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Luther's Teaching of "Faith" in his Catechisms

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LUTHER'S TEACHING OF "FAITH"
IN HIS CATECHISMS

A Seminar Paper present to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology,
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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by
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Approved by: _____
Advisor

Reader

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus said that faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains (Matthew 17:20). Jesus commends the faith of people He heals and rebukes the unbelief even of His closest disciples. Many passages in Holy Scripture exhort Christians to faith and others warn against unbelief. At the heart of the church's preaching is the issue of faith, namely, believing what is preached of Christ and Him crucified. So we ask what exactly is "faith"? What does it actually do? In this paper we will examine "faith" as Dr. Martin Luther understands it and teaches it in his Catechisms, specifically in the Creed.

What is the rationale for such a study? While "faith" is an essential and central part of the message of Christ and His salvation, it tends to be understood in various ways. For some "faith" seems to be tantamount to an individual's will power or determination to face the changes and chances of life. For some "faith" seems to be synonymous with "conviction," that is, simply assent or agreement with certain details of Christian teaching. For some "faith" is viewed as one's commitment or decision to invite Jesus into one's heart. And for others "faith" seems to be some ability to see God's mystical hand working above and beyond, even orchestrating, the ordinary circumstances of life.

Rationalism would concentrate on the intellectual element of "faith"—believe in what makes logical, rational sense. Some rationalists' faith would excise the accounts of miracles and supernatural deeds from the Scriptures (including the central events of Jesus' death and

resurrection). Pietism, on the other hand, would concentrate on the emotional aspects of “faith.” Some pietists’ faith becomes based on emotions and is gauged by one’s experiences.

Therefore, this paper looks at Luther’s understanding and teaching of “faith” to provide clarity amidst the confusion. While “faith” is certainly important for Christians, it is also vital that we correctly understand it. On the one hand, we do not want to minimize “faith.” We do not want to equate “faith” with human reason or even human potential. It is something more and different. On the other hand, we do not want to over-emphasize faith. We do not want to understand “faith” as a means of escaping or avoiding the harsh realities of life. “Faith” itself is not some kind of talisman giving a person special abilities otherwise unrealized.

When we examine how Luther teaches and understands “faith” in his Catechisms, we see a view of faith that is refreshingly simple. Luther’s view avoids the extremes of intellectualism and emotionalism. Instead Luther charts a different course and blends the assent to doctrinal truths with the personal reception of the message of Christ. While Luther’s view of “faith” has rational and emotional elements, it is quite different from the intellectualism and emotionalism outlined above. If Luther had to give one word as a synonym of “faith,” that word might be “reception.” As we will discover, Luther understands “faith” as receiving God and His gifts, especially His works of salvation for and on behalf of the believer. For Luther trusting God is tantamount to receiving from God.

In this paper we will examine Luther’s understanding of faith in the following ways. First, we will define “faith” by unpacking its meaning. We will ask, “Who believes and in what do they believe?” Second, we will look at Luther’s language of faith in his Catechisms

and catechetical writings. We will note how he changes his language of faith depending on which part of Christian teaching he is explaining. Third, we will examine Luther's grammar of faith—his use of grammatical subjects, verbs, and objects—in the *Small Catechism*. And finally, we will see how Luther combines the teachings of the Christian faith with personal trust in those divine truths. For Luther, "faith" is much more than mental assent to doctrinal truths; it is a person's reception of those life-changing truths and the incorporation of those truths into one's way of thinking and living. Also, in Luther's Catechisms, "faith" is much more than a person's ever-changing religious experience; it is based on the sure foundation of the teachings of the Christian faith.

I. "FAITH" AS "EVENT WORD" IN LUTHER'S CATECHISMS

In this first part we will "unpack" the meaning of the word "faith," particularly as Luther understands it in his *Large Catechism*. In this part of the paper we are concerned not so much with the body of doctrine called "the Christian faith," but rather with the Christian's faith—trust or belief—in that teaching.¹ What is meant by "faith" (that is, when a person "has faith")? What does the word "faith" entail? For comparison's sake we will sample one non-Lutheran source. Following a look at this source we will look at Luther's *Large Catechism* to see what the word "faith" entails for him.

In this section, we are working on the premise that language tends to be shorthand.² When we look for the meanings of words or phrases, we need to "unpack" their meanings, or

¹ In traditional systematic language, for this part of the paper we are focusing more on the *fides qua creditur* and not so much on the *fides quae creditur*. We will discuss the relation of these two "kinds of faith" below.

² For this part of the discussion I am relying on James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 187-192.

determine their various components of meaning.³ This is especially true of “event words,” that is, nouns or adjectives that are verbally based, or have some component of activity behind them.⁴ James Voelz suggests that we can define so-called event words “by turning them back into verbs and by defining them according to the components of meaning of their related verbs.”⁵ To find the components of meaning of “event words” we need to turn the word itself back into a verb and then fill in the details of the rest of the sentence.⁶ Voelz calls these details “external entailments,” that is, “the related concepts” that “come along with the concept of the verbal root, when the noun or adjective related to that root is used.”⁷ In this section we are approaching the word “faith” as an “event word,” that is, as a noun that is based on a verb. In order to “unpack” the meaning of “faith” we will turn it back into a verb—“to believe in, or have faith in.” Then we will ask the questions: What is the subject of “to believe in, or have faith in”? What objects and modifiers help define “to believe in, or have faith in”? We will seek to answer these questions and define the event word “faith.”

³ See Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 363: “Components of Meaning: a complex of characteristics evoked by words/signifiers in the mental world of the reader/hearer from her memory world.”

⁴ As Voelz discusses ascertaining the meanings of different words, he introduces the concept of “event words”: “... some nouns and adjectives are verbally based, i.e., they are related to verbal concepts. In modern linguistic parlance, they are called ‘event words,’ because, while they are nouns and adjectives (and so we would not expect them to have an action component in their meanings), they are *verbal in their nature*. Or, put another way, in the meanings they convey, *a component of activity is, in fact, present, though that is not apparent to the ‘naked eye’*” (187-188, emphasis added).

⁵ Voelz, *What Does this Mean?*, 188.

⁶ Voelz, *What Does this Mean?*, 188, “... the verbal roots of event nouns... are part of—indeed, the center of—a sentence with a subject, object, modifiers, etc.”

⁷ Voelz, *What Does this Mean?*, 189.

Non-Lutheran Entailments of “Faith”

The source we will study here is merely a sample.⁸ Our cursory look at this non-Lutheran source will simply serve to sharpen the focus as we look at Luther’s understanding of “faith.” We choose the source below for the following reasons: 1) it is indicative of the widespread religious climate of late twentieth century America, that is, predominantly Arminian; 2) it is readily available for Christians to read and examine on a popular level, and thus many Christians may be influenced by it; and 3) it gives an understanding of “faith” markedly different from that of Luther in his catechisms.

We turn to the non-Lutheran source: *The Awesome Power of Shared Beliefs* by E. Glenn Wagner.⁹ Particularly insightful is how Randy T. Phillips¹⁰ introduces the book in his foreword: “In *The Awesome Power of Shared Beliefs*, our authors examine carefully five foundational convictions all who would call themselves Christians *must* agree upon: 1. The inerrancy of the Word of God; 2. The nature and attributes of God; 3. The Person and deity of Jesus Christ; 4. The role of the Holy Spirit in our salvation, and 5. Redemption and salvation through Jesus Christ.”¹¹ A preliminary unpacking would give us this starting definition for “faith”: “The Christian believes in, or is convinced of, the inerrancy of God’s Word, God’s nature and attributes, Jesus’ person and divinity, the Holy Spirit’s role in

⁸ Due to the limited scope of this paper, this cannot be an exhaustive, or even in-depth, treatment of possible sources.

⁹ E. Glenn Wagner, *The Awesome Power of Shared Beliefs* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995).

¹⁰ Randy T. Phillips is president of the popular men’s movement Promise Keepers. E. Glenn Wagner is Promise Keeper’s Vice President of Ministry and Advancement. We choose their work to examine and evaluate 1) because of its Arminian roots and teaching, and 2) because of its widespread availability. In essence these authors are catechizing many Christians, especially Christian men, in a view of Gospel and faith that is far different from Luther’s teaching in his catechisms. We might add that Luther’s catechisms provide a properly Gospel-centered view of faith and life so as to “answer” the concerns of Promise Keepers. Whereas Promise Keepers has properly diagnosed some of the late 20th century ills concerning men and their practice of the Christian faith, it is Luther’s catechisms—Luther’s teaching of faith—that provides the better remedy.

¹¹ Wagner, VI, emphasis original.

salvation, and the redemption and salvation that comes through Jesus.” We note especially how the words “belief” (that is, “faith”) and “conviction” are used as synonyms.

Wagner later elaborates on Phillips’ prefatory statement:

The Bible: By believing God has revealed Himself to me, I can base my life on revealed truth.

God: By believing that God exists and that I am created by Him and unto Him, I can, therefore, relate to Him.

Jesus Christ: By believing that Jesus is God and that His life and death provide something for me, I can be in relationship with Him. His characteristics can characterize my life. I can be strong, I can be compassionate, and I can have many other traits modeled after Christ.

The Holy Spirit: God does not make demands of me without providing the means and resources to accomplish these demands. He has given the Holy Spirit to enable us. Therefore I am not an orphan or deserted.

The redemption of man: By understanding my own sinfulness and my need for a redeemer, I can be fully accepted based on the work of Christ on the cross. Through His work I can find both security and significance.¹²

Two dominant facets of this understanding of “faith” stand out. The first facet is believing certain things *about* God (that He has revealed Himself, that He exists), or *about* Jesus (that He is God), or *about* the Holy Spirit (that He enables the believer). The second facet is the believer’s actions: basing his life on revealed truth; relating to God; modeling himself after Jesus; and using the Holy Spirit’s resources. After these facets comes the belief in the redemption of man. The believer’s understanding of his sinfulness and his need for a redeemer lead him to realize his acceptance. Clearly, the believer is the subject of “to believe in, or have faith in.” The key entailment, then, becomes the object of faith. Here the believer believes in certain facts about or characteristics of God. The purpose, or goal, of this believing is that the believer may then establish and practice his life accordingly. Thus, we

¹² Wagner, 43.

can revise the above definition of “faith”: “The Christian believes in (is convinced of) certain qualities or actions¹³ of God so that he can modify his life to live with God and to model his life after Jesus’ life.”

