*, (one holy Christian church) instead of *Katholische*, (Catholic). This is not a perversion of the original, but it prevents also misconception. The phrase, *eine Katholische Kirche*, would be wholly misunderstood in most German congregations, and would lead to mischievous results. Indeed, the use of the expression, *Catholic church*, in the Creed, is not always understood even in an assembly of English worshipers, but it is more objectionable in German than in English, for no other expression is employed by the masses of Germans to designate what we call the *Church of Rome*.² The Romanists abused Luther most unchristianly for leaving out the word *Katholische*, and charged him with falsifying the Creed. But, as in all other questions of a similar character, these furious assailants were sent back to their kennels howling with despair. Gerhard, Scharnel and others, showed that, before the time of Luther, it was customary to recite those very words: *ich glaube eine heilige christliche Kirche* (I believe in one holy Christian church)! In the ancient symbols of the *Latin*

church, the word *Catholic* does not occur. It was adopted by the *Greek* church, and afterwards came into general use, but when it was added to the Creed is not easy to determine. Walch, *Introduce Lib. II. § 8.*, discusses this subject at length, and gives much curious and learned information about it. Luther himself did not reject the term *catholic.*, but held it to be synonymous, in an ecclesiastical sense, with *Christian*. He uses the word in *Smalc. Art. Part III. §12. credo sanctum ecclesiam catholicam, sive christianam*, (I believe in a holy catholic, or Christian church).

In his explanation of the first section of the Creed, he recites the benefits we receive from God the Father and our consequent obligations to him. In the second, the benefits from the redemption by Christ; and never was this article more comprehensively treated and thoroughly explained. In the third, the necessity and nature of the means and operations of grace and the benefits flowing to the whole church from the Holy Ghost, are forcibly set forth.

The third part of the Catechism consists of the Lord's Prayer, which he divides into the introductory address, seven petitions and the doxology; each of which is illustrated in his peculiarly pithy and forcible style.

The *Fourth* part treats of the first sacrament of the New Testament, or Baptism, as a means of grace established for reuniting man with God, and is treated under four principal questions. The *first* does not embrace properly an explanation of baptism, but rather those things which are necessary to constitute it, as water, the word of God, including the command in Matt. 28:9, which is also added.

The *Second* illustrates the benefits or effects of baptism, to which is appended Mark 16:16. This is, however, not to be understood as limiting the benefits of baptism to the presence of faith, or rendering faith indispensable to a participating in the ordinance. The sacraments are acts of God's grace towards us, and not our acts of devotion or service toward him. He no more asks the consent of a child to be born into his kingdom by baptism, than He consults it about being born into the world. In both instances, He performs the work of His own gracious will. [This is God's part of the work: but on the part of man, *faith* is always required in adults to a salutary reception of baptism as well as of the Lord's Supper; and that in the case of infants faith is an *ultimate* element and essential to their salvation, is also involved in the Lutheran system.]

In the *Fifth*, or last part, the Lord's Supper is treated under four sections. In the *first*, we have the nature, the essential components and divine institu-

tion of the sacrament, in the words of its founder. In the *second*, its benefits are set forth; in the *third*, the manner in which those benefits are produced, and in the *fourth*, our obligations to prepare ourselves for a worthy participation, which is limited to faith.

This, then, is an extremely succinct analysis of *The Shorter Catechism*, but we are not permitted to enlarge.

The Larger Catechism

The *Larger Catechism* is not so well known to pastors and catechumens in this country, even to those who can read it in the original language, as it deserves to be. We have never met with an English translation of it, and that accounts, to some extent, for its limited circulation among us. It is not often seen printed by itself, and the Book of Concord, in which it is contained, has not, heretofore, been so widely distributed as it should be. We are, however, glad to observe strong symptoms of a *revival* of symbolic theology among our ministers. Every one of us will be the better in many respects, from studying that immortal work.

But we must return to The Larger Catechism. It is many times larger than the other, and of itself makes a *duodecimo* of quite respectable size. It has two prefaces, the first of which is very long, and contains a regular treatise on the necessity of frequently preaching the word, and especially of catechetical instruction for the young. It is written in Luther's boldest manner, and contains many of his severest expressions. It is a sort of sledgehammer style, which would hardly be considered polite in this refined age. His soul seems to be fired with holy ire against his adversaries, the pope, the devil and the priests, and he unmercifully hurls against them all the bolts of his righteous wrath. The Latin translation has been softened down, for we presume that language furnished no words to render the *volcanic* expressions and thoughts of Luther.

The second preface is much shorter, and is properly an introduction to the text. It defines the Greek word *Katechismos*, and enforces the obligation

of parents and masters to teach it to their households, and of every body, young and old, of becoming well acquainted with its contents.

