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Der grosse Catechismus

Deutsch/ Doct. Mart. Luth.

Kurtze Vorrede.



Diese Predigt ist dazu geordnet/ vnd angefangen/ das es sey ein vnterricht für die Kinder vnd Einfeltigen/ darumb sie auch von alters her / auff Griechisch heisset Catechismus/ das ist/ eine Kinderlere / so ein jeglicher Christ zur not wissen sol/ Also/ das/ wer solches nicht weis/ nicht künde vnter die Christen gezelet / vnd zu keinem Sacrament zugelassen werden / gleich wie man einen Handwercksmann/ der seines Handwercks recht vnd gebrauch nicht weis/ auswirfft / vnd für vntüchtig helt. Derhalben sol man Junge Leute/ die Stücke / so in den Catechisimum oder Kinderpredigt gehören / wol vnd fertig lernen lassen / vnd mit fleis darinne vben / vnd treiben.

Darumb auch ein jeglicher Hausuater schuldig ist / das er zum wenigsten die Wochen einmal seine Kinder vnd Gesinde / vmbfrage vnd verhöre / was sie dauon wissen oder lernen / vnd wo sie es nicht können/ mit ernst dazu halte. Denn ich dencke wol der zeit/ ja es begibet sich noch teglich/ das man grobe / alte / betagte leute findet/ die hie von gar nichts gewusst haben / oder noch wissen / gehen doch gleichwol zur Tauffe vnd Sacrament / vnd brauchen alles / was die Christen haben/ So doch die zum Sacrament gehen / billich mehr wissen / vnd völliger verstand aller Christlichen Vere haben solten denn die Kinder vnd neue Schüller / Biervol wirs für den gemeinen Hauffen bey den dreyen stücken bleiben lassen / so von alters her in der Christenheit blieben sind / aber wenig recht geleret/ vnd getrieben/ so lange bis man sich in denselbigen wol vbe / vnd leufftig werde/ beide Jung vnd Alt/ was Christen heissen vnd sein wil/ Vnd sind newlich diese.

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Catechesis for Life in the Royal Priesthood

JOHN T. PLESS



In spite of numerous adamic attempts to put the Lord Jesus Christ in the unemployment office and take over his work with blueprints for the building of the church according to our own schemes and tools of our making, the Lord Jesus Christ alone remains the architect and builder of his church. In those regal words of St. Matthew 16:18 he says, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” This same Lord, now crucified and raised from the dead, speaks with all authority on the day of his Ascension, giving to his disciples the mandate to make disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to keep all that he has given us. Disciples are made by baptizing and teaching. Jesus builds his church with these tools. This teaching that flows from Holy Baptism and leads to Holy Baptism is catechesis. Catechesis is the way in which the word of God is spoken and then echoes back in confession to the glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Catechesis is concerned with “faith development,” but in a way that is fundamentally opposed to the theory of faith development set forth by James Fowler in his books *Stages of Faith* and *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*.¹ Fowler posits a movement through seven stages of faith, beginning with what he calls “primal faith” moving toward the ultimate “universalizing faith.” The stages of faith according to Fowler evolve from a lower to higher form with very few individuals ever achieving “universalizing faith,” which would be represented in such figures as Ghandi and Martin Luther King standing as examples of tolerant inclusivity. The faith development theorists work with the assumption that faith is brought to maturity by moving people beyond the community, enabling them to stand as autonomous selves over against any particular narrative.

Lutheran catechesis, however, proceeds from an altogether different orientation. The goal of our catechesis is to shape the baptized to live in Christ as members of the Royal Priesthood. Catechesis does not result in the formation of the autonomous spiritual ego, but in a priest living in the company of fellow priests under a

common High Priest and sharing in a common cultus. Fowler’s “stages of faith model” is a secularized form of Pietism.

Catechesis is the process of transmitting the word of God so that the mind and life of the one who receives it grows up in every way into Jesus Christ, living in faith toward him and in love toward the neighbor. While catechesis does lead from the font to the altar, culminating in the extolling of the Lord’s gifts and the confession of his name in that churchly rite called Confirmation, catechesis itself is from the womb to the tomb. Catechesis has a text and a context. The text is the Small Catechism and the context is the Royal Priesthood, the holy church.

We turn first to the text. Beginning in 1518, Luther frequently preached series of sermons on the catechism, that is, the basic components of Christian doctrine as they had been arranged and handed down from earlier generations of Christians. As early as 1525, Luther had expressed his concern that a good catechism be prepared for the instruction of the young in the evangelical faith. In a letter addressed to Nicholas Hausmann on February 2, 1525, Luther notes that Agricola and Jonas had been given the task of preparing such a catechism. This catechism, however, never materialized. The Saxon Visitations of 1528 revealed such spiritual disorder in the congregations that Luther himself was compelled to prepare both of the Catechisms, Small and Large.

Commenting on the visitations, Luther writes in the Preface to the Small Catechism:

The deplorable conditions that I repeatedly encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching. Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, they live as though they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty (SC Preface, 1–3).