We will now turn our attention to the chapters that treat the Persons of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹⁴ While a different author writes each chapter the external entailments of “faith” will still be evident and consistent for this non-Lutheran view of “faith.” In the chapter titled “God” Max Anders discusses how one knows there is a God and then who is the true God.¹⁵ Anders then narrows the focus: “When we go to the Bible for a look at God, we find several things *about who He is.*”¹⁶ The author then discusses the many and various attributes of God: He is a Trinity; He is love, holy, just, eternal, immutable, omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent.¹⁷ Anders then says, “If we truly believed these things *about God*, it would radically change our attitude and behavior toward Him.”¹⁸ Again, this view of “faith” can be defined as being convinced of certain attributes about God so that the believer may change his life (“attitude and behavior”).

Anders also defines his understanding of “faith” more clearly:

“To believe, in the biblical sense, does not mean merely an intellectual acceptance of a given fact, but a personal commitment to it. To believe in Jesus means to accept in our hearts who He is and to place ourselves under His jurisdiction, to give our lives

¹³ We note that while the qualities and actions are both present in this understanding of faith, the primary focus is on the qualities of God. His actions seem to be viewed as proving or supporting His qualities or attributes.

¹⁴ We are not looking at the chapter on the Bible for the simple reason that we would have nothing to compare and contrast when we look at Luther’s view of “faith.” Luther of course worked from the foundation of an inspired and inerrant Bible, but he did not set out to prove or defend its inerrancy, as Wagner is doing in his book.

¹⁵ Wagner, 71-74.

¹⁶ Wagner, 74, emphasis added.

¹⁷ Wagner, 74-81.

¹⁸ Wagner, 82, emphasis added.

over sincerely to following Him. When we do, we see that God, in response to our faith in Jesus, gives us eternal life.”¹⁹

A key focus of this non-Lutheran view of “faith” is conviction of the qualities of God, but, according to Anders, it goes beyond that. Here we see the element of self-surrender to God (“to place ourselves under His jurisdiction”). We also note that this self-surrendering “faith” causes, or leads to, an action on God’s part (“When we do, we see that God, *in response to our faith* in Jesus, gives us eternal life”). So, again we might modify this definition of “faith” this way: “The Christian believes in, or is convinced of, God’s qualities, so that he may commit himself to Jesus and thereby receive eternal life.”

In the chapter on “Jesus Christ” Jeff VanVonderen outlines the teachings of Jesus’ sacrifice for sin and who He is.²⁰ “Faith” enters the discussion when VanVonderen addresses Jesus’ sinlessness as “an example for those who follow.” He admits that, because of sin, it is too late for people to duplicate Jesus’ perfection, but he continues, “But we can seek to emulate His pattern of dependence upon and abiding in the Father. Each time we rely on Him to meet our needs, we won’t be relying on people or things that can’t meet our needs, things that miss the mark. This is the fight of faith.”²¹ Here faith is described as relying on Jesus Christ, but in this case for a God-pleasing pattern of life. VanVonderen also discusses Jesus’ miracles and says this about faith: “Some miracles illustrate that God unleashes His caring power in response to our faith.”²² Once again, faith is seen as something to which God responds. Again, we want to rework our definition of “faith,” this time concentrating on

¹⁹ Wagner, 87.

²⁰ Wagner, 96-103.

²¹ Wagner, 100.

²² Wagner, 101.

Jesus Christ: “The Christian believes in, or is convinced of, Jesus’ qualities and works, so that he may commit himself to Jesus and rely on Him for a pattern of life and thereby receive eternal life.”

Jack Hayford writes the chapter on “The Holy Spirit.” While Hayford does not specifically mention “faith,” we can deduce his understanding of it from what he says on the Holy Spirit’s work. Hayford describes the Holy Spirit’s work in various ways. The Holy Spirit makes “the Word of God become alive.... He helps us to *understand* God’s love and teaches us to *live* in God’s love.”²³ Also according to Hayford, “It is the power of the Holy Spirit, engaging our lives—*gearing us with Christ*—that transmits *new* life and ‘gets us going.’ He brings us (a) into a life *for* Christ and (b) unto eternal life forever *with* Christ.”²⁴ Also, “He [the Holy Spirit] comes to fill us completely and to do two things: (1) to reproduce the *character* of Jesus *in* us and (2) to manifest the dynamic *conduct* of Jesus *through* us.”²⁵ The closest descriptions of “faith” that Hayford gives would be phrases such as “to welcome the work of the Holy Spirit”²⁶ or “that each of us be *informed* and *desirous* of spiritual gifts”²⁷ or “it is essential that each of us is open to the gifts the Holy Spirit wants to work in us.”²⁸ We note that “faith” seems to be comprised of the *understanding* of God’s Word and love and also the *living* of the Christian life. The Holy Spirit’s work is, essentially, to give us the character and conduct of Jesus, again so we can emulate Jesus’ moral example. Thus, a definition of “faith” specific to the Holy Spirit would be: “The Christian makes himself open

²³ Wagner, 121, emphasis original.

²⁴ Wagner, 129, emphasis original.

²⁵ Wagner, 130, emphasis original.

²⁶ Wagner, 138.

²⁷ Wagner, 141, emphasis original.

²⁸ Wagner, 141.

to (namely, informed and desirous of) the Holy Spirit's work of supplying him with the character and conduct of Christ for living a godly life."

In summary, we note that the subject of "faith"—that is, "to believe in, or to have faith in"—is the Christian. We also note that "faith" and "conviction" are used as synonyms. The object of the verb, then, is key. In this non-Lutheran view the objects are (1) the qualities or characteristics of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), (2) the works of God *in* and *through* the believer, and (3) the manifestation of godly qualities in the life of the believer. Also, according to this view, a Christian's "faith" is something to which God responds.

Entailments of "Faith" for Luther

Here we will focus on the language Luther uses in the *Large Catechism*.²⁹ Again, we are looking for the entailments of "faith"—the verb "to believe in, or have faith in" (along with synonyms), the subject of the verb, and, most importantly, the objects and any modifiers that accompany the verb "to believe in."

Luther's understanding of "faith" is clearly evident in his explanation of the First Commandment ("You shall have no other gods."). Luther explains the First Commandment first by asking, "What is a god?" His answer is, "A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart."³⁰ Luther also says, "That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God."³¹ Since Luther is addressing Christians, the Christian is clearly the subject of "to have faith." From Luther's words we see how the

²⁹ *The Large Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther in The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Theodore Tappert, trans. & ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) 357-461. Hereafter referred to as "*Large Catechism*."

object of the verb—God—is paramount. We also note the synonyms of “faith”: “to look [to God] for all good” and “to find refuge in every time of need” and “to trust and believe... with the whole heart.” We might formulate a definition of “faith” this way: “The Christian believes in, that is, sets his heart on God or looks to Him, expecting from Him all good things and refuge in distress.”

When Luther explains that the First Commandment requires “faith,”³² he says, “The purpose of this commandment, therefore, is to require true faith and confidence of the heart, and these *fly straight to* the one true God and *cling to* him alone.”³³ Again, God is the object of “to have faith in, or to believe in.” Especially noteworthy here are the synonyms for “faith”: “fly straight to” and “cling to.” For Luther, faith is not so much recognizing or agreeing with certain attributes of God; rather it is looking to and relying on God Himself.³⁴ “Faith” is not so much “being convinced” of certain qualities of God as it is “flying to” God or “clinging to” Him alone.³⁵

One more major aspect of “faith” is evident in Luther’s treatment of the First Commandment. “Faith” is “expectant receiving.” As Luther says, “We are to trust in God alone and turn to him, *expecting from him* only good things; for it is he who gives us body, life, food, drink, nourishment, health, protection, peace, and all temporal and eternal

³⁰ *Large Catechism*, I, 2; Tappert, 365.

³¹ *Large Catechism*, I, 3; Tappert, 365.

³² More on the demand, or requirement, of faith below.

³³ *Large Catechism*, I, 4; Tappert, 365, emphasis added.

³⁴ In contrast to the Wagner book, Luther does not first set out the attributes of God. Instead, he begins simply with God’s demand of faith. One main difference between this non-Lutheran view of faith and Luther’s view of faith would be in this point: this non-Lutheran view establishes the attributes of God apparently to engender faith (on the basis of evidence/reason?), whereas Luther’s view establishes the need for faith before discussing God’s qualities or characteristics. And even then Luther’s focus is more on God’s actions than on His attributes.

blessings.”³⁶ He also says, “It is God alone, I have often enough repeated, from whom we receive all that is good and by whom we are delivered from evil.”³⁷ In three paragraphs,³⁸ Luther uses the German word *empfangen*³⁹—“to receive”—six times. The subject of *empfangen* is the believer. The object is stated in different ways: *alles Gute* (“all good”)⁴⁰; or *viel Gutes von Menschen* (“much good from men”) which is immediately explained as *alles von Gott* (“all from God”)⁴¹; or *durch die Kreaturen Gutes* (“good things through creatures”).⁴² Now we may restate the definition of “faith” this way: “The Christian believes in, that is, clings to God in order to receive all good things from Him, even the good things he receives through other people or other created things.”

So far we see that for Luther “faith” has these entailments: The believer “has faith in, or believes in” God Himself (so far without explicit reference to His attributes). That believing is tantamount to clinging to God and expecting to receive good things from Him. The object of “to believe in” is primarily God and secondarily the good things that He gives to the believer.

When Luther explains the Creed, he continues the theme of “faith” as “receiving”: “The Creed properly follows, setting forth all that we must expect and receive from God; in

³⁵ “We lay hold of him when our heart embraces him and clings to him. To cling to him with all our heart is nothing else than to entrust ourselves to him completely” (*Large Catechism*, I, 14; Tappert, 366).

³⁶ *Large Catechism*, I, 24; Tappert, 367, emphasis added.

³⁷ *Large Catechism*, I, 24; Tappert, 368, emphasis added.

³⁸ See *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921) 586. Hereafter referred to as “Triglotta.”

³⁹ *Cassell’s German-English English-German Dictionary* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1978), 184, defines *empfangen*: “1. *irr. v. t.* take, receive, (*Comm.*) be in receipt of; (*Rad.*) receive; receive, greet, welcome (*guests*). 2. *irr. v. i.* conceive, become pregnant.”

⁴⁰ *Large Catechism*, I, 24; Triglotta, 586.

⁴¹ *Large Catechism*, I, 26; Triglotta, 586.