The catechism itself consists of two divisions. The first contains the text of the five principal parts of the Smaller, and there is here a still further abbreviation than in the former. After the three first, follow some excellent rules for learning and daily reciting them by children and even adults, and we wish that the counsels of the Reformer were followed at the present day.

In the *second* division, the Five Principal Parts are illustrated at length. This explanation, of course, embraces much relating to the abuses of popery, which were at that time, familiar to every body. All his extended observations on the commandments are most edifying and impressive. They would not, perhaps, receive the approbation of all modern theologians, particularly, those on the Sabbath, but Luther's views on that subject did not differ from those of all the great divines of that generation. After a short introduction to the Creed, there follows a masterly commentary on that ancient symbol. On the subject of faith and redemption, Luther is always great.

If any man desires to see the nature, necessity, hindrances and benefits of prayer illustrated in a powerful manner, let him read Luther on the Lord's Prayer, which constitutes the third article of this catechism. It is a subject he well understood, for no man ever more faithfully practiced prayer, and no man ever experienced more signal benefits from it. He spent hours of every day upon his knees in close communion with God, and knew well how to speak and write of it for the instruction of others. His commentary on the Lord's Prayer has been, for three centuries, printed as a tract, and has been distributed in uncounted numbers. In it, he gives us the results of his own rich experience, and seems to take a peculiar pleasure in writing on it.

His expositions of the two Sacraments, constituting the fourth and fifth parts of the book, ably set forth the distinctive features of the Lutheran theology. They embrace views which are not universally adopted even by those who call themselves after his name, but which we honestly believe will be more highly appreciated the more carefully they are studied and the more thoroughly they are understood. We do not here include all that Luther ever taught, or claim scriptural authority for all his peculiar views on all subjects. If his explanations of God's word do not harmonize with other portions, let them fall, but hear him before you strike him. Let not his teachings be judged by the rules of a false philosophy, or the faint glimmerings

of the taper-light of human reason; —let the everlasting Word decide, and it will not be hard to find out where the truth lies. There are some who dogmatically condemn Luther's views on the Sacraments, and yet do not know what they are—they have never studied them, and still presumptuously expect to be listened to by sensible men whilst they prate on a subject they do not understand. Yet these men are ardent admirers of Luther,—they flare up prodigiously when his venerated name is assailed;—they boldly rush into the arena of controversy in vindication of his honor— but after all, that which is peculiarly distinctive in his theology, they reject.

But, we are glad to see a return to the family mansion by those of Luther's household in this country. They have wandered long enough among the dwelling places of strangers, for they have almost forgotten the language and the plain, blunt manners of their father's family. Some of them have put on strange airs, and have departed from the simplicity that prevailed at home. They have fashioned their theological garments after the ever-varying taste of the modern artiste, and have adopted too many inventions and "notions" of the land so productive of both. Let them come back and re-assume the simple but comfortable garb of the fathers, and eat of the rich, wholesome abundance of the family board.

We need not be surprised at hearing that these books of Luther received, as they well deserved, the most rapturous laudations from many of his admirers. Although many of them did not carry their veneration of them to the same extravagant length with an old Silesian prince, who had them buried with him, because, next to the Bible, he derived more benefit from them than from all other books, yet their admiration knew scarcely any bounds. Polycarp Lyser in his preface to Chemnitz's *Loc. Com.* as quoted by Walch, says,

"Luther wrote a short catechism which is more precious than gold or gems, in which the essential purity of the prophets' and apostles' doctrine is so concentrated in one entire body, and is conveyed in such perspicuous language, that it may be deservedly regarded as a canon or rule of faith, for every thing therein is taken from the canonical scriptures. I can positively affirm that this little book contains such a copious fulness of every thing necessary to be known for salvation, that if all faithful preachers of the gospel, throughout their whole lives, were to treat of nothing else in their sermons, than the hidden wisdom of God comprehended in these few pages, and would properly explain it to the common people, and illustrate each part from the Scriptures, they would never be able to exhaust this fountain of immense depth."

Matthesius in his *Sermons on the Life of Luther*, says,

“If Dr. Luther had done nothing more in his whole life, than introduce these two Catechisms into families, schools, and the pulpit, the world would never be able sufficiently to thank and repay him.”

Many more such testimonies might be given, but enough for the present.

The Order

Some persons have objected to the order observed by Luther, particularly in beginning with the commandments, but is not this the real order of salvation? “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” “I had not known sin but by the law.” How proper, then, that after I have discovered myself to be a sinner by hearing the demands of the law, and feeling myself ruined, I should be directed to the way of recovery developed in the creed—that I should be pointed from Moses to Christ—from the law to the Gospel—from Sinai to Calvary—from the broken and condemning covenant of works, to the inviting and saving covenant of grace.