Luther intended his catechisms as a remedy to this crisis in the church.

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In Luther's mind, the Small Catechism was a text for use not so much in the classroom as in the home. This is revealed in the heading that stands over each of the chief parts: "in the plain form in which the head of the family shall teach them to his household." Historically, it was the Small Catechism that was crystallized from the Large Catechism. H. Bornkamm notes, "Without the preparatory condensation of the catechetical sermons into the Large Catechism, there would have been no crystallization of the entire substance into the Small Catechism."² The Large Catechism is an exposition of the Small Catechism for pastors, teachers, and other adult Christians to assist them in teaching the Small Catechism.

The Formula of Concord speaks of the Small Catechism as the "layman's Bible."

We would do well to remember that the Preface to the Small Catechism is also part of the confessional corpus. In it we see Luther's theory of catechesis. In the Preface, Luther makes three major points that are crucial to evangelical catechesis. First, there should be a standard and fixed text. Luther writes, "In the first place, the preacher should take the utmost care to avoid changes or variations in the text and the wording of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the sacraments, etc. On the contrary, he should adopt one form, adhere to it, and use it repeatedly year after year. Young and inexperienced people must be instructed on the basis of a uniform, fixed text and form. They are easily confused if a teacher employs one form now and another form—perhaps with the intention of making improvements—later on . . . when you are teaching the young, adhere to a fixed and unchanging form and method. Begin by teaching them the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, etc., following the text word for word so that the young may repeat these things after you and retain them in their memory" (SC, Preface, 7, 9–10).

Second, Luther argues that the catechist should move from text to meaning. Luther comments, "After the people have become familiar with the text, teach them what it means" (SC, Preface, 14).

Third, the text of the Catechism is never exhausted. There is always more to learn, so Luther advises that "after you have thus taught this brief catechism, take up a larger catechism so that the people may have a richer and fuller understanding" (SC, Preface, 17).

From Luther's Preface to the Small Catechism, it is apparent that he envisioned this book to be far more than a miniature textbook in systematic theology. For Luther, the Catechism is the handbook of doctrine, prayer, and life. As a handbook of Christian doctrine, the Small Catechism is confession, that is, a repeating back to God what he has said to us in the Holy Scriptures. James Voelz calculates that approximately one-fourth of the Small Catechism is direct quotation from the Scriptures, another one-third is direct exposition of the biblical text, while the remainder is application of scriptural teaching to life.³ The Catechism summarizes Scripture and leads us back into Scripture. A sixteenth-century Lutheran by the name of Christopher Fischer declared,

Just as the best, most experienced alchemist draws forth the quintessence, that is, the core, power, sap, and pitch of a thing, so God in his great mercy has prepared in the precious Catechism an extract, an excerpt, a brief summary and epitome of the entire Holy Scripture for people who are thirsty and hungry for grace. In the Catechism he has brought together in clear and distinct words which everyone can understand everything a Christian needs to know and to believe for his salvation. If a teaching agrees with the precious Catechism, every Christian may accept it in good conscience.⁴

The Formula of Concord speaks of the Small Catechism as the "layman's Bible," confessing that it "contains everything that Holy Scripture discusses at greater length and which a Christian must know for his salvation" (FC, Ep., 5). The Small Catechism is not a substitute for the Scriptures, but, to use the imagery of Charles Arand, "a map for the study of Scripture."⁵ Occasionally one hears the complaint that Lutherans replace the Bible with the Catechism or that Lutherans know the Catechism but don't know the Bible. These criticisms, it seems to me, miss the point. The Bible is a big book, and if one resolves to read the Scriptures, he is launching out on a journey that is beset with potential dangers. Witness how many sincere Bible readers misread the holy text and are led away from Jesus Christ.

We are Evangelical Lutherans, not Fundamentalists. Among other things, that means it is not the presence of the Bible that locates the church and brings people to faith, but rather "the church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly" (AC VII, 1–2). The emphasis is on the preaching of the pure gospel and the right administration of the sacraments. Lutherans of the old Synodical Conference have spent a lot of time and energy defending the inerrancy of the Scriptures, and I do not deny that this was a necessary battle. But could it be that in the battle over the Bible we have forgotten that it is not enough to talk about characteristics of the Bible—inerrant, infallible, and inspired? The question still remains: how will the Holy Scriptures be read and proclaimed? Will the law be properly distinguished from the gospel? Will the Scriptures be interpreted in accordance with the mind of the Spirit who inspired them, or will biblical interpretation move according to the impulse of the interpreter?