⁴² *Large Catechism*, I, 27; Triglotta, 586.

brief, it teaches us to know him perfectly.”⁴³ Here we note the addition of “knowing God” as well as “receiving” from Him. In each of the three articles (on God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) Luther concentrates his discussion on two questions: 1) Who is the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit? and 2) What does each One (Father, or Son, or Holy Spirit) do?⁴⁴ While Luther does discuss who God is—not only using the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but also using language such as “his fatherly heart” and “Lord” and “Redeemer”⁴⁵—he does not list God’s attributes. Instead, Luther discusses God’s works *for* and *on behalf of* the Christian.⁴⁶ We can see this most clearly in Luther’s summary to the discussion on the Creed: “Here in the Creed you have the entire essence of God, his will, and his work exquisitely depicted in very short but rich words.... In these three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart, his sheer, unutterable love. He created us for this very purpose, to redeem and sanctify us.”⁴⁷

For Luther the entire Creed is the object of “to believe in, have faith in.” Therefore, to summarize the entailments of “faith” for Luther, we see that the Christian is the subject of the verb “to believe in.” God and His works are the objects of “to believe in.” Luther uses other verbs such as “look to,” “cling to,” and “receive” as synonyms of “faith.” We can

⁴³ *Large Catechism*, II, 1; Tappert, 411.

⁴⁴ On the First Article: “These words give us a brief description of God the Father, his nature, his will, and his work” (*Large Catechism*, II, 10; Tappert, 411). On the Second Article: “Here we learn to know the second person of the Godhead, and we see what we receive from God over and above the temporal goods mentioned above—that is, how he has completely given himself to us, withholding nothing” (*Large Catechism*, II, 26; Tappert, 413). On the Third Article: “To this article, as I have said, I cannot give a better title than ‘Sanctification.’ In it is expressed and portrayed the Holy Spirit and his office, which is that he makes us holy” (*Large Catechism*, II, 35; Tappert, 415).

⁴⁵ It can also be argued that the titles (such as “Lord” and “Redeemer”) are noun forms of the entitled Person’s characteristic actions. That is, Jesus is called “Redeemer” because He is the one who specifically redeems the Christian. Again, the focus is on the actions, and not so much on the attributes, of God.

⁴⁶ The limited scope of this paper prohibits us from going into detail on this point. When one reads the *Large Catechism* treatment of the Creed, the differences from the Wagner book, for example, are apparent. The Wagner book focuses primarily on God’s attributes whereas Luther focuses primarily on God’s actions.

phrase Luther's definition of "faith" this way: "The Christian believes in God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), that is, looks to Him, clings to Him, and expects to receive nothing but good things from Him."

Conclusion

For the non-Lutheran view of "faith" as well as for Luther, the subject of "to have faith in, or to believe in" is the same: the believer. Where the two views differ, however, is in the object of the verb. For one non-Lutheran view, emphasis is put on 1) the attributes of God and 2) the changed lifestyle of the believer. For Luther's understanding, emphasis falls on 1) God Himself (without specific reference to His various attributes) and 2) God's actions of creating, redeeming, and sanctifying the believer. In the non-Lutheran view "faith" is synonymous with "conviction" and then manifest changes in the Christian's lifestyle. In Luther's understanding "faith" is synonymous with "looking to God" or "clinging to God" or "receiving from God." We can see this progression in the non-Lutheran view: knowing the attributes of God leads to the conviction of faith, which leads to the changed lifestyle (modeled on Jesus' life), for the Christian. God then responds to this "faith" by giving eternal life. In Luther's understanding of faith, on the other hand, we can see this progression: God manifests His goodness in order to engender "faith" in the Christian; that faith, then, clings to and receives God's good things (namely, works of creation, salvation, and sanctification, as stated in the Creed).

Now we turn to a more detailed look at Luther's teaching of "faith" in the Catechisms.

⁴⁷ *Large Catechism*, II, 63-64; Tappert, 419.

II. CREED IN CONTEXT

In this part we will examine Luther's teaching of the Creed in the context of other parts of the Catechism. We will examine both the *Small*⁴⁸ and the *Large Catechisms*. We will also sample some of Luther's other catechetical writings—the 1522 “Prayer Book,”⁴⁹ the “Ten Sermons on the Catechism” of 1528,⁵⁰ and the 1535 book “A Simple Way to Pray.”⁵¹ We will focus on the first three chief parts, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. We will look for references to faith not only in Luther's sections on the Creed but also outside his treatments of the Creed. We will look for any changes in faith-related language in the selected parts of the Catechism. As we do this, we will see that Luther's goal is not to teach “faith” as an abstract concept or an ideal or even merely a conviction. Rather, Luther's aim is 1) to teach “faith” as receiving God's works of salvation, 2) to teach the believer to live the life of this receiving faith and 3) to teach the believer to speak the language of faith. Receiving and relying on God's works for him, then, mark the believer's life and language.

Ten Commandments—Expectation of Faith

The Catechism's first part, the Ten Commandments, immediately focuses our attention on faith. The *Small Catechism* (SC) explains the First Commandment this way:

⁴⁸ Dr. Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism—1986 Translation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986). Hereafter referred to as “1986 Translation” or “*Small Catechism*.”

⁴⁹ Martin Luther, “Personal Prayer Book, 1522,” *Luther's Works: American Edition*, vol. 43, Gustav K. Wiencke, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968) 11-45. Hereafter referred to as “Prayer Book.”

⁵⁰ Martin Luther, “Ten Sermons on the Catechism, 1528,” *Luther's Works: American Edition*, vol. 51, John W. Doberstein, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) 137-193. Hereafter referred to as “Ten Sermons.”

⁵¹ Martin Luther, “A Simple Way to Pray, 1535,” *Luther's Works: American Edition*, vol. 43, Gustav K. Wiencke, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968) 187-211.

“We should fear, love and trust in God above all things” (SC, I). God commands, or expects, faith, here described as fearing, loving, and trusting in God.

The *Large Catechism* (LC) reinforces this expectation, or requirement, of faith. “The purpose of this commandment, therefore, is to *require true faith* and confidence of the heart, and these fly straight to the one true God and cling to him alone” (LC, I, 4, emphasis added). The language of God expecting faith is woven throughout Luther’s explanation to the First Commandment: “[The commandment] *requires* that man’s whole heart and confidence be placed in God alone” (LC, I, 13, emphasis added); “*We are to trust* in God alone” (LC, I, 24, emphasis added); “God will tolerate no presumption and no trust in any other object; he makes *no greater demand* of us than a hearty trust in him for all blessings” (LC I, 47, emphasis added).

Luther uses expectation language not only of God (expecting, or requiring, faith), but he also uses it of the believer, though in a different sense. The believer does not require or demand something of God. Instead, the believer is to *expect to receive* good things from God. Luther writes as if God were speaking: ““Whatever good thing you lack, look to me for it and seek it from me”” (LC I, 4); and ““Look upon me as the one who wishes to help you and to lavish all good upon you richly”” (LC I, 15).⁵²

This is the focus of Luther’s 1522 “Personal Prayer Book” and is also evident in his 1528 sermon series on the Catechism. The “Prayer Book” explains the First Commandment this way: “The First Commandment teaches a person the right attitude in his own heart

⁵² This twofold understanding of “faith” is also evident in Luther’s “Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors,” *Luther’s Works: American Edition*, vol. 40, edited by Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958) 277: “The first commandment teaches us to fear God. For God threatens those who do not

toward God, that is, what he should always keep in mind and consider important. Thus a person should *expect all good things* from God as from a father or good friend whom he trusts, loves, and respects at all times.”⁵³ In the “Ten Sermons” Luther combines the two kinds of expectation (God expecting, or requiring, faith and the believer expecting to receive good things from God). “Thus the first commandment requires that you fear no one and trust no one except God alone who says: If you fear and trust me, I will protect you and supply you with nourishment and all that you need and you shall have what is sufficient.”⁵⁴ When commanding faith, then, God is expecting the believer to expect all good things from Him.

Luther’s “A Simple Way to Pray” of 1535 brings out these same emphases in the context of a devotional manual. Luther introduces a four-fold way to pray the Commandments⁵⁵ and then treats each Commandment. Luther exemplifies expected and expecting faith when he comments on the First Commandment: “Here I earnestly consider that God expects and teaches me to trust him sincerely in all things and that it is his most earnest purpose to be my God.... Second, I give thanks for his infinite compassion by which he has come to me in such a fatherly way and, unasked, unbidden, and unmerited, has offered to be my God, to care for me, and to be my comfort, guardian, help, strength in every time of need.”⁵⁶ In Luther’s teaching and praying God expects people to have faith, and that faith receives the fatherly goodness of God.

reverence him. It teaches us also to believe in and trust God, for God promises to do good to those who love him, that is, look to him for blessings”

⁵³ “Personal Prayer Book,” 14, emphasis added.

⁵⁴ “Ten Sermons,” 139.

⁵⁵ See “A Simple Way to Pray,” 200: “I divide each commandment into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland of four strands. That is, I think of each commandment as, first, instruction, which is really what it is intended to be, and consider what the Lord God demands of me so earnestly. Second, I turn it into a thanksgiving; third, a confession; and fourth, a prayer.”

⁵⁶ “A Simple Way to Pray,” 200.

The 1528 sermon series adds another element: the daily practice of this expected (required) and expecting (to receive) faith. “Thus there is always occasion for observing the commandment and practicing it daily in the home.... We probably think that the Ten Commandments are there only to be preached from the pulpit, but they need rather to be applied to use.”⁵⁷

The *Small Catechism* highlights the “doing” of faith in its conclusion to the Ten Commandments. Luther echoes his explanation to the First Commandment when he says, “Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly do what He commands” (SC, I, Conclusion). Faith and keeping the Commandments are joined together. Here we understand faith to precede and yet lead to, or be the source of, doing what God commands.⁵⁸

The *Large Catechism* certainly brings out this “practical” element of faith as it explains the individual commandments,⁵⁹ but the “Conclusion of the Ten Commandments” (LC, I, 311-333) very clearly ties faith together with life. For Luther faith and life are united, not compartmentalized or separated. On the one hand, Luther sees the Commandments as teaching conduct for life: “Apart from these Ten Commandments no deed, no conduct can be good or pleasing to God, no matter how great or precious it may be in the eyes of the world” (LC, I, 311). On the other hand, Luther can say that the First Commandment—on faith—

⁵⁷ “Ten Sermons,” 140.