The coherence between the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, which follows, will appear, if we consider the design of the former. It contains the doctrine of faith, and not only in an objective form, that is, the truth that is to be believed, but it also teaches subjective faith, that which we are to exercise in the truth, and which justifies. Faith is one of the operations of grace. Grace alone engenders, preserves and increases it, but as it is a gift of God and to be sought by prayer, it is proper that the nature and benefits of prayer should be considered next. God does not engender immediately, but has established means of grace through which the Holy Spirit operates, increasing faith in the hearts of believers, thereby rendering their lives more holy. Among these means are the sacraments, which very properly follow in the order in which they are here set down. The system of salvation is thus complete — the connection and sequence of the articles are scriptural, answer-

ing to the experience of every man who has fled for refuge to the hope set before him.

Both these catechisms have symbolical authority in our church, though they were not written by command of princes or by resolution of ecclesiastical bodies. Luther wrote them of his own private will. They, however, became so universally popular, (Matthesius tells us that even in his own time, more than one hundred thousand copies had been distributed) that they gradually but silently won their way to this high distinction. The *Epitome II.* says: *Et quia haec religionis causa*, etc. — “And inasmuch as the cause of religion concerns the laity and their salvation, we also profess our adherence to the Larger and Smaller Catechisms of Dr. Luther as they are embraced in his works, and regard them as a sort of Bible for laymen, in which is contained every thing treated of in the Scriptures, necessary for a Christian to know in order to his salvation.” The *Declaratio Solida* afterwards adds: “*omnes . . . ecclesiae.* etc. etc.,” all the churches of the Augsburg Confession approve and receive these Catechisms." They are placed in the Book of Concord immediately after the articles of Smalcald and before the Formula Concordiae. The reason why they are placed in this order, and thus after the Augsburg Confession and the Apology, for they were written before either, is, probably, because the former were prepared by public authority, and the catechisms, as stated before, were private writings. All these books had attained symbolic authority before the Formula was written, and hence the latter was placed last.

The Smaller Catechism has been used by most of our ministers in this country, in instructing their catechumens, ever since the transplanting of the church. Numerous editions have been published in both languages, by various Synods and booksellers, and thousands are disposed of every year. Some liberty has been taken in some of the English translations, which we regard as unauthorized and unjust. We shall mention but one instance. Luther says that “the Sacrament of the Altar is the *true* body and blood of Christ under the external signs of bread and wine.” The General Synod’s and even Ludwig’s edition most unjustifiably leave out the word *true* and thus stultify, not Luther, but some other persons! If the Sacrament is at all the body and blood of Christ, which no person denies, it must be his *true* body and blood, and not an unreal or imaginary body. Why, then, not say so? Why mutilate Luther’s language, and try to present him in a false light? He is not the first man that has been wounded in the house of his friends.

Some additional illustrations have been made to the General Synod's edition, which are very good: for example, an argument in favor of infant baptism, and other explanatory notes. One of our ministers has published two elucidations of the Five Principal Parts (and it has been shown that nothing else in the book can be called a portion of Luther's Smaller Catechism), of one of which more than seven thousand copies have been sold, and the demand for it is increasing every year.

We observe that the last General Synod appointed a committee "to improve the Smaller Catechism . . . to frame suitable questions to elicit more fully the sense of the answers to the original questions . . . and to improve the collection of hymns."

This we regard as one of the most important works undertaken by the church, for many a day—more important, even, in our esteem, than the improvement of the hymn book, which a few years ago excited so much interest and discussion.

No body, however, appears to be much concerned about it, and, very probably, the fact of the appointment of such a committee will be news to many. It seems to be an easy thing to add a few questions to the catechism, but we look upon it as involving immense responsibility.

We do not exactly know what is meant by 'improving' the catechism, as expressed in the resolution. Any attempt to alter the arrangement, or sense, or language of the original, would be of more than questionable propriety at present; but still we do not mean to intimate that even that might not be done by the united voice of the church. Yet any essential alteration, without the consent of the whole church, would create an interminable controversy, and produce the most disastrous results. But we have no apprehension that the committee design to propose any such thing. We have the highest confidence in their integrity, prudence, and attachment to the church.

As this subject has been brought to the notice of the church, should we not make a complete work of it at once, and endeavor to furnish our people with a catechism that will need no further 'improvement' hereafter? If it were not considered presumptuous, we would beg leave to make to the committee the following suggestions:—Retain the Five Principal Parts of Luther's Catechism just as they stand, but give the commandments in full, as in the General Synod's edition — "Elicit more fully the sense of the original" by additional illustrations drawn from the *Larger* Catechism. Abolish as distinct parts, the other portions written, as we have seen, by other men,

but employ them as far as you can, in expanding Luther's answers.—Introduce a short chapter on the mode and subjects of Baptism, and such other matters of a similar kind as may be deemed necessary.—Give us, by all means, a chapter of Instructions to the Catechist and Catechumens—tell us how we may most advantageously teach, and *them*, how they may most profitably learn. Furnish us with an introductory chapter on Luther himself, (we have seen some excellent German editions containing such a chapter).—Print all of Luther's original in large type, so that it may be easily distinguished from your own,—mark those questions and answers that ought necessarily to be learned in first going through, with an asterisk, so as to obviate all objection to its size.

