

B.A.S.I.C.

Brothers And Sisters In Christ

The Catechisms of Luther

By Pastor Nathanael Mayhew

We have considered the ecumenical confessions of the early Christian church and have seen how the early church found it necessary to go into greater detail with their confessions and articles of faith in order to defend against error and false teaching, and to proclaim the truth of God's revealed Word. Sadly, in our time, we find the opposite trend. The current trend of churches and denominations in our time is to decrease the strength of their confessions due to unionistic tendencies. Many "Christians" in our age have rejected the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds as being overly bold and condemnatory. A very sad state of affairs indeed!

As we move ahead to the particular confessions of the Lutheran church, we find once again that these confessions were written to point out error, and proclaim the truth. Instead of Arius, Nestorius, or Macedonius, it was the teachings of the church itself, under the leadership of the pope of Rome which was being condemned. Among these particular confessions of the Lutheran church we will be considering the catechisms of Martin Luther, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald

Articles, and the Formula of Concord, which date from about 1529-1577 A.D.

Catechetical Instruction

Biblical instruction as a foundation for church membership dates back to the very beginning of the Christian church. In the early days of the church this instruction generally preceded baptism. We have many examples of this in the book of Acts. In Acts 2, the people who had gathered to celebrate the Old Testament festival of Pentecost were instructed by Peter and the other apostles in basic Christian doctrine: They were taught about the work of the Holy Spirit (2:16-21, 33); the life of Jesus of Nazareth (2:22); His death (2:23); His resurrection (2:24-32); and His ascension into heaven (2:33-36). Then we are told: "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:41-42).

Similarly we are told of the Ethiopian eunuch to whom Philip "preached Jesus" (Acts 8:35) after which he made confession and was baptized; the family of

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Cornelius whom Peter instructed in the Christian faith (cf. Acts 10:34-43) and then were baptized; the jailer of Philippi to whom Paul and Silas "spoke the word of the Lord" (Acts 16:32) and believing, were baptized; as well as many others (cf. Acts 8:12, 13; 9:18; 16:15; 18:8; and 22:16).

Over time this changed. The adults who came to know Jesus as the Christ, and their Savior, through the preaching of Jesus' followers are described clearly in the book of Acts. (Note: The Protestant churches often focus too much on a confession of faith as an adult, because of this emphasis in the book of Acts, even though entire families or "households" are mentioned often in the above sections.) The first generation of Christians passed on to their children what they had come to know. Succeeding generations in Christian homes were baptized in their youth or infancy and then instructed in the Christian faith as they grew older.

But even before the close of the first century, the apostles already began to warn against the intrusion of false teaching. Peter wrote: "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed" (2 Peter 2:1). Just as the confessions of the church grew in strength and detail, so did the need for more detailed instruction, in order to combat these many destructive heresies.

Martin Luther was not the first to compile a catechism (i.e. book of instruction). Books of instruction in the Christian faith have been around since the first century (they can be found in the Old Testament as well). The early church writing entitled *The Didache* ("the teaching") was a catechism from the late first or early second century. It's focus was on teaching the 10 Commandments. Over time, instruction was expanded to include the Apostles' or Nicene Creed, the Lord's Prayer, as well as the Sacraments, and various other aspects of Christian training.

Luther's Catechism

During the Middle Ages, such instruction in the Christian faith was almost completely lost, and the majority of people, even within the church were very spiritually ignorant. During a visitation of the churches in Saxony (1527-1529), Luther discovered that the majority of the people and their pastors did not even have a basic knowledge of the Christian faith! This instilled in Luther the need for a book of instruction teaching the basics of Biblical doctrine. The Roman church had such books, but Luther realized that they were full of Roman teachings, and what Luther himself calls "unchristian follies." So Luther made it a priority to publish a simple book of the Bible's teachings which could be used in the church, schools and home to instruct the people in these truths.

The Six Chief Parts

Luther's mode of operation was not to start completely from scratch, but to utilize the good, and dispose of what was

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bad in existing catechisms, and so return to the Scriptural teachings of the early church. For this reason, Luther retained the three chief parts from the ancient church: The 10 Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. Later he added parts on Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Confession as well as an appendix of short family prayers, and a table of general Christian duties.