⁵⁸ See, for example, the *Large Catechism*’s “Conclusion to the Ten Commandments.” On the one hand Luther says, “Here, then, we have the Ten Commandments, a summary of divine teaching on what we are to do to make our whole life pleasing to God. They are the true fountain from which all good works must spring, the true channel through which all good works must flow” (*Large Catechism*, I:311; Tappert, 407). Yet on the other hand, in the same section Luther indicates that the First Commandment (faith) is still primary: “This word, ‘You shall have no other gods,’ means simply, ‘You shall fear, love, and trust me as your one true God.’ Wherever a man’s heart has such an attitude toward God, he has fulfilled this commandment and all the others” (*Large Catechism*, I:324; Tappert, 409).

⁵⁹ See, for example, *Large Catechism*, I, 73-74, 87-89, 145-148. Luther constantly draws out the every day, practical implications for trusting God and living in the Commandments.

summarizes all the Commandments: “Wherever a man’s heart has such an attitude toward God, he has fulfilled this commandment and all the others” (LC, I, 324); “Thus the First Commandment is to illumine and impart its splendor to all the others” (LC, I, 326).⁶⁰

It does need to be said that simply because God expects faith, that does not mean that people can fulfill the expectation. Luther says, “It will be a long time before men produce a doctrine or social order equal to that of the Ten Commandments, for they are beyond human power to fulfill” (LC, I, 317). In the “Prayer Book” Luther explains the relationship of Commandments and Creed: “First, [a person] must know what to do and what to leave undone. Second, when he realizes that he cannot measure up to what he should do or leave undone, he needs to know where to go to find the strength he requires.”⁶¹

In the Ten Commandments, then, Luther understands faith as the foremost expectation that God has of people, an expectation that cannot be met on our part. That faith also has its own element of expecting good things from God. In addition, faith does not remain in the arena of ideas or mere convictions, or even just in preaching; rather, the faith that God expects is to be daily used and practiced. God’s expectation, then, shows us that we need help to fulfill it.

The Creed—Gift of Faith

We will discuss the specifics of the *Small Catechism*’s treatment of faith in the next section on Luther’s grammar of faith. In this section we concentrate on the *Large Catechism*, the “Prayer Book,” the “Ten Sermons,” and “A Simple Way to Pray” and how they teach

⁶⁰ Here Luther uses the analogy of the hoop of a wreath. The First Commandment is the hoop which holds the wreath of all the Commandments together as a whole (LC, I, 326).

⁶¹ “Prayer Book,” 13.

faith as the God-given gift that receives God's works and thus fulfills God's expectation of faith.

In the *Large Catechism* Luther introduces the Creed in this manner: "The Creed properly follows [the Ten Commandments], setting forth all that we must expect and receive from God; in brief, it teaches us to know him perfectly. It is given in order to help us do what the Ten Commandments require of us" (LC, II, 1-2). In concluding the *Large Catechism* treatment of the Creed, Luther again shows the relationship of expected faith (Commandments) and given faith (Creed):

Now you see that the Creed is a very different teaching from the Ten Commandments. The latter teach us what we ought to do; the Creed tells what God does for us and gives to us. The Ten Commandments, moreover, are inscribed in the hearts of all men. No human wisdom can comprehend the Creed; it must be taught by the Holy Spirit alone. Therefore the Ten Commandments do not by themselves make us Christians, for God's wrath and displeasure still remain on us because we cannot fulfill his demands. But the Creed brings pure grace and makes us upright and pleasing to God. Through this knowledge we come to love and delight in all the commandments of God because we see that God gives himself completely to us, with all his gifts and his power, to help us keep the Ten Commandments... (LC, II, 67-69).

God expects us to have faith, but we cannot fulfill the expectation. Therefore, He gives of Himself so that we might expect good things from Him and thus fulfill His expectation of faith.

In the 1522 "Prayer Book" Luther speaks the same way. "The Creed will teach and show [sinful man] where to find the medicine—grace—which will help him to become devout and keep the commandments."⁶² When he introduces the Creed specifically, Luther says, "... faith is exercised in two ways. First, a faith about God meaning that I believe that

⁶² "Prayer Book," 14.

what is said about God is true. . . . The second kind of faith means believing in God—not just that I believe that what is said about God is true, but that I put my trust in him, that I make the venture and take the risk to deal with him, believing beyond doubt that what he will be toward me or do with me will be just as they [that is, the Scriptures] say.”⁶³ So faith is not merely knowledge or conviction of facts about God, but more importantly it is confident trust that God looks upon and treats the sinner in a favorable way.⁶⁴

The 1528 sermon series on the Catechism speaks in the same way. As he concludes the sermon on the Third Article, Luther again ties Commandments and Creed together, and then states, “This is the Christian faith: to know what you must do [Ten Commandments] and what has been given to you [Creed].”⁶⁵

In “A Simple Way to Pray” Luther teaches the Creed as God giving Himself. For instance, regarding the First Article Luther writes, “But here it is declared and faith affirms that God has created everything out of nothing. Here is the soul’s garden of pleasure, along whose paths we enjoy the works of God”⁶⁶ When discussing the Second Article—“how Christ, God’s Son, has redeemed us from death”—Luther shows faith’s reception of God’s saving work this way: “Now think: just as in the first article you were to consider yourself one of God’s creatures and not doubt it, now you must think of yourself as one of the

⁶³ “Prayer Book,” 24.

⁶⁴ Robert Kolb expresses it this way: “The right vertical relationship is given to us by that recreating Word of God which we call the good news, the Gospel. It creates trust in us once again. Through faith the relationship between us and God becomes right once again. Faith is having the fundamental, right attitude toward God, which results in having the right attitude toward ourselves and others. God is restored to his rightful place as our Father, and we are restored to our rightful place as His creatures, His children” (*Teaching God’s Children His Teaching: A Guide for the Study of Luther’s Catechism* [Hutchinson, Minnesota: Crown Publishing, Inc., 1992], 2-7).

⁶⁵ “Ten Sermons,” 169.

⁶⁶ “A Simple Way to Pray,” 210.

redeemed and never doubt that.”⁶⁷ On the Third Article, Luther states that God “may be found and plainly encountered” in the Christian church. Here one “can find God the Creator, God the Redeemer, God the Holy Spirit, that is, him who daily sanctifies us through the forgiveness of sins, etc.”⁶⁸

In summary, Luther’s language of faith changes. The explanations to the Commandments talked of faith being expected; the explanations to the Creed talk of faith being given. In both contexts faith is understood as expecting to receive good things from God and even receive God Himself. First faith that looks to God for good things is commanded, but then in the Creed it is given.

Lord’s Prayer—Language of Faith

Once we are given faith, we learn to speak the language of faith, the language of expecting and receiving from God His promised good things.⁶⁹ Luther begins his *Large Catechism* discussion of the Lord’s Prayer by connecting the Lord’s Prayer to the Commandments. “Consequently nothing is so necessary as to call upon God incessantly and drum into his ears our prayer that he may give, preserve, and increase in us faith and obedience to the Ten Commandments and remove all that stands in our way and hinders us from fulfilling them” (LC, III, 2). Luther also directs us to “both the way and the words” (LC, III, 3) to pray. The Lord’s Prayer teaches the language of faith so that the believer can

⁶⁷ “A Simple Way to Pray,” 210.

⁶⁸ “A Simple Way to Pray,” 211.

⁶⁹ Kolb notes, “Johannes Meyer observes that Luther did not use the Lord’s Prayer as merely a prayer which believers should repeat often. In the *Catechisms* he regards the Lord’s Prayer as an occasion for teaching the whole life of prayer and for modeling how believers should pray apart from the Lord’s Prayer. The Lord’s Prayer served him as an agenda for all praying and indeed as a framework for faith’s entire view of life. He views life here as lived under the cross, under the assault of Satan and his temptations” (*Teaching God’s Children His Teaching*, 5-4).

ask God to give, maintain, and increase His gift of faith. In this way the expectation of faith is fulfilled.⁷⁰

The act of praying (using the language of faith), however, is not for God's benefit, but rather for the believer's benefit. "God therefore wishes you to lament and express your needs and wants, not because he is unaware of them, but in order that you may kindle your heart to stronger and greater desires and spread your cloak wide to receive many things" (LC, III, 27). Speaking the language of faith—the language of need and reception—teaches us to receive God's good gifts as our very own. This is faith and living in faith.

We also see the language of receptive faith in the *Small Catechism*. Luther explains the Introduction ("Our Father who art in heaven") in terms of God as Father imploring His children to trust Him, "so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father" (SC, III, Introduction). The believer practices the language of faith by confidently approaching God as his kind Father. In the Conclusion to the Lord's Prayer (specifically the word "Amen") Luther highlights the confident trust of praying to the Father: "I should be certain that these petitions are pleasing to our Father in heaven, and are heard by Him." This confidence, though, is based on God's command and promise: "for He Himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us." Again, God's expectation of faith (command) moves to His gift of faith (promise) so that the believer may use the language of faith (prayer) and live confidently therein.

The language of faith is uniquely demonstrated in the first four petitions (God's name, His kingdom, His will, and daily bread). In the *Small Catechism* Luther explains each

⁷⁰ Kolb: "Just as Luther found in the Ten Commandments an agenda for prayer, so he found in the Lord's Prayer an agenda for living. Each of his treatments of prayer contains suggestions for living out the faith which

of these petitions with a confession of faith that what we pray for is already being done:

“God’s name is certainly holy in itself” (SC, III, 1st Petition); “The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself” (SC, III, 2nd Petition); “The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer” (SC, III, 3rd Petition); and “God certainly gives daily bread to everyone” (SC, III, 4th Petition). The believer, then, learns to pray on the basis of these works of God that are already being accomplished. In the First Petition, we pray “that [God’s name] may be kept holy among us also (SC, III, 1st Petition). In the Second Petition we pray “that [God’s kingdom] may come to us also” (SC, III, 2nd Petition). In the Third Petition we pray “that [God’s good and gracious will] may be done among us also” (SC, III, 3rd Petition). And in the Fourth Petition we ask “that God would lead us to realize [that He already gives daily bread] and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving” (SC, III, 4th Petition). Thus, faith is constantly looking to God’s works, and the language of faith learns to confess these and request that they be done for the believer.

In the 1522 “Prayer Book” Luther highlights the role of divine grace in the language and asking of faith. When discussing “Our Father who art in heaven,” Luther prays, “Now through your mercy implant in our hearts a comforting trust in your fatherly love, and let us experience the sweet and pleasant savor of a childlike certainty that we may joyfully call you Father, knowing and loving you and calling on you in every trouble.”⁷¹ Regarding the First Petition, he prays, “...grant us your divine grace that we might guard against all that does not

prays . . .” (*Teaching God’s Children His Teaching*, 5-2).