No one could reasonably object to this arrangement, for it contemplates retaining all that Luther wrote of the book, and yet does not reject all that he did not write. This would secure a unity and *consequence* of plan, which the book *called* Luther's Catechism, does not now possess, and if the committee write their portion of it in the same style that Guericke declares Luther wrote his, "in apostolic clearness like that of James, and with practical concreteness," (in *apostolisch Jacobischer Klarheit und praktischer Concretheit*) — we will say of them, as Matthesius said of Luther: if they had never written any thing else, they will deserve the everlasting thanks of the church.

Abundant materials for such a work are at hand in the immense number of Illustrations of Luther's Catechism that have appeared in past years, and which are yet annually appearing in Germany. We could furnish a catalogue of alarming length, but would particularly recommend certain works on this subject, of the old and modern masters, if it were within our province. On one catechism that we know something about, such men as Carpzov, Lucian, Schmidt and a few others, wrote and thought and prayed five years. Since that time, catechisms have been manufactured with more haste.

This is not the first time that the subject of an "improvement" in the catechism has been brought to the notice of the church. In the fifth volume of the *Lutheran Intelligencer*, several articles relating to it, may be found, some of which, we believe, were written by ourselves. But as the Persian prince said, "the remembrance of youth is a sigh." In looking back on those productions of our theological adolescence, we were reminded of what Schiller said when he refused to witness the performance of his play of *The Robbers*: "*Ich will nicht mein Magen verderben mit der rohen Kost meiner*

Jugend,” (“I will not turn my stomach with the raw productions of my youth.”) No, we trust the committee will not change the form, or the words of the original. We trust it will not be in this country with the Catechism as it is in Germany, where, as Jerome (quoted by Hase) said of the bibles of his day: “We have so many copies and codices, and every one, just at his own pleasure, either adds or subtracts, as seems good to him.” Let them take the copy as given in Walch’s edition of the Book of Concord, and they cannot err.

Conclusion: On the Benefits of Catechising

It would be an easy transition from this theme to another of immense practical importance,—the benefits of catechetical instruction, including the duty of imparting and receiving it, and the best method of catechising. We do not remember seeing any thing in print on this subject in our church periodicals, for some years. One of our ministers some time ago preached an elaborate discourse upon it at a Synod, and he was politely requested, by resolution, to publish it at his own cost; but as he had some practical experience of the profits which writers receive from pamphletizing, he declined, as he did not feel disposed to reward the *printer* at his own expense.

Great as Luther was, yet he was not above receiving lessons from the catechism. In his Introduction to the Larger, he says,

“For myself I can say, that I also am a divine and a preacher—yea, I have as much learning and experience as all those (who despise the catechism) and yet I am not ashamed to do as children do, who learn it. Every morning, and also at other times, I repeat word for word, the Decalogue, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and some Psalms; and although I thus daily read and study it, yet I cannot advance, as I should like, and hence I must continue to be a child and to be a learner of the catechism, to which I cheerfully consent.”

This reminds us of what Hannah More has somewhere said:

“It is a pity that people do not look at their catechism sometimes when they are grown up; for it is full as good for men and women as it is for children; nay, better—for though the answers contained in it are intended for children to repeat, yet the duties enjoined in it are intended for men and women to put in practice. It is, if I may so speak, the very grammar of Christianity and of our church; and they who understand every part of their catechism thoroughly, will not be ignorant of any thing which a plain Christian ought to know.”

But the subject of catechising demands a separate article, and we will conclude in the language of old Thomas Fuller, which we commend to the consideration of those pastors who express their surprise that some of their parishioners wander away after theological mountebanks peregrinating through the country, and opening a religious “show,” and to those also who act on the principle, that one protestant church is as good as another: “What may be the cause why so much cloth so soon changeth color? It is because it was never wet wadded, which giveth the fixation to a color, and setteth it in the cloth. What may be the reason why so many now-a-days, are carried about by every wind of doctrine, even to scour every point in the compass? Surely it is because *they were never well catechised in the principles of religion.*”

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1. “It is most worthy to be read.”↩
 2. We observe that at least in one of the German translations of the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, they have it, *eine Katholische Kirche*, which, we are sure, will prevent its general use among the Germans.↩

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