

Thoughts on Teaching Luther's Catechism

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We will not hide them from their children;
we will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord.
Ps. 78:4

This is another year of the catechism. We are fortunate that a commemorative year keeps recurring at half-century intervals to focus attention on the jewel of our Reformation heritage. No finer piece of Christian-literature has been drawn from the fountain of sacred Scripture than our catechism. This appraisal, however, is trite, if not supported by some understanding of our catechism's place in history, of its matchless style, and of the simple profundity of its teaching. Luther's catechism fits old Bishop Gregory's descriptive sentence with remarkable fidelity: so shallow that a child can wade in its waters, so deep that an elephant must swim. As you shall hear later, this catechism holds a unique place among all catechisms in Christendom.

When, however, we pursue the subject of teaching the catechism and teaching it the best way possible, the road becomes rocky because of the differences of opinion about proper catechism teaching. Such a road, your assignment for this conference has invited me to travel. The path we take may become rocky to the extent that my thoughts about catechism teaching depart from well established methods that have become traditional in our midst. Add to this the fact that everyone in the conference has been trained in catechism teaching, has had experience in catechism teaching, and therefore has, and should have, some confidence to speak on the matter, and our journey has the prospect of becoming an interesting one. It could become a journey to arouse spirited debate, and that is good.

Before we set out on this road, we should alert ourselves to the issues at stake. Good, dynamic catechism teaching remains a difficult challenge. To meet it, no teacher should be satisfied with anything less than the best each of us can do with our individual talents. Luther's catechism contains the quintessence of Scripture's essence, the wheat germ of the wheat, which by all means must be salvaged for our people—and seared into their souls. Furthermore, our catechism dispenses its elixir in cups of salvation which match those of Scripture—in prayers; sermons, stories, sayings, and songs. This brings us prematurely to one of the theses which will be expanded in this paper, namely, that catechism teaching comes alive to the degree it stays with its style, which is the Biblical style: the natural way God speaks with us in the Scriptures and the natural way people have responded to God in the Scriptures.

Do not underrate the importance of this thesis. Satan cannot remove spirituality from people's lives. Though the great dragon has apparently been let loose from his millennial leash to demolish the standards of right and wrong built into the creation, his devastations have not diluted people's religiousness. That is clear from what we read or see in the media each week, whether in Iran, or in Boston, New York, and Des Moines. But Satan corrupts spirituality by externalizing it, by satisfying people's religious sense with external system: the container, at the expense of what it contains. The parishes of Germany were full of spirituality when Luther and his friends set out on their celebrated visitation, but you know from Luther's preface to the Small Catechism what woeful spiritual ignorance he nevertheless found. Or consider another kind of woeful spirituality:

It is thankful for the clear and pure voice of the Gospel, but devotes more effort to uncovering the evils of misteachers than being grateful for God's blessings to us; showing more interest to explain the Trinity than to pray to the Trinity; preferring to defend Christ's presence at all places than to glorify His presence at all places. We would rather describe penitence than be penitent; rather deny the merit of works than do good works; rather page through the Holy Scriptures than feed on the Holy Scriptures. Thus religion becomes an academic discipline, a storehouse of knowledge. Preachers pride themselves in the correctness of their doctrine, but when they return from the pulpit to their daily life, they are all taken up by the world. Whoever strives after a pious life is branded an enthusiast. We have exchanged the lordship of the pope for the rule of many little popes. The old prayers have been banished, and now there is no praying.

What you have heard was taken from a sermon by John Valentin Andreae, nephew of one of the signers of the Formula of Concord. His message is still timely for us today. It is a keen description of spirituality nourished on system, content with system, gone to sleep with system.

The alert having been sounded—that catechism teaching is no trifling matter—let us come to the theses around which I wish to carry out this assignment.

In the first place,

Catechism teaching is strong and full of life to the degree that the words and lives of those who teach bear witness to the Gospel within them.