⁷¹ “Prayer Book,” 29. We can also see the similarity in language to the *Small Catechism*’s explanation to the Second Commandment: “We should fear and love God so that we . . . *call upon* [God’s name] *in every trouble*, pray, praise and give thanks” (SC, I, 2nd Commandment). Thus the praying, or language of faith, is fulfilling the expectation of faith given in the Commandments and asking for God to give what He commands.

serve to the honor and glory of your holy name.”⁷² Regarding the Second Petition, he prays, “...give us help and grace and above all else grant us a true and constant faith in Christ.”⁷³ And regarding the Third Petition, he prays, “Grant us grace to bear willingly all sorts of sickness, poverty... and to recognize that in this your divine will is crucifying our will.”⁷⁴ When the believer is praying for God to accomplish His works for the believer, clearly he is relying on God’s grace.

In the “Ten Sermons” Luther introduces the Lord’s Prayer by appealing to God’s command to pray in the Second Commandment. Following this exhortation he then treats the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer. Regarding the First Petition Luther explains God’s name: “It is holy in its nature, but not in our use. God’s name has been given to us.”⁷⁵ Upon this foundation, then, Luther explains the thrust of the petition: “What, then, does it mean to hallow the name of God? This: when our teaching and life are Christian and godly.”⁷⁶ First God’s holy name is given, then the believer prays for help to use it as holy. Faith receives what God gives and appropriates it for use in the believer’s life.

The “Ten Sermons” treat the remaining petitions in the same way. For example, Luther weaves the first three petitions together in this manner: “But we should pray, in order that *I too* may be part of those in whom the name of God is hallowed, that God’s kingdom may come also *to me* and his will be done *in me*.”⁷⁷ Faith looks to what God accomplishes

⁷² “Prayer Book,” 30.

⁷³ “Prayer Book,” 32.

⁷⁴ “Prayer Book,” 33.

⁷⁵ “Ten Sermons,” 172.

⁷⁶ “Ten Sermons,” 173.

⁷⁷ “Ten Sermons,” 174, emphasis added. This example is in Luther’s discussion of the Second Petition. He does the same when he treats the Third Petition: “God’s name is not only hallowed in itself, but *in me*. Likewise, God’s kingdom not only comes of itself and his will is done not only of itself, but rather in order that

and then appropriates, or receives, it for itself. This is evident also as Luther explains the Fourth Petition. “The Lord does indeed give bread, but he also wants us to pray, in order that we acknowledge it as his gift.”⁷⁸

In “A Simple Way to Pray” Luther shows the language of faith (that is, the act of praying) by example. As he treats each petition of the Lord’s Prayer, he cites the petition itself and then crafts a prayer based on it.⁷⁹ Most striking is Luther’s advice on the little word “Amen.” “Finally, mark this, that you must always speak the Amen firmly. Never doubt that God in his mercy will surely hear you and say ‘yes’ to your prayers.... Do not leave your prayer without having said or thought, ‘Very well, God has heard my prayer; this I know as a certainty and a truth.’ That is what Amen means.”⁸⁰

In summary, the expectation of faith changes into the gift of faith so that the believer can use the language of faith. Once the believer receives the gift of God Himself as well as His other good gifts (under the headings of creation, redemption, and sanctification), then he calls and speaks to God in prayer. Thus faith is more than knowledge or conviction. It is that receiving trust that looks to God and calls on Him to receive more of His giving.

Conclusion

After looking at the context of the Creed in the Catechisms and selected catechetical writings, we see that Luther understands “faith” to have several components. First, it is expected, or commanded, by God. Second, faith is also the believer’s expectation of receiving good things from God. Third, faith is given when God gives Himself to create,

God’s kingdom may come *in me*, that God’s will may be done *in me*, and his name be hallowed *in me*” (175, emphasis added).

⁷⁸ “Ten Sermons, 178.

redeem, and sanctify the believer. And fourth, faith asks for God to give His promised gifts. The believer's faith is very active in receiving God's gifts and works.

Now we turn to an examination of Luther's grammar of faith, that is, how he explains the Creed and how his grammar teaches what "faith" is.

III. LUTHER'S GRAMMAR OF FAITH

In this section we will examine Luther's use of basic grammar in the *Small Catechism* to see how he understands and teaches "faith." We will look at the simple yet important grammatical details of subjects, verbs, and objects as used in Luther's *Small Catechism* explanations to the Creed. We will examine the subjects of the verbs and why the subjects change. We will take note of the kinds and forms of verbs Luther uses in his explanations. And we will look at the objects or predicate phrases for their part in teaching "faith." In so doing we will show that Luther teaches faith as being on the receiving end of God's working and giving. Also, God's actions of giving form a lively trust and confidence in God and His actions of creating, redeeming and sanctifying. We will use the German (Triglotta⁸¹) as well as the English (1986 Translation) wordings.

Subjects

First, we will look at Luther's use of subjects of verbs. We begin with the *Small Catechism's* explanation of the First Article. The explanation begins with *ich* ("I") in "I believe" (*ich glaube*) referring to the believer. But then the subject quickly changes to "God"

⁷⁹ See "A Simple Way to Pray," 195-198.

⁸⁰ "A Simple Way to Pray," 198.

⁸¹ Triglotta, 542-544.

(*Gott*). God is the subject of the verbs *geschaffen hat* (has made), *gegeben hat* (has given), *erhalt* (keeps, maintains), *versorgt* (provides), *beschirmt* (protects), and *beheutet und bewahrt* (guard and protects). Following this string of verbs, the subject switches back to *ich* (“I”), again referring to the believer. The main verb joined to this subject is *schuldig bin* (am indebted), on which depend the verbs *zu danken* (to thank), *zu loben* (to praise), *zu dienen* (to serve), and *gehorsam zu sein* (to be obedient/submissive).⁸²

Luther begins with “I” as the subject, but only for believing. The subject “God” (the Father) immediately takes over and performs the main actions of making, giving, keeping, providing, protecting, guarding, and preserving. The believer’s faith, then, is focused on what God the Father is actively doing.⁸³ Only then does the subject switch back to the believer, who thanks, praises, serves and is submissive to God the Father. These actions of the believer are responsive to the actions of God the Father. But the actions of God the Father are the focus of faith. Faith receives the actions of God and then thanks and praises.

The explanation to the Second Article gives a similar use of grammatical subjects. The explanation again begins with *ich glaube* referring to the believer. Again the subject quickly changes, this time to *Jesus Christus*. In the German “Jesus Christ” is the subject of two uses of *geboren* (begotten/born),⁸⁴ then of *sei... Herr* (is... Lord), *erlost hat* (has

⁸² German words are from the Triglotta, p. 542. English equivalents here are literal translations.

⁸³ Kolb, *Teaching God’s Children His Teaching*, 4-4: “Here we confess that God is our Father. Luther distinguished God’s being Father from His being Creator. He is creator of all beings in His universe; He has a special parental relationship with His chosen children among His human creatures. For He is not just any kind of father. This Father devotes Himself in love to taking care of His children and enjoying their being His children. That is why it is not quite accurate to say of unbelievers, “Well, they are children of God, too.” They are certainly His creatures, and His hand cares for them. But they have run away from home, and they do not recognize Him as Father or themselves as His children. They do not permit God to function as their father.”

⁸⁴ While the German word is the same in both cases, it must be translated differently in each case due to the prepositional phrase with which it is connected. Just as Jesus cannot be “born” of God the Father, so He cannot be “begotten” of the Virgin Mary.

redeemed), *erworben [hat]* ([has] purchased), and *gewonnen [hat]* ([has] won). Following this list of Jesus' actions comes a short list of verbal phrases with *ich* as the subject: *sein eigen sei* (may be His own), *unter ihm lebe* (may live under Him), and *ihm diene* (may serve Him). Here, however, the Second Article differs from the First with an added subject change. The pronoun *er* (he, referring to Jesus Christ) is the subject of the final three verbs in the explanation: *ist auferstanden* (is risen), *lebt* (lives), and *regiert* (reigns).

Again, the initial "I" does only the believing. Then the focus switches over to the actions of Jesus Christ in being begotten and born, in being Lord, in redeeming, purchasing, and winning the believer. The subsequent "I" again governs the more receptive or resulting states (being His and living under Him) and action (serving) of the believer. The Second Article, however, leaves us with the final focus on Jesus' works of rising, living, and reigning. While both the believer ("I") and Jesus are subjects of verbs, Jesus performs the main actions while the believer believes them and benefits from them.

The Third Article also uses the verbal subjects in this same way, but with two important differences. As with the previous articles, *ich glaube* (I believe) begins the explanation. This time, however, the second subject stated is another pronoun referring to the believer: *ich nicht... glauben... kommen kann*. To paraphrase the sentence, the believer confesses that he believes that he cannot, by his own will or effort, believe in or come to Jesus. The subject then switches to *Heilige Geist* (Holy Spirit), which is the subject for the remainder of the explanation. The Holy Spirit is the subject of the verbs *hat... berufen* (has called), *hat... erleuchtet* (has enlightened), *hat geheiligt* (has sanctified), and *hat erhalten* (has kept). The Holy Spirit also does the verbs *beruft* (calls), *sammelt* (gathers), *erleuchtet*

(enlightens), *heiligt* (sanctifies), *erhalt* (keeps), and *vergibt* (forgives). The final two verbs, *auf Erwecken wird* (will raise) and *geben wird* (will give), also have the Holy Spirit as their subject.

Whereas the first two articles switched subjects back and forth (First Article: “I” to “God” to “I”; Second Article: “I” to “Jesus Christ” to “I” to “He”), the Third Article has only one switch: “I” (repeated) to “Holy Spirit.” This use of subjects again highlights the actions of God. While the “I” subject is indeed repeated, the repetition actually de-emphasizes the believer’s action. We will explain this more as we discuss Luther’s use of verbs. The Holy Spirit is then emphasized as the main subject; His works are prominent. Indeed, in the Third Article, the Holy Spirit’s works are the ultimate focus.

In summary, the believer learns to look away from himself and to focus on God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as the primary doer of the verbs of salvation. When the believer is the subject, it is either for believing or for being on the receiving and responding end of God’s actions.