Luther felt that these chief parts of the catechism were so important in Christian instruction that he even incorporated them into other forms to aid the people in learning them. For example, Luther wrote hymns based on these parts to be used in congregational singing.

Confession and Absolution - [From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee](#) (TLH 329 - 1523);

The 10 Commandments - [That Man a Godly Life Might Live](#) (TLH 287 - 1524);

The Creed - [We all Believe in One True God](#) (TLH 251 -1524);

The Lord's Supper - [O Lord we Praise Thee](#) (TLH 313:2,3 - 1524);

The Lord's Prayer - [Our Father, Thou in Heaven Above](#) (TLH 458 - 1529);

Baptism - [To Jordan When our Lord Had Gone](#) (Not in TLH - 1541).

The Large Catechism

Luther began by preaching a series of sermons on the chief parts for the purpose of instructing the people. From those sermons Luther first completed the Large Catechism. The purpose of the Large catechism was to teach the basics of

the Christian faith, and was intended primarily for pastors and teachers, who were (in some cases) just as spiritually ignorant as the people. In his preface to the Large Catechism Luther writes: "Therefore I again implore all Christians, especially pastors and preachers, not to be doctors too soon, and imagine that they know everything (for imagination and cloth unshrunk fall far short of the measure), but that they daily exercise themselves well in these studies and constantly treat them." Pastors and teachers were to study the Large catechism for their own instruction and edification.

[View Luther's Large Catechism.](#)

The Small Catechism

The Small Catechism, was primarily intended by Luther to be used for the instruction of children. They were to memorize it at home and bring it with them for instruction at church. Luther realized that instruction at church was not enough. Instruction had to be done at home as well. He felt that the church, school and home had to co-operate in this instruction. He exhorted fathers and mothers to aid in this Christian education at home. In his preface Luther writes: "The ten commandments, as the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to his household." Very soon after its publication, the Small Catechism was also being taught in public schools throughout Germany.

Of all the confessions of the Lutheran church, none have had as great an impact as Luther's Small Catechism. It has been stated that only seven years after its

publication, Luther's Small Catechism had a circulation of more than 100,000! It has, for good reason, been called "The gem of the Reformation."

[View Luther's Small Catechism.](#)

BELC Vignettes

By Pastor Emeritus David Koenig

Pastor M. Jesuraj, 45 years old, is serving 112 believers in the BELC Tiruvallure District in Tiruvallure city. His wife's name is Shanthi, 42 years old, and they have two children. This all would seem rather normal except he and his wife both are fully blind. Both they and some of his church believers read the Bible by the braille method. He had started his ministry service and for nearly 8 years he serving under our BELC.

He has been doing Gospel and blind ministry and most of his believers are blind .

He has been doing some self help work like re- caning of chairs. Doing small business training they produce some small household things.

It is wonderful to see our brother at the monthly studies learning by ear what is taught.

It is hard to keep track of where Pastor John Wesley is preaching. A new BELC District has started in Puttur town using his partially completed church building for the meetings at Bavaninagar. He has 40 adults and 30 children in this congregation. In past reports a VBS had ten Hindu children among the forty who came. The VBS he had at Kannigapuram had ten Hindu children among the sixty some there. And at Kattuvoddallu VBS

of the 25 children who attended of those ten were Hindu. He is consistent and so is God in His grace and mercy allowing these children to hear of the wonderful work of God. With the 29 other new pastors in this district John can help give good direction to outreach.

I was so glad to see Babu Victor's happy face at the combined Koppedu/ Uthukottai meeting. Among 64 who were there I saw that face right away. At Sathyavedu he serves 30 souls; at Vannlure nearly 40; and at Rasapalaym where there is no other Christian church in the village of 800 he serves 55 and has for over twenty years.

While not all men have the same gifts and abilities, and some men become lazy and need God's prodding, these men are fine examples of how it should be in the public ministry. They look forward to the Chief Shepherd's "Come oh blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."