Since this is so self-evident, perhaps it need not have been said. Yet, we should never lose sight of it. How we live, how we speak, how we appear: these factors *do* have a bearing on our message. The machine can't replace the human being in the art of teaching. This is especially true for teaching the Christian faith. Though we teachers do not convert hearts by what we do, God has made us living instruments of His living Gospel. He makes His Gospel live in our voices, our faces, our hands, as though God did beseech our hearers by us. Our testimony as servants of the Gospel follows us, for better or for worse, right out of the classroom. It is an offense in the Scriptural sense of this word; it is a soul-endangering offense when teachers and preachers having laid aside their clerical vestments, so to speak, almost without fail show themselves preoccupied with the world. From this lifestyle, good Lord, deliver us!

In the second place,

Catechism teaching is strong and full of life to the degree that teachers fill their teaching with the Fountain of Life.

This thesis is no less self-evident. I beg your indulgence for repeating what everyone knows. But as this presentation moves forward to other theses, perhaps the dimensions of the present thesis will grow more significant. We have said that good catechism teaching is filled with the Holy Scriptures. This cuts in two directions. Scripture filled catechism teaching makes heavy demands on teachers. It requires a strong

acquaintance with the Scriptures. There is no better preparation for catechism teaching than a steady regimen of Bible reading. (And if we did not remember Bible history as we ought during our student years at college, that state of affairs should improve in a hurry when the roles are reversed and we stand before the class.) Let catechism teaching be full of the Scriptures. Let the Scriptures in their stories, sermons, sayings and songs unfold the particular catechism truth for the day. In this manner let the Scriptures *be* themselves and come into their own right, rather than to serve as props added at the close of the lesson and, to the students' consternation, for memorization besides.

Scripture filled catechism teaching makes corresponding demands on the pupils. It requires their committing to memory a treasury of Scripture stories, sermons, sayings, and songs for doctrine, for self-examination, for comfort, for instruction in righteousness that contributes to the perfecting of their faith and the edification of their life.

By gradual stages we have come to the third in our set of theses:

Catechism teaching will be strong and full of life to the degree that it vibrates not only with Scripture's melody but also with Scripture's style.

This, I must hurry to add, is also the style of Luther's catechism, that is, of the Enchiridion. Let us state the thesis in another manner: Catechism teaching will be vital and viable to the degree that it limits the formal system which accompanies Luther's catechism (and is much confused with Luther's catechism) to its valuable service for teacher preparation. In other words, catechism teaching comes to life the more we hide the skeleton of formal system behind the flesh and blood of Scripture's style and story.

This thesis in no way disparages formal system. The rules of good teaching have to be learned. There must be system for communicating information effectively, for telling a story vibrantly, for inculcating a truth correctly. Without rules and system, communication may miss the mark, its substance may be incomplete, and the general result shambles. Even great teaching, supposedly uninhibited by rules or not conscious of system, *does* follow rules and system, because rules, good rules, are the reflection of good teaching. Someone once called my attention to a line from Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* which expressed what I am saying in this way: "Had the bo'sun good form without knowing it, which is the best form of all?"

In catechism teaching, rules are vital and formal system is necessary for the teacher. But rules are not worn on the sleeve. As for the formal system, I wonder whether it has to show or be put into the children's hands. To my mind, this heightens the danger of formalism. It threatens to stereotype teaching and, even worse, to anesthetize the faith-life of those who are taught.

Several times Scripture has been described as a collection of wonderfully diverse sermons, stories, sayings, and songs. Furthermore, these are firmly rooted to the earth: to people, to times, to places. God's revelation has come to man in the natural context of life. This is its marvelous style. Let me make the point in another way. Jesus called His disciples to evangelize all nations by baptizing and by teaching all things which He commanded. Surely, it would have been possible for the disciples to draw up a set of the teachings of Jesus; to organize in a formal system all truths which should be known and believed for a person to be saved. But the things which Jesus taught have not been put on record in such a way at all. Far from it! Indeed, we could insist that such system was not the Holy Spirit's way. For what have we received in the New Testament? Five histories or portraits—four of Jesus, one of the church—and 22 letters: 27 pieces of literature, natural, faithful, and intensely personal pictures from life. Such has been the Holy Spirit's style of teaching, God's style of revelation. And this style meets us again and again as we watch the Master Teacher at work and as we follow the mission of His first pupils.