Verbs

Now we turn to the kinds and forms of the verbs used in Luther’s explanations to the Creed. The verbs Luther uses also emphasize God as the primary doer of the actions of salvation. The verbs also stress faith as receiving, or looking to, those divine deeds. We will examine the kinds of verbs used as well as their tenses. This will demonstrate the varying deeds God carries out to create and sustain faith. It will also show how the believer benefits from God’s past, present, and future actions.

The first verb, used of the believer in all three explanations, is *glaube* (“believe”). This verb does not do something, rather it accepts, or better *receives* the deeds of God. We also note that faith is not abstract, as in a principle or ideal. Rather, in Luther’s explanations faith is made concrete when it is expressed “I believe.” The person of the believer is a necessary component. The verb “believe” is also necessary. It is an “action” in the sense that someone is doing the believing. Other than that, the focus of believing is on its object, on what the believer trusts.⁸⁵

The verbs used of God, however, are action words that affect their objects.⁸⁶ The First Article explanation attributes two past tense verbs to God the Father: *geschaffen hat* and *gegeben hat*. God “has made” the believer and other creatures. Also, He “has given” body, soul, and all their parts to the believer. The believer is directed not only to the static fact that he is a created being but also—and especially—to God’s *actions* of creating and giving.⁸⁷ These verbs are perfect tense, indicating that these actions are past actions of God but with importance for the present.⁸⁸ Thus the believer looks not only to God’s past actions of

⁸⁵ Girgensohn, 123, says: “In the expression, ‘I believe in . . . ,’ there is a trust and confidence carried to the absolute degree, going beyond any other kind of human relationship of trust. It has its foundation and its justification in the one to whom one trusts oneself in faith. Trust, faith, gains its value from the word of the one whom one meets with trust.”

⁸⁶ Kolb, *Teaching God’s Children His Teaching*, 4-2, says: “The *Catechism* is not a speculative treatise on the Godhead; it instead proclaims what He has done and is doing in our behalf.”

⁸⁷ Cf. Robert Kolb, “‘That I May Be His Own’: The Anthropology of Luther’s Explanation of the Creed,” *Concordia Journal* 21:1 (January 1995) 31: “It is the nature of being a creature that this question [‘Who am I really?’] takes us back to the Creator. Yet, for all that must be said about the theocentricity of Luther’s theology, his introduction to catechetical instruction seems surprisingly anthropocentric. . . . [T]he Large Catechism introduces the subject of the Creed in what seems like an anthropocentric manner: It lays before us ‘what we have to expect from God, and what we must receive from him. [sic] Yet Luther is not truly anthropocentric, for his starting from the faith of the human creature remains totally focused on God, even if it takes the human perspective seriously.”

⁸⁸ Cf. Robin Hammond, *A German Reference Grammar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), paragraphs 39-45, pages 69-74, especially page 73: “The perfect tense on the other hand concerns the past, but is of present interest to the speaker (or the writer).”

making and giving but also sees God's hand in the continued state of being His creature and having the body and soul God has given.⁸⁹

The rest of the verbs with God the Father as their subject (*erhalt*, *versorgt*, *beschirmt*, and *behutet und bewahrt*) are in the present tense. They stress the continuing action of God the Father as Creator.⁹⁰ His creating work continues in the life of the believer in the actions of maintaining, providing, protecting and guarding and preserving. Thus the believer's action of believing rests on God's ongoing actions.⁹¹ God's actions affect and benefit the believer. More will be said on this below as we discuss the objects of the verbs.

The final set of verbs in the First Article flows from "I" (the believer) as the subject. The phrase *ich ihm...schuldig bin* conveys the believer's receiving state in that he is indebted to God the Father.⁹² The remaining verbs are infinitives that depend on *schuldig bin*. The believer's indebtedness to God the Father shows itself in the actions of thanking, praising,

⁸⁹ The present tense verb *erhalt* reinforces this. Not only has God created and given body and soul, etc., in the past, but He also maintains them in the present.

⁹⁰ See Oswald Bayer, "I Believe That God Has Created Me With All that Exists. An Example of Catechetical Systematics" (*Lutheran Quarterly* 8:2 [Summer 1994]): "Luther never speaks of creation as an event that has been definitively concluded or of creation as the mere process of both the effects and the consequences of a one-time event. When Luther speaks of creation, he does so in a way indissolubly joining the present perfect with the aorist present; 'I hold and believe that I am a creature of God; that is, that he has given and constantly sustains....' In that Luther believes and confesses that God's creative action takes place here and now, he shows that God's creative activity corresponds to the self-introduction of God. This correspondence is achieved by the verbal mode of time, *the present*" (131-132, emphasis original).

⁹¹ Girgensohn: "These works of God are described, not in the past tense, but as happening now. God is still creating and caring. The Redeemer is now bringing under his rule those freed from the tyranny of the devil. The great works of God in the past are seen as works at the same time being done in and to us now. The goal of all the activity of God is the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Everything God does leads to this. Then the confession of faith becomes a jubilant witness to the wonderful works of God in Jesus Christ for us. The Creed, therefore, is not speaking of metaphysical facts, toward which a person can take a neutral attitude. On the contrary, a person who reads or says or hears it is directly addressed by the real, triune God, addressed—and this is the real intent of the Creed—by his saving and merciful love" (127).

⁹² The 1986 Translation has "it is my duty...." This seems to soften the indebtedness of the believer and seems to transform it into more of a moralistic responsibility. While one can properly understand "it is my duty" as indebtedness, caution may be needed so that it does not become mere moralism.

servicing, and being submissive to Him.⁹³ These verbs are responsive to God's previous actions of creating, maintaining, etc.⁹⁴ The verbs of God's actions affect their objects, but the believer's actions of thanking, praising, serving, and submitting do not affect, or change, God. These actions are simply directed toward God because of His previous actions of creating, giving, maintaining, and the rest.

As can be expected, the verbs of Luther's Second Article explanation reveal much the same thing. The primary focus is on the verbs related to Jesus, either who He is (His being begotten and born, His being Lord) or what He does (redeeming, purchasing, winning, rising, living, and reigning). Whereas the First Article did not identify or describe the Father apart from His works, the Second Article does identify who the Son is—begotten of the Father (true God) and born of the Virgin Mary (true Man). The main sentence of the Second Article is "I believe that Jesus Christ... is my Lord..." Thus the believer's act of believing is first directed to who Jesus is for the believer.⁹⁵ The following verbs serve to explain this relation and how it has come about.⁹⁶

Three past tense verbs (*erlost hat, erworben und gewonnen*) serve as the focal point of Jesus' actions for the believer. He has redeemed, purchased and won the believer. Again,

⁹³ See also Bayer: "Furthermore, the interrelation of the first article with the other two articles of the Creed is established by the phrase, 'fatherly and divine goodness and mercy.' This phrase makes explicit the negation of any self-reliance: 'and all this... without any merit or worthiness on my part'" (136).

⁹⁴ Kolb explains this indebtedness as both a joy and a privilege: "Our identity is reflected in our turning to Him as beloved children turn to the Father they love: with gratitude, with love and longing, with a readiness to carry out His every wish, *for the joy of it.*" "We are without merit or worthiness apart from the gifts of our Creator; for that *we are given the privilege of* thanking and praising Him, serving and obeying Him" (34-35, emphasis added).

⁹⁵ According to Kolb, "'Jesus Christ, our Lord' is a confession of His identity and ours which lets thrills run through every corner of our existence" (37).

⁹⁶ Cf. *Large Catechism*, II, 31 (Tappert, p. 414): "Let this be the summary of this article, that the little word 'Lord' simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, he who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and now keeps us safe there. *The remaining parts of this article simply*

these verbs affect their object; that is, they do something for the believer and for the believer's benefit. As in the First Article, we note the perfect tense of the verbs. Jesus' actions—redeeming, purchasing, and winning—have been accomplished in the past but also benefit, or have an interest for, the believer in the present. As a result of Jesus' actions, the believer now stands in a state of being redeemed, purchased and won.⁹⁷

Next come three verbal phrases with “I” (the believer) as the subject: *sein eigen sei*, *unter ihm lebe*, and *ihm diene*. The *auf dass* clause with the subjunctive verbs (*sei*, *lebe*, and *diene*) indicates the purpose of Christ's redeeming work: to make the believer His own, to give the believer life under Him, and to have the believer serve Him. While the subject is “I” (the believer), the phrase (*auf dass... Gerechtigkeit*) still highlights faith as receiving Jesus' works as gifts. Note also, as we did with the First Article, that the believer's verbs do not affect Jesus, but rather show a new state, or condition, in which Jesus' works put the believer.

The final set of verbs in the Second Article explanation again refers to Jesus as the subject. He is risen (*er ist auferstanden*), He lives (... *lebt*), and He reigns (... *regiert*). These three verbs are present tense, thus leaving the believer's focus on the present reality of Christ as risen, living, and ruling Lord. Faith receives not only Jesus' actions of history (redeemed, purchased, and won), but it also focuses on Jesus' own current state or condition (risen, living, and ruling). These verbs, however, do not have objects. They simply draw the believer's attention to Christ and the proofs, as it were, that His redeeming work is sure and certain.

serve to clarify and express how and by what means this redemption was accomplished—that is, how much it cost Christ and what he paid and risked in order to win us and bring us under his dominion” (emphasis added).

The Third Article explanation presents two new aspects. The first is related to the verb *glaube*. In this explanation the believer confesses: “I believe that I cannot... believe (*nicht... glauben... kann*)...or come (*nicht... kommen kann*) to [Jesus],” that is, apart from the Holy Spirit’s work. Emphasis is taken away from the believer’s act of believing while the focus is put on the verbs done by the Holy Spirit. The *ich glaube* (“I believe”) phrases of the previous two articles are now put into perspective. The believer does not take credit for believing. The Holy Spirit’s actions receive the due credit.⁹⁸

Whereas the previous two articles had verbs in only two tenses, the past (i.e. perfect) and the present, the Holy Spirit’s verbs appear in three tenses: past (i.e. perfect), present, and future. The first four verbs (*hat... berufen... erleuchtet... geheiligt und erhalten*) are in the German perfect tense. For the believer as an individual, the Holy Spirit’s works of calling, enlightening, sanctifying, and keeping are past actions with present interest or importance. The believer thus focuses not on his faith, but on the Holy Spirit’s works that brought him to faith.