Here the Small Catechism proves itself to be a reliable road map that our youth need to learn if they are to chart their course in the Scriptures in such a way that always leads to the morning star, Jesus Christ (2 Pt 1:19). The Catechism, then, may be described as that "pattern of sound words" which Timothy is exhorted to follow in 2 Timothy 1:13. Therefore, the Small Catechism is to be understood not merely as a collection of essential doctrines, but as the very pattern or shape of Christian doctrine. As a handbook of Christian doctrine, the Small Catechism has a particular theological structure that moves from law to gospel. The ordering of the six chief parts is not accidental but expresses the dynamics of biblical teaching. The structure of the Small Catechism, the sequence of its chief parts, is crucial to a right understanding of Luther's theological intent in catechesis, as Robert Schultz has demonstrated.⁶

A reordering or rearrangement of the chief parts of the Small Catechism signals a change in theological focus. Agricola would have us begin with the Creed, that is, the gospel. Here we may recall the Antinomian controversy and the impetus that it provided toward the “Articles of Visitation” of 1528. Some contemporary recastings of the Small Catechism would have the catechesis begin with Holy Baptism. Others, under Barthian influence, would place a great deal of weight on the prologue to the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20:2, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage,” as a “gospel” preface to the law.

We are not Jews. The Ten Commandments were not given to us, but we are not without the law. Luther omits the biblical prologue and states the brute fact of God’s law, spoken to Jew and Gentile alike (e.g., Romans 1): “You shall have no other gods before me.” This law exposes and executes the sinner, who lacks the fear, love, and trust in God above all things. The center of gravity for Luther’s catechesis of the law is located in the First Commandment, as is demonstrated in the Large Catechism.

The Apostles’ Creed follows the Decalogue as the gospel follows the law. Breaking from medieval tradition, Luther understood the Creed as a Trinitarian confession of the gospel to be interpreted christologically. Both the Father and his gifts in creation and the Spirit and his gifts that create and sustain faith are confessed in their relationship to the Son. The Our Father is prayed in response to the Creed—it is the prayer of faith. The gifts of redemption confessed in the Second Article of the Creed are concretely given in Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and the Sacrament of the Altar.

The prayers and the table of duties form appendices to the six chief parts of the Christian doctrine, but that does not mean that they are excluded from the theological structure of the Small Catechism. On the contrary, they demonstrate how the Catechism’s doctrine shapes the believer’s life—a life of doxology that prays within the rhythm of time (morning, evening, and at meals) and works within the structures of this world (congregation, civil realm, family, and occupation).

Catechesis has a context, the royal priesthood of believers. Debates regarding “church and ministry” in the nineteenth century have perhaps clouded the fact that the primary distinction in 1 Peter 2:1–10 is not an anticlerical distinction between those who are called and ordained into the office of the holy ministry and the rest of the baptized, but between faith and unfaith. The church is a priesthood, and within that priesthood there is an office established by God himself to provide oversight for the spiritual house that God has built. All believers are priests, but not all priests are ministers. 1 Peter 2:1–10 is descriptive of the identity and activity of the royal priesthood.

The 1 Peter text has often been used as a polemic against the Roman Catholic conception of the priesthood—that is, since Jesus Christ is our High Priest we do not need a human priest as a mediator between God and the Christian. As each believer is a priest, he or she may go directly to God. Such a use of the text misses the point that the holy apostle makes. We are not a collection of isolated priests, each doing our own thing before God. Rather Peter says that we are “built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood” (1 Peter 2:5) and that we are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Peter 2:9). George Wollenburg writes,

A race is more than a collection of individuals. A race has identity that is derived from a common ancestry. You cannot join a race, you are born into it. The chosen race has a Father in heaven and a mother on earth—Holy Church. Her members are born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). Their mother is the holy and pure bride of Christ, the Church (Gal 4:26; Eph 5:25–27; Rev 12:1,5–6; Is 66:8–9). This race is a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5) in the sense of the royal ‘house’ or lineage⁷

Priests in this priesthood get their identity from the name put upon them in Holy Baptism: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Holy Baptism, God makes us priests in his priesthood. F. L. Cross, among others, has suggested that 1 Peter is a baptismal document originally associated with Easter baptisms in the early church.⁸ Whether or not this hypothesis is correct, 1 Peter was surely written with Holy Baptism in view. Not only does 1 Peter provide us with one of the key baptismal texts in the New Testament in 3:21 (“Baptism now saves you”); the whole epistle is, in fact, derived from the Father’s mercy by which “we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1:13). This new birth was brought about not by “perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” (1:23). Baptism sets us apart as “aliens and exiles” to live as members of God’s holy priesthood.

Catechesis has a context, the royal priesthood of believers.

Priests in this priesthood do three things: (1) Priests offer sacrifices; (2) priests speak to other people on behalf of God; and (3) priests speak to God on behalf of other people. Catechesis is the training that Christians are given for this priestly life and work.

Priests offer sacrifices. What are these sacrifices? As Article XXIV of the Apology reminds us, there is a singular propitiatory sacrifice, and that is the death of our High Priest, Jesus Christ. The Apology goes on to confess that all other sacrifices are eucharistic sacrifices. “The rest are eucharistic sacrifices, called ‘sacrifices of praise’: the proclamation of the gospel, faith, prayer, thanksgiving, confession, the affliction of the saints, yes, all good works of the saints. . . . The sacrifices of the New Testament are of this type, as Peter teaches in 1 Peter 2:5, ‘A holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices.’ Spiritual sacrifices are contrasted not only with the sacrifices of cattle but also with human works offered *ex opere operato*, for ‘spiritual’ refers to the operation of the Holy Spirit within us” (AP XXIV, 25–26).