But formal system is something different. In the context of catechism teaching, it takes the natural picture, divides it into a series of distinct and carefully machined parts (and how many necessary hours are put in on the machining to make sure that the sides of each part are straight and that nothing essential is lacking!) With these pieces, formal system also furnishes the adhesive (in many individual strips) by which the pieces shall be held together. Thus the goal of fashioning the picture of divine truth may be reached. Yet over this

method hangs the specter that the pieces and the process of fitting them together lionize the attention. Meanwhile, the picture itself, formed of the pieces, fades into the background.

Hence our third thesis: Catechism teaching will be strong and full of life to the degree that it vibrates not only with Scripture's melodies but also with Scripture's style, that is, Scripture's way of teaching. Formal system approaches the doctrine of Christ with a well organized series of truths: that Christ is God, with proofs for His divinity; that He is man, with proofs for His humanity; that He lived among men and exercised: a threefold office as prophet, priest, and king, with corresponding proofs to support each office; that His blood shed on the cross redeemed mankind, with definitions for the nature of His blood, the meaning of "redeemed," and the extent of the benefits, and so on. I do not disparage such system. But I do suggest that it remain hidden in the teacher's tool chest of preparation. I do suggest that the doctrine of Christ be presented in the natural style of Scripture, and of the catechism (Luther's), which speaks in story and song and which draws into its story and song other pertinent passages from Scripture to enhance the narration. Teach children the catechism so that their Encheiridion will be well annotated and well thumbed by their hands and so that, from the 4th or the 5th grade on, their Bibles will also begin to be well thumbed and well underlined. Teach the, catechism to fill children's hearts with the fear of God and the love of God in the manner that hearts are best filled with the terror for sin and the warmth of forgiveness by the Bible style itself, in sermons, stories, sayings, and songs.

Our fourth thesis is an extension of the third:

Catechism teaching will be strong and full of life to the degree that it follows its own unique style (the style of Luther's Encheiridion!), the faithful reflection of Scripture's style.

I have called Luther's catechism unique among all the catechisms of Christendom. I have spoken of it as the finest literature of its kind drawn from the fountain of sacred Scripture. It is a supremely beautiful product of the sort Jesus described in Matthew 13 at the end: the work of a houseowner who brings out of his storeroom things old and things new. A better acquaintance with the uniqueness of Luther's catechism may help to strengthen the validity of the fourth thesis and of the one which went before.

The content of Luther's catechism, as you have long known, was partly old and partly new. In selecting the commandments, Creed, and Lord's Prayer as the essential material for Christian instruction, Luther was following an old, old tradition. Luther's fellow reformer, John Brenz (d. 1570) from southern Germany, put it this way: By means of these three chief parts God upheld the church through the dark ages of papal supremacy. Even the form of some of Luther's explanations followed old tradition. A German catechism from the mid 9th century speaks in phrases with a familiar ring.

To the First Petition it says: God's kingdom is always at hand, but we pray as we do that His kingdom may be in us and that the devil's power be far removed from us.

To the Fourth Petition: Every kind of need is included in this bread, whatever our needs for this present life. Hence we should make this request every day as an indication that God may give help every day for these needs.

To the Sixth Petition: God tempts no one, but hinders temptation. We pray in this petition that God will not forsake us as long as we live surrounded by evil.

Again, it is generally known that Luther's catechism addition of special parts on Baptism and the Lord's Supper was new. It may be less well known that the explanations to the Creed, both in the content and in the form, were freshly minted. It had been customary, and has remained so, to explain the Creed according to twelve articles that matched the twelve apostles. Luther changed this and crafted three one-sentence masterpieces. For the first time in church history Luther also integrated all parts of the Third Article, previously treated as independent statements, around the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in his catechism, Luther brought forth from the storeroom of Scripture a sermon and song of things old and new.

The uniqueness of this catechism's style comes to light when it is compared with others. Luther's was not the first catechism to appear among the champions of the newly rediscovered