The next series of verbs is present tense. The four previous verbs are used again, this time with “the Christian church” as the object. This time, however, two other verbs are added to the string. The entire string of verbs is *beruft, sammelt, erleuchtet, heiligt... erhalt... vergibt*. What the Holy Spirit does for the individual believer, He also does for all believers, thus gathering them together—hence the first added verb (*sammelt*). The present

⁹⁷ Kolb: “The point and purpose of the justification of sinners is their liberation—the restoration of their freedom to live out their identity as human creatures, children of God. Liberation describes the newborn child of God, who has died to Satan’s power and death’s shadow” (36).

⁹⁸ Kolb: “The Holy Spirit delivers, establishes, and maintains our new identity.... Luther regarded but one gift as fundamental: the gift of new identity through faith. All God’s other gifts flow from this gift and are both received and exercised under it” (39).

tense is used in relation not merely to the believer as an individual, but in relation to the church. The Holy Spirit's present work for the believer is in the church.⁹⁹ The second verb added to the present verb string is *vergibt*, "forgives." Thus the believer's attention is on the forgiveness of sins as the Spirit's work, and that work is carried out in the church.¹⁰⁰

The last two verbs in the Third Article explanation are future verbs. Unlike the First and Second Article explanations, now the Third Article draws our attention to the future works of God, namely raising believers (*aufserwecken wird*) and giving eternal life (*ewiges Leben geben wird*). The believer learns to trust in the future works of God's Holy Spirit. Not only does the believer look to God's past works and present works, but he also learns to look to God's future works. Thus faith also anticipates receiving God's future actions.

In summary, Luther's use of verbs shows two facets of "faith." First, faith is directed to the works of God, which affect or benefit the believer. These works of God are not only things of the past, but they also happen in the present and future. Second, faith includes receiving God's works as one's own and realizing their benefits in the life of faith.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Kolb: "However, as we recognize the new identity our Father and our Lord, His Son, have given us, we must recognize how God gives us this new identity. That He does through the church. We are never to underestimate its importance, for the church is where we receive this new identity—which, indeed, we practice among God's human creatures in home, on the job, in our society, as well as in our congregation" (38).

¹⁰⁰ Kolb: "The Holy Spirit continues to conduct the melody of this life, through His maintenance of my faith and the forgiveness of my sins. Forgiveness happens, and it determines our identity as children of God" (39).

¹⁰¹ Girgensohn: "In Luther's explanation the personal relationship of faith between God and man is presented in a new aspect. The Creed speaks of receiving the saving gifts God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit impart. Then in the individual clauses it is not merely a matter of making objective judgments that these things are so. The objective reality of God, to which the Creed addresses itself, remains completely intact, but now it is seen from the point of view of its significance for the human being. What is said about God, about Jesus Christ, about the Holy Spirit acquires the character of a gift which brings salvation to the person. He may accept it through faith. The content of the Creed is understood as good news for the person" (126).

Objects

Now we turn to a brief look at the main objects used in Luther's explanations to the Creed. The limited scope of this paper will allow us to make only general observations.

Technically, the phrase *ich glaube* (I believe) governs all three explanations. Grammatically, the discussion of God's works in each article is the object of "I believe." Thus, faith is directed outside itself and outside the believer toward an object.¹⁰² In the case of Luther's explanations, the Triune God with His various works is the object of the believer's faith.¹⁰³

Within this setting, though, God is the subject of His various works and the believer, then, is the object. This is seen in the use of the first person singular pronoun. Aside from the few cases of *ich* ("I") cited above, the first person singular pronoun is otherwise used in the oblique cases.¹⁰⁴ These cases are used of the believer more than the nominative (subject) case.¹⁰⁵ The simple and abundant use of the pronouns *mein* (Genitive, "of me"), *mir* (Dative, "to me") and *mich* (Accusative, "me") shows that the believer's place in relation to God is receiving, or being affected by, God's actions. The believer is "given to" or "acted upon."

¹⁰² Bayer, 139: "Thus, faith is constituted by its relation to its object. In contrast to Paul Tillich, faith is not 'absolute faith,' but it is related to a ground, a goal and a content; only faith with an object is faith."

¹⁰³ Girgensohn, 123, explains: "In the Bible, however, faith derives its meaning and importance completely from the object, or rather the Person, toward whom it is directed. By its very nature it is trust, personal relation to the one whom one trusts, a relationship that goes beyond the mere recognition of the other Person and includes complete surrender to the other Person, from whom one expects all that is good."

¹⁰⁴ That is, the Genitive, Dative, or Accusative cases.

¹⁰⁵ We can tally the uses of the Nominative versus the uses of the other cases (Genitive, Dative, and Accusative) as they refer to the believer. While the German (Triglotta) is Luther's tongue, and of primary importance, the English (1986 Translation) also conveys the same sense on this point. The purpose of this exercise is simply to show that the focus in Luther's explanations is on the believer as receiver of God's actions and gifts

<u>German</u>	<u>Nominative</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Nominative</u>	<u>Others</u>
First Article	2	3	First Article	3	11
Second Article	2	2	Second Article	2	3
Third Article	2	5	Third Article	2	8
<i>Totals</i>	6	10	<i>Totals</i>	7	22

The objects referring to God, however, show a different usage. In the First Article explanation, an oblique case is used of God only once: *des alles ich ihm zu danten... sein schuldig bin*. Here God is the object, or receiver, of the believer's actions of thanking, praising, serving, and obeying. But again these actions do not affect or change God, or even prompt His fatherly, divine mercy and goodness.

In the Second Article oblique case pronouns referring to Jesus appear five times: three uses of *seinem*, showing possession (*His* holy precious blood, *His* innocent suffering and death, and *His* kingdom), and two uses of *ihm*, showing Jesus as the object, or receiver, of the believer's life and service.

In the Third Article there are no oblique case pronouns referring to the Holy Spirit. This would reinforce the primacy of the Holy Spirit as "actor" or "doer" in the works of salvation. The three times the oblique case is used, however, refer to Jesus Christ. The first two times are in the opening statement in which the believer says, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ (*an Jesum Christum*) my Lord or come to Him (*zu ihm*)...." The third use of the oblique case is the phrase *bei Jesu Christo*, referring to the relationship of the church to Jesus Christ; the Holy Spirit keeps the church with her Lord Jesus. It is into this arrangement that the believer is placed, again solely by the working of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Luther's use of subjects, verbs, and objects (including all oblique cases) shows that faith is best viewed as a product of the active workings of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Faith looks outside itself and outside the believer to the creating, redeeming, and sanctifying

works of God. Faith does have its own activity of thanking, praising and serving God, but its primary activity is receiving the works and gifts of God. More on the “activity” of faith will come in the next section.

IV. PERSONALIZING “FAITH”

Now we turn to a discussion of how Luther combines knowledge of the facts of the Christian faith with personal appropriation on the part of the believer. In traditional systematic terminology, we are discussing the *fides quae creditur* (the faith which is believed) and the *fides qua creditur* (the faith by which it is believed). Our treatment of the raw data above has already alluded to this. Here we will look to secondary sources to show that Luther’s teaching of “faith” in explaining the Apostles’ Creed is 1) a needed, evangelical shift from the understanding of the Creed before him, and 2) an essential and proper combination of the two aspects of faith—knowledge of God’s actions and personal reception, or appropriation, of those actions.

The Apostles’ Creed originates in the baptismal rites of the early church.¹⁰⁶ Initially the Creed was used as a summary confession of faith for those about to be baptized, but later it came to be used as a more general statement of faith for all Christians. The Creed, then, became the basic statement of the components of the one Christian faith.

Herbert Girgensohn introduces Luther’s treatment of the Creed by delineating the differences between Luther and the understanding of the Creed prior to him. Girgensohn begins by questioning the suitability of the Apostles’ Creed for the task of instruction in the

¹⁰⁶ See John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, Third Edition (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982) 22-26, and J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Third Edition (London: Longman Group Limited, 1972) 100-130.

Christian faith. He notes the brevity of the statements, the lack of systematic completeness, the seeming irrelevancy of Third Article statements to the Holy Spirit and the lack of details about the life of Christ.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the Creed “lacks basic statements concerning the things that played the chief role in the Reformation: human sin and God’s grace. The ‘Word of God’ and ‘justification’ are not explicitly mentioned at all.”¹⁰⁸ Girgensohn then states the reason Luther keeps the Apostles’ Creed in his catechism.

The fact that the Apostles’ Creed finds a place in the Catechism as a model of the gospel is to be attributed to the tradition of the Western church, not to any fundamental considerations of its suitability for the purpose. It will therefore be well for us to take the Apostles’ Creed for what it is, namely, a confession of faith which grew out of the practice of the church and which, just like the Scriptures, has a double quality always characterizing the Word made flesh.¹⁰⁹

As the Western church viewed it, the Creed was the basic confession of the facts of the Christian faith. Girgensohn explains this view of the Creed prior to Luther:

The Creed denominates the decisive components of our faith, the *fides quae creditur*, the faith believed, the objective fact with which faith is already presented. On the other hand, the *fides qua creditur*, the faith with which we believe, faith as an act within the believer, recedes almost completely into the background. Only in the unemphasized words, “I believe,” is the latter side of faith expressed.¹¹⁰

Prior to Luther, the Creed is viewed primarily as *fides quae*, that is, the objective statement of the Christian faith.

Girgensohn also draws attention to the other end of the spectrum, the tendency in recent times to over-emphasize the *fides qua* aspect of the Christian faith.

¹⁰⁷ Girgensohn, 121-122.

¹⁰⁸ Girgensohn, 122.

¹⁰⁹ Girgensohn, 122.

¹¹⁰ Girgensohn, 123.

It has been customary in the recent past to attribute the primary importance to faith as such, faith as a spiritual act, and thus fail to recognize the importance of the objective reality with which faith has to do. What was crucial was to be 'believing'; attention was focused upon the condition of the person, in the perception, in itself quite correct, that a tremendous spiritual power resides in a person's 'faith,' since by having 'faith' men have accomplished things which have moved and changed the world. Everything depended upon the awakening of the power of faith residing within a person.¹¹¹

Girgensohn points out, however, that the genius of Luther's treatment of the Creed is that it inseparably links the two aspects of faith. Christian faith is at the same time based on the objective reality, but personally, or subjectively, received or appropriated; it is *both fides quae* and *fides qua*.¹¹² The object of faith, or the Person to whom faith is directed, is what, in turn, creates and fosters the trust in and surrender to that object of faith.¹¹³ This is precisely the transformation that Luther brought to the understanding of the Creed.