Priests offer the daily sacrifice of repentance. Indeed, David tells us in Psalm 51 that “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart.” In the royal priesthood, repentance is not a religious exercise that one engages in only to move on to some other aspect of the Christian life. Repentance is the Christian life. Or as Luther said in the first of his Ninety-Five Theses, “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ‘repent’ (Mt 4:17), he willed

the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”⁹ The catechesis embodied in the Small Catechism sets the life of the Christian in the rhythm of repentance, daily dying to sin and being made alive to walk in the newness of life.

The sacrifice of repentance is the sacrifice of one’s own life. In Romans 12:1–2, St. Paul writes, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:1–2 NKJV).

Here the apostle puts two words together in a way that must have jarred his original readers: sacrifice and living. Everybody in the ancient world knew that sacrifices were dead! Goats and bulls were slaughtered in a temple that resembled a meat packing house more than a church, by a priest who could pass for a butcher. Whether you were Jewish or pagan, you knew that sacrifices were killed. But in the vocabulary of the Holy Spirit, “living sacrifice” is no oxymoron. Romans 3 notes that the death of Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for sin. In Romans 6, Paul maintains that we were joined to that death in our baptism, and sharing in the Lord’s death we are also made partakers of his resurrection. Hence in Romans 12 the Apostle beseeches us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice.

Luther and the Lutheran Confessions removed sacrifice from the chancel and relocated it in the world, as the whole life of the believer becomes a living sacrifice. This is “the liturgy after the liturgy,” to borrow a phrase from Carter Lindberg.¹⁰ Served with the gifts of the gospel in the Divine Service, the life of worship is lived out in the concrete places of our various callings. The Small Catechism connects sanctification—the life of the living sacrifice—with vocation.

Priests speak to people on behalf of God. The life of the royal priesthood is doxological in word and deed. Notice the description in Hebrews 13: “Therefore by him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb 13:15–16 NKJV). The language here is not unlike the language of 1 Peter 2:9–10 where God’s people declare the wonderful deeds of the God who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. The language of the Old Testament cultus has shaped these passages. Sinners brought into the presence of a Holy God by his grace now render thanks to him by confessing what God has done. Confession is doxology.

Again catechesis tutors us in such doxology. The Apostles’ Creed recites “the wonderful deeds of God who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

The Creed is the yardstick for measuring our speech about God. If one is going to talk about God as a member of his priesthood and not as a gossip, his language about him must square with these words.

Priests speak to God on behalf of people. This is the priestly work of intercession. “Let my prayer be set before you as incense; the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Ps 141:2). Praying priests come before the Father in faith, and in love they lift the needs of the neighbor to him in whose name alone there is help. Here the Small Catechism functions as our prayerbook. It was Wilhelm Loehe who noted that of all the cat-

echisms within Christendom, the Small Catechism alone was capable of being prayed.¹¹

We have outlined rather broadly the identity and life of the royal priesthood that is gathered by the High Priest, Jesus Christ, by his word and sacraments. We now turn to the catechesis that goes on within this royal priesthood.

Something is wrong. We have all heard the statistics of the number of youth who drop out of the church after confirmation. We know that confirmation is to be seen in light of Holy Baptism and not vice versa. We know that confirmation is not graduation from catechesis. Yet what pastor has not experienced some degree of frustration and disappointment when it comes to the instruction of the youth and their subsequent confirmation?

Luther and the Lutheran Confessions removed sacrifice from the chancel and relocated it in the world.

In 1966, a pan-Lutheran commission was assembled to study the theology and practice of confirmation. After having collected data from 86,000 participants, the Joint Commission prepared a study entitled *A Report on the Study of Confirmation and First Communion* in 1969. Among other things, this study suggested that confirmation be separated from first communion, with first communion taking place around the fifth grade. The recommendations of the report were widely accepted and implemented in the ALC and LCA, but much less so in the LCMS. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to assess the inter-Lutheran report, a few observations are in order. First, early communion with confirmation coming later does not appear to reverse the trend of adolescents falling away from active participation in congregational life in the ELCA. Second, the report continued to view catechesis as primarily an educational process rather than training for life in the royal priesthood. Third, the report tended to downplay the significance of the Small Catechism in catechesis. This final trend effected both catechetical curriculum and recastings of the Rite of Confirmation.