Luther, on the contrary, undertook in his *Small Catechism* what was a retransformation of the Creed from a dogmatic compendium to a genuine confession of living, personal faith. And when he did so, he did not in any way alter the objective truth of the Creed's statements but rather retained it. Nor was the dominating importance of the object of faith above that of the subjective application of faith in any way diminished. The whole Creed really becomes a witness, a

¹¹¹ Girgensohn, 123.

¹¹² Albrecht Peters (18) also highlights Luther's inclusion of both *fides quae* and *fides qua*: Der apostolische Ursprung des Symbols wird deshalb noch umgriffen vom göttlichen Ursprung des Glaubens; dies gilt sowohl im Hinblick auf den heilsgeschichtlichen Inhalt als auch im Hinblick auf unser Ergriffenwerden von Gottes Wirken, sowohl also für die „fides, quae creditur“ als auch für die „fides, qua creditur“. 1) Im Hinblick auf die „fides, quae creditur“ sagt Luther: Im Credo hat Gott „selbs offenbaret und aufgetan den tiefsten Abgrund seines väterlichen Herzens und eitel unaussprechlicher Liebe in allen drei Artikeln“. „Symbolum, das Bekenntnis unsers heiligen christlichen Glaubens, est historia historiarum, ein Historien über all Historien, die aller höchste historia, darinnen uns die unermesslichen Wunderwerk göttlicher Majestät von Anfang bis in Ewigkeit vurgetragen werden“. Das Credo gründet zutiefst in dem in ihm bezeugten Schöpfer- und Erretterhandeln Gottes selber. 2) Im Hinblick auf die „fides, qua creditur“ gilt analog: Das bekennende Einstimmen in das im Credo Bezeugte is nicht etwas, das wir aus eigener Vollmacht heraus vermöchten, es ist und bleibt ausschließlich und allein Geschenk des Gottesgeistes. „Die zehen Gepot sind auch sonst in aller Menschen Herzen geschrieben, den Glauben aber kann keine menschliche Klugheit begeifen und muß allein vom heiligen Geist gelehret werden“.

¹¹³ See Girgensohn, 123.

testimony, an expression of the personal faith out of which the Creed, like every other dogmatic statement, grew.¹¹⁴

For Girgensohn, Luther's retransformation of the Creed is accomplished in a twofold manner. First, Luther focuses on summarizing the statements of the Creed. Yet while he summarizes, Luther also redirects the understanding of the objective reality of faith. Instead of maintaining the ancient division of the Creed into twelve clauses, which may be considered an approach of simple dogmatic statements, Luther shifts the focus to the three persons of the Godhead. Luther explains, "Hence the Creed may be briefly comprised in these few words: 'I believe in God the Father, who created me; I believe in God the Son, who redeemed me; I believe in the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies me.' One God and one faith, but three persons, and therefore three articles or confessions."¹¹⁵ Hence, faith is not only knowledge of certain abstract mysteries of God. Rather, faith takes on a more personal nuance as Luther focuses on the person(s) of God.

The second manner in which Girgensohn sees Luther transforming the understanding of the Creed is the personal relationship of faith between God and believer. "The Creed speaks of receiving the saving gifts God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit impart."¹¹⁶ This is the *pro me* ("for me") aspect of the Christian faith. As seen in the above citation from the *Large Catechism*, the personal relationship is brought out by the phrases "created me," "redeemed me," and "sanctifies me." Thus, faith concentrates on receiving God's gifts of

¹¹⁴ Girgensohn, 124.

¹¹⁵ Large Catechism, II, 7.

¹¹⁶ Girgensohn, 126.

salvation and life. "The content of the Creed is understood as good news for the person....

The benefits of God are the works God does for us and in us."¹¹⁷

Albrecht Peters explains Luther's simplified distinction this way:

Während Luther in der Römerbrief-Vorlesung die augustinische Trias¹¹⁸ erwähnt, unterscheidet er in der Kurzen Form vereinfachend zwischen dem Glauben „von“ und „in“ Gott:

a) Ersterer verbleibt in der Dimension des Für-wahr-Haltens, „wenn ich glaub, daß wahr sie was man von Gott sagt“. Dieses Glaubensmeinen möchte Luther lieber eine „Wissenschaft oder Merkung“ (cognitio, notitia) nennen....

b) Der Glaube *in* Gott dagegen wagt es, in dem von ihm Berichteten die unsichtbare Hand zu ergreifen, welche uns der Schöpfer, Erlöser und Vollender entgegenstreckt. Als „fides specialis“ setzt dieser Glaube sein „Trau“ in Gott.¹¹⁹

For Luther, to confess the Creed is, on the one hand, a confession of belief that what God does and says is true and, on the other hand, a confident trust that what God does and says is for the believer. The Creed is more than knowledge about God; it is the knowledge that is passed down by the believing church through the centuries. The Creed is more than a personal testimony of an individual's subjective faith; it is the person's confession of trust that falls in line with the church's confession, in the God who creates, saves, and sanctifies "me."

The person's testimony of faith, however, cannot be derived from the person. When an individual confesses the Christian faith as *fides qua creditur*, that confession must be based on the historical, objective *fides quae creditur*. Yet the believer is not mindlessly prattling about some historical events or lessons. The believer is confessing the past, present,

¹¹⁷ Girgensohn, 126.

¹¹⁸ The reference is to St. Augustine's triad of *credere in Deum*, *credere Deo*, and *credere Deum* that he used to describe the different aspects of "faith." Peters also indicates that this triad is evident in Peter Lombard (Sent. III, dist. 23,4). See Peters, 30, note 117.

¹¹⁹ Peters, 30.

and future works of God, but those works of God are no different than the ones confessed in the past, that is, by the church catholic. According to Girgensohn,

These works of God are described, not in the past tense, but as happening now. God is still creating and caring. The Redeemer is now bringing under his rule those freed from the tyranny of the devil. The great works of God in the past are seen as works at the same time being done in and to us now. The goal of all the activity of God is the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Everything God does leads to this. Then the confession of faith becomes a jubilant witness to the wonderful works of God in Jesus Christ for us. The Creed, therefore, is not speaking of metaphysical facts, toward which a person can take a neutral attitude. On the contrary, a person who reads or says or hears it is directly addressed by the real, triune God, addressed—and this is the real intent of the Creed—by his saving and merciful love.¹²⁰

Girgensohn also discusses the matter of the Creed as the church's testimony handed down through the centuries. "We learn to believe, not from any theoretical presentation of the objects of faith, but rather from the testimony, the witness of the believing church passing on to us the witness of the Bible and offering to us the 'chief things' of that witness."¹²¹

Robert Kolb explains it this way as he relates the discussion directly to Luther:

Luther taught that my believing always rests upon someone else's teaching. He presumed that there is no such thing as an individual; we are all created for community (Gen. 2:18), with God and with others. He presumed that God works through the power of His Word and that believers come to new life in Christ when other believers use the Gospel—in one form or another—to bring about new birth, a new creation (Rom. 10:14-15). Therefore, my faith always rests upon the Holy Spirit's use of someone else's using the Word.

Believing is always inextricably linked with teaching. God's people cannot be quiet, precisely because they are God's children, chips off the old block, imitating—projecting the image of—their heavenly Father as children always are wont to do. The taught teach.¹²²

¹²⁰ Girgensohn, 127.

¹²¹ Girgensohn, 128.

¹²² Kolb, *Teaching God's Children His Teaching*, 1-5.

While Kolb's "someone else" may specifically be seen, within the context of his book, as the individual instructor of God's teaching, specifically Luther's Catechism, the same is true of the instruction passed on by those who have gone before us. Kolb's "someone else" can also be all of the "someone elses" of the church catholic.

Girgensohn summarizes the discussion well:

To sum up, we may say that Luther conceives of the Creed as a recital of the gospel in the form of the church's hymn of praise, as a kerygma proclaiming the works of God to us. But the kerygma is not merely a sum of abstract, mutually independent clauses; behind them stand the personal God, who actually bestows the gifts mentioned in the individual clauses and in these gifts permits us to know and experience his love. In all these gifts it is a matter of personal relationship to God himself.¹²³

Luther transformed the understanding of the Creed from a statement of only the *fides quae creditur* to a confession which may be termed *fides quae et qua creditur*. The personal faith rests on the church's faith, and the church's faith naturally leads to the personal faith.¹²⁴

CONCLUSION

We have examined the event word "faith" with its entailments. Some may understand "faith" as 1) conviction that the attributes of God are true and 2) living the pattern of life exemplified by Jesus. Luther, on the other hand, understands and teaches faith as clinging to God and receiving the good things that He gives—especially Himself and His saving works. We have seen how Luther's language of faith changes as he progresses

¹²³ Girgensohn, 129.

¹²⁴ Wilhelm Loehe's *Questions and Answers to the Six Chief Parts of the Small Catechism of Martin Luther* addresses this point: "256. By which faith are we saved, the Creed or the belief of the heart? By neither alone, but by both together. He who does not know what to believe is saved as little as he who does not believe what he ought. The Creed without faith helps not at all; and faith is impossible without a Creed" (80-81).

through the parts of the Catechism. God expects, or commands faith and then, since people cannot of themselves fulfill the requirement, He gives faith in the Creed. The gift of faith, then, leads to the believer praying to God, that is, relying on Him and calling on Him in the language of faith to grant the promised good things for faith and life. As Luther teaches it, faith is very much active not only in requesting and receiving God's promised works and gifts but especially in clinging to God and trusting His works. We have also examined Luther's grammar of faith in the *Small Catechism*. In the simple grammatical details of subjects, verbs, and objects Luther teaches us to look outside ourselves and focus on God and His works of creating, redeeming, and sanctifying us. This focus is the essence of faith. And finally we looked at how Luther personalizes the church's confession. The Christian faith confessed through the centuries is far from irrelevant to the individual believer. Rather, as Luther understands and explains the Creed, the Christian faith finds its expression in the individual believer receiving it and confessing it as his own.

Luther's understanding of "faith" avoids two problems. The first problem is the overly privatized and individualistic understanding of faith so characteristic of late twentieth century American Christianity. When Luther teaches personal "faith," he bases it on the solid foundation of the church's confession, the Apostles' Creed. The second problem Luther avoids is the tendency to turn "faith" into mere intellectual agreement with the doctrines of Christianity. Luther's understanding of faith is vibrant with clinging to God and receiving His good gifts of life and salvation. The doctrines of Christianity are appropriated as the believer's own; the works of God are *for* the believer. Faith, then, actively calls for, confesses, and receives God's goodness.

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