Walter Carlson of the former LCA, writing in the Winter 1982 issue of *dialog* in an article “LCA Catechesis—The Reformation Lost,” critiques his church body’s catechetical curriculum, *Catechetics For Today*, concluding, “I entitled the essay ‘LCA Catechesis—The Reformation Lost’ because I failed to recognize in this material the fundamental insights of the Reformation. While familiar terms from Lutheran theology and catechetical tradition are employed, the methodology and theological content are foreign to anything I have come to understand as Lutheran.”¹² Virgil Thompson makes similar observations about more recent catechetical practices in the ELCA in “The Promise of Catechesis” in the Autumn 1990 issue of the *Lutheran Quarterly*, lamenting that

In the place of the classical service of catechesis as indoctrination to the dogma of the church and introduction to the discipline of theological reflection, one hears of the

pastor who ushers his confirmation class into the darkened sanctuary, instructs the students to close their eyes, and get in touch with their spirituality. While such a silly approach to teaching the faith may be an isolated incidence, the aversion to catechesis as indoctrination to dogma, which lies behind it, is not isolated. This understanding of catechesis is widely abandoned throughout the church. In this sense the church seems to be intent on chasing the epistemological train which just left the station and wrecked a few miles down the track.¹³

The rite entitled “Affirmation of Baptism” in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* has no mention of instruction in the Small Catechism or of a confession of the Christian faith normed by this document.

Frustration over confirmation instruction has led to a lot of tinkering with programs, techniques, and in the case of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the very structure of the Rite of Confirmation itself, but we are still left with an inadequate view of catechesis. I have no sure-fire programs to suggest or techniques to teach that would stop the post-confirmation exodus. I am only urging that we reclaim the Small Catechism as the handbook for our catechesis and the royal priesthood as the context for the catechesis.

The royal priesthood as the context for catechesis has three dimensions: (1) The royal priesthood lives under the oversight of the Pastoral Office, and that office is primarily a teaching office; (2) catechesis is more than the classroom; (3) catechesis cannot be divorced from the Divine Service.

The royal priesthood lives under the oversight of the Pastoral Office, and that office is primarily a teaching office. I do not take the reference in Ephesians 4:11 to “pastors and teachers” to be a reference to two separate offices but to one office. As Bertil Gaertner has pointed out in his paper “Didaskolos: Men, Women, and the Office in the New Testament,” the pastor shepherds the congregation by his authoritative teaching.¹⁴ The pastor is the teacher. There may be other catechists in the congregation, but they serve under the supervision of the pastor, who is given responsibility for the teaching that goes on within the congregation.

Under the impact of modernity there are significant pressures brought to bear on the pastoral office that would make the office something other than the teaching office of the church. Alistar MacIntyre has argued that modernity has produced a world view that is managerial and therapeutic. Os Guinness in his excellent book *Dining With the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts With Modernity* maintains that the managerial and therapeutic approaches spawned by modernity have subjected the gospel to the pragmatism of “whatever works” and to the subjectivity of whatever therapy brings relief.¹⁵ Thus the pastor is seen as a CEO, a shopkeeper catering to ill-defined spiritual needs, or a rancher. In *The Parish Paper* Lyle Schaller writes, “The most difficult and certainly the most demanding change is for the minister to move from the stance of pastor, teacher, shepherd, to becoming a skilled and effective agent of intentional change.”¹⁶ The managerial model would subordinate the pastor as shepherd/teacher to the pastor as administrator.

The ascendancy of the therapeutic model is traced by E. Brooks Holifield in his book *From Salvation to Self-Realiza-*

*tion: The History of Pastoral Care in America.*¹⁷ Actually, the title says it all. Brooks charts the evolution of pastoral care that was centered in the language of prayer and Scripture in the early American Puritans to the contemporary paradigm embodied in the Clinical Pastoral Care Movement.

The catechesis of the Small Catechism cannot be sustained by either of these models. Yes, there are budgets to be managed and broken lives to be mended. There are others in the congregation who can attend to many of these things. Recall that the apostles appointed seven men to take care of the food distribution program so that the apostles could devote themselves “to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). In the present-day church we often do just the opposite, as pastors turn over “prayer and . . . the ministry of the word” to the laity and instead busy themselves with the multiplication of programs and administration of parish business.

Catechesis is not confined to the classroom.

Let the pastors teach. Especially let the pastor teach the adults. James Smart was fond of saying that our Lord blessed the children and taught the adults and that we have turned it around so that we teach the children and bless the adults. The catechesis envisioned by Luther, following the lead of Deuteronomy 6, would have the “head of the household” teaching the Small Catechism to his family. If parents are going to be the primary catechists, then they will need to be taught by the pastor in adult Bible classes, retreats, and other formal settings, but also in informal settings as the pastor visits in the home or counsels with couples preparing for marriage or awaiting the birth of a child.

That leads to the second dimension: Catechesis is not confined to the classroom. In a very provocative article under the title “Catechesis: The Quiet Crisis,” William Thompson observes:

For Luther, the Catechism is a prayer-book, not merely a book of doctrine. The Catechism is an enchiridion, a handbook for living the baptismal life. Catechesis is the training in living as a baptized child of God, not just the accumulation of facts. The central error that we have made in catechesis is to treat it as an academic process rather than our patterning of living in our baptism. We have treated the Catechism as a textbook rather than a prayerbook. Consequently, many adults, including pastors, view the Catechism as a book for children and not for us, as if it were a book like other school books—something to be tolerated until graduation and then discarded. This problem is further compounded when pastors who do seek to use the Catechism concentrate on explanations of the Catechism rather than on the Catechism itself.¹⁸

As we have already noted, catechesis is from the womb to the tomb, and the Small Catechism is to be the Christian’s handbook

not merely for a couple of years but for a lifetime. Such catechesis can be fleshed out in the congregation in a number of ways. Pastors will need to continue to study and pray the Catechism. Listen to the admonition of Luther in the Preface to the Large Catechism:

To our regret we see that even many pastors are neglectful of the Catechism, despising both their office and the Catechism itself. . . . As for myself, let me say this: I, too, am a doctor and pastor. In fact, I am as educated and experienced as any of those who have all that nerve and brazen self-confidence. Yet I continue to do as a child does that is being taught the Catechism. Mornings and whenever I have time I recite word for word and pray the Ten Commandments, the creed, etc. I must still study and pray the catechism daily, yet I cannot master it as I would like, but must remain a child and student of the catechism. This I do gladly. But those who think they have mastered it in one reading need not anticipate failing; they have already failed. What they need to do is to become children again and start learning their ABC's, which they falsely imagine they long ago had under their belts (LC, Martin Luther's Preface, 1, 7–8).

The liturgy provides a deep structure for catechesis as it embraces us in the Lord's name.

Pastors will need to use a variety of means to help their people make use of the Small Catechism. When a child is baptized, present the parents with a copy of the Small Catechism inscribed for the child with words something like this: "Today God washed your sin away in the waters of Holy Baptism and made you a priest in his holy and royal priesthood. This Catechism is your handbook for life in God's priesthood. Your parents will use this book to help you understand what God did for you today in your baptism and how you are to live as his child." Encourage the parents to use the Small Catechism as a prayerbook in family devotions and to help their children learn the six chief parts by heart long before they come to catechetical instruction in the seventh grade.

Pastors are not marriage counselors but shepherds of Christ's flock. The Small Catechism used in conjunction with the marriage liturgy from the *Lutheran Worship Agenda* are biblical and churchly means for helping engaged couples look at marriage as an estate formed by God for their good and blessing.

Preach catechetical sermons. The six midweek services in the Lenten Season provide an excellent opportunity to preach sermons on the six chief parts of the Small Catechism. The lectionary often is directly linked to one of the chief parts of the Small Catechism, thus providing yet another opportunity for catechetical preaching.

The third dimension of catechesis has to do with the Divine Service. Philip Lee writes: "The liturgy of the church, after all, served as the training ground for Christians for centuries before the Protestant Sunday School was invented."¹⁹

The Divine Service (subjective genitive) is the Lord's service to us. Luke 22:24–30 is an excellent text to use to teach the Divine Service, for here in the context of the institution of the Sacrament of the Altar our Lord says, "I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:27). The Lord of heaven and earth clothed in our flesh and blood becomes our Host and Servant. The liturgy is not a service we render to God, but his service to us by means of his saving word and blessed sacrament.

In this Divine Service there is ongoing catechesis, week after week and year after year. There is built into the liturgy a blessed sameness. As C. S. Lewis says, a good liturgy is like a well-worn pair of shoes: "A good shoe is a shoe you don't notice. Good reading becomes possible when you need not consciously think about eyes, or light, or print, or spelling. The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God."²⁰ By repetition of the Kyrie, the Gloria, the Creed, the Our Father, the Sanctus, and the Agnus Dei we commit these treasures drawn from God's Word to heart. We become at home with them and yet never exhaust their riches.

The liturgy provides a deep structure for catechesis as it embraces us in the Lord's name. The proclamation of the Lord's name in the invocation locates us in Holy Baptism. Baptism is not a past event but a present reality, as the Lord into whose name we have been baptized says: "Lo, I am with you always" (Mt 28:20). Baptism plunges us into a daily death of contrition and repentance. This is liturgically indicated by the placement of Confession and Absolution immediately after the baptismal name of God. Absolved of our sins, we come into the courts of the Lord's house with words of praise and thanks that we have received from him in the Introit. The Lord's word is read and preached. On the basis of the Lord's speaking to us we speak to him in prayer. The Lord serves us with his body and blood. With his name put on us in the Benediction, we are sent back into the world to live as his people, holy and precious in his sight. The Introduction to *Lutheran Worship* is a classic statement of the catechetical value of the Divine Service:

Our Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says. Faith that is born from what is heard acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise. Music is drawn into this thankfulness and praise, enlarging and elevating the adoration of our gracious giver God.

Saying back to him what he has said to us, we repeat what is most true and sure. Most true and sure is his name, which he put upon us with the water of our Baptism. We are his. This we acknowledge at the beginning of the Divine Service. Where his name is, there is he. Before him we acknowledge that we are sinners, and we plead for forgiveness. His forgiveness is given us, and we, freed and forgiven, acclaim him as our great and gracious God as we apply to ourselves the words he had used to make himself known to us.

The rhythm of our worship is from him to us, and then from us back to him. He gives his gifts, and together we receive and extol them. We build one another up as we speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Our Lord gives us his body to eat and his blood to drink. Finally his blessing moves us out into our calling, where his gifts have their fruition. How best to do this we may learn from his Word and from the way his Word has prompted his worship through the centuries. We are heirs of an astonishingly rich tradition. Each generation receives from those who went before and, in making that tradition of the Divine Service its own, adds what best may serve in its own day—the living heritage and something new.²¹

The Divine Service takes place within the context of the Christian year. The church year so clearly and consistently unfolds the life of the Holy Trinity in its various seasons and days. The church year has a “trinitarian shape” that is centered in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (Good Friday and Easter) and expressed in the Time of Christmas (Father), the Time of Easter (Son), and the Time of the Church (Holy Spirit). All of the church year either leads into Good Friday-Easter or flows from Good Friday-Easter. The historic Gospel for the First Sunday in Advent is Luke 19:29–38, the Palm Sunday narrative. Why has the Palm Sunday account been read on the first Sunday of the church year for over a thousand years? Why Palm Sunday, when the world is getting ready for Christmas? The Blessed King who comes in the name of the Lord comes to suffer and die. The first half of the church year is geared to move toward Good Friday and Easter.

This movement continues through Christmas as the Son of God is born in the lowliness of Bethlehem. He becomes incarnate in order to be the sacrifice for sin. Epiphany makes manifest both his person and his work. The Transfiguration serves as something of a bridge between Christmas and Calvary, between Epiphany and Easter. Transfiguration contains echoes of the Lord’s baptism in the Father’s voice from the cloud while at the same time pointing forward to his death and showing forth the glory of his resurrection. The Sundays of Lent draw us ever closer to Calvary with the Gradual based on Hebrews 12:2, “Oh, come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Historically, Holy Week is at the center of the Christian year, as the church year developed out of Easter, which, in turn, grew out of Sunday, the Lord’s Day. It is often said that every Sunday is a little Easter. It is in fact more historically accurate to say that every Easter is a big Sunday. The traditional Epistle for the Feast of the Resurrection, I Corinthians 5:7–8, demonstrates the theological centrality of Good Friday-Easter to the whole of the church year: “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

The remainder of the church year flows out of Good Friday-Easter, as can be seen from examining the Gospels appointed for the Sundays of Easter. In the Holy Gospel for the Second Sunday

of Easter (John 20:19–31), the risen Lord comes to his disciples, speaking words of peace and showing them the tokens of his passion, his wounds. With his words and wounds, the Lord bestows on his disciples his Spirit and the apostolic office. The risen Lord is the source of life to his church just as the vine gives life to the branches in John 15:1–8, the Holy Gospel for Easter 3. Easter 4 is called Good Shepherd Sunday, since this Sunday’s Gospel is John 10:11–16. The Gospels appointed for Easter 5 and 6 are from our Lord’s farewell discourse on Maunday Thursday (John 16:4b–15 and 16:23b–33), and both connect the passion and resurrection with Ascension and Pentecost. The Holy Gospel for Pentecost (John 15:26–16:4) shows us that the gift of Pentecost is a reality because of the Lord’s “going to the Father.” The Sundays after Pentecost reflect the life of the crucified and risen Lord in the midst of his church as he enlivens and sustains his people by the gospel. The last Sundays of the church year point us to the consummation of Easter in the Lord’s return to judge and the gift of the marriage supper of the Lamb in his kingdom.

The church year is a many-splendored reality. It has an integrity or a wholeness to it that centers in the work of the Liturgist of our salvation, Jesus Christ. This integrity provides a vehicle for an on-going catechesis that is sometimes subtle but nonetheless real and potent. It is a shame, therefore, that we have allowed the church year to be replaced by the Synodical Year with its programmatic emphasis on the Christian’s work rather than the work of the Trinity. This rejection of the church year signals a slippage away from grace to works. Our programs are deemed more beneficial to the life of the church than the story of salvation delivered systematically in the Christian year.

SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

(1) Each generation is “unwell in a new way,” writes the poet John Berryman. In his book *The Contemplative Pastor*, Eugene Peterson argues that the present generation is “unwell” in that it is addicted to “episodes of adolescence.” In other words, now the sins of the sons are being visited upon the fathers. Peterson writes, “There was a time when ideas and living styles were initiated in the adult world and filtered down to youth. Now the movement goes the other way: lifestyles are generated at the youth level and pushed upward. Dress fashions, hair styles, music, and morals that are adopted by youth are evangelically pushed on an adult world, which in turn seems eager to be converted.”²²

A major characteristic of the culture of adolescence is historical amnesia, the absence of a sense of the past. That which is old is thought to be obsolete. There is a temptation for the church to jettison its heritage in order to be relevant and in doing so capitulate to the idols of this present age. We need to take the warning of Carl Braaten with utmost seriousness as he says, “The church that wants to be relevant has already sown the seeds of its own irrelevance.”²³ If our children are to have faith, we must first of all be ourselves faithful to what we have been given. Simone Weil has said, “If you want to be relevant, you must always say things that are eternal.”²⁴ Ours is not a cultural catechesis of pop psychology disguised as “relational Bible studies” and self-help books, of shallow songs that tell us more about the singer than they do about the Triune God, of entertainment evangelisms that try to convince the pagans that we are just like them after all. Ours is a catechesis that is forever rele-

vant because it is speaking eternal things, words of him who is the Alpha and the Omega, in Scripture, catechism, and liturgy. We are indeed to be countercultural in our ministry. Our catechesis will train both youth and adults to live as “resident aliens”²⁵ within a narcissistic religious culture.

(2) In our work with youth we would do well to heed the remark of T. S. Eliot that “It is not enthusiasm but dogma that differentiates a Christian from a pagan.”²⁶ In our desire “to make church fun” we have, in fact, trivialized the realities that we seek to pass on to our youth. Instead we are left with youth services that turn the Lord’s Supper into a MacDonald’s Happy Meal and

encourage our young people to have contempt for the allegedly boring and dull things that transpire in their home congregations at ten o’clock on Sunday morning.

(3) It is tempting to take shortcuts. But if we are to be about the task of feeding our Lord’s sheep and caring for his lambs, then we best use the equipment that he has bequeathed us: his word and sacraments. It is not given to us to entertain or excite, but faithfully to pass on the word that we have been given. And that word does have impressive power—power to create and preserve faith for the long haul, for see, the goal of catechesis is finally the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. LOGIA

NOTES

1. See James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981) and *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984). Fowler’s approach has been widely used by a variety of theorists in Christian education. For an example see Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

2. Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career*, trans. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 601. On the genesis of the Catechisms also see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521–1532*, trans. James Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 273–279; J. M. Reu, *Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism: A History of Its Origin, Its Distribution, and Its Use* (Chicago: Wartburg Press, 1929), pp. 7–24; Timothy J. Wengert, “Wittenberg’s Earliest Catechism,” *Lutheran Quarterly* (Autumn 1993), pp. 247–260.

3. James Voelz, “Luther’s Use of Scripture in the Small Catechism,” in *Luther’s Catechisms—450 Years*, eds. Robert Preus and David Scaer (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1979), p. 55.

4. Quoted by Robert Kolb, “The Laymen’s Bible: The Use of Luther’s Catechisms in the German Late Reformation,” in Preus and Scaer, p. 16.

5. Charles P. Arand, “Luther’s Catechisms: Maps for the Study of Scripture,” *Issues in Christian Education* (Summer 1990), p. 22. In this connection also see Paul I. Johnston, “Reu’s Understanding of the Small Catechism,” *Lutheran Quarterly* (Winter 1993), pp. 425–450.

6. Robert Schultz, “The Theological Significance of the Order of the Chief Parts in Luther’s Catechism,” in *Teaching the Faith*, ed. Carl Volz (River Forest: Lutheran Education Association, 1967), pp. 45–46.

7. George Wollenburg in an unpublished essay “The Priesthood of Believers as it Relates to the Divine Service.” Also see Erling Teigen, “The Universal Priesthood in the Lutheran Confessions,” *Logia* (Reformation 1992), pp. 9–16.

8. See Frank Cross, *1 Peter: A Paschal Liturgy* (London: SPCK, 1954).

9. AE 31:25.

10. Carter Lindberg, *Beyond Charity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 169. Also see Robert Kolb, *Teaching God’s Children His Teaching: A Guide for the Study of Luther’s Catechism* (Hutchinson, MN: Crown Publishing, 1992), pp. 8:1–8:14; Harold

Senkbeil, *Sanctification: Christ in Action* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989), pp. 111–148.

11. Wilhelm Loehe, *Three Books About the Church*, trans. James Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), p. 170.

12. Walter Carlson, “LCA Catechesis—The Reformation Lost,” *dialog* (Winter 1982), p. 13.

13. Virgil Thompson, “The Promise of Catechesis,” *Lutheran Quarterly* (Autumn 1990), p. 264.

14. Bertil Gaertner, “Didaskolos: The Office, Man and Woman in the New Testament,” *Concordia Journal* (March 1982), p. 52–60.

15. See Os Guinness, *Dining With the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts With Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993).

16. Lyle Schaller, *The Parish Paper* (April 1988), p. 1.

17. See E. Brooks Holifield, *From Salvation to Self-Realization: The History of Pastoral Care in America* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983).

18. William Thompson, “Catechesis: The Quiet Crisis,” *The Bride of Christ* (Advent 1990), p. 22.

19. Philip Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford, 1987), p. 228.

20. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1963), p. 4.

21. *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), p. 6. For an exposition of *Gottesdienst* see *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, ed. Fred Precht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), pp. 44–45; Norman Nagel, “Whose Liturgy Is It?” *Logia* (Easter 1993), pp. 4–8; Harold Senkbeil, *Dying to Live: The Power of the Forgiveness of Sins* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994), pp. 115–136; John T. Pless, ed., *Real Life Worship Reader* (St. Louis: LCMS Commission on Worship, 1994).

22. Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), pp. 128–129.

23. Carl Braaten in a speech at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota on April 27, 1993.

24. Guinness, p. 6.

25. See Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

26. Quoted by Robert Wilken, “No Other Gods,” *First Things* (November 1993), p. 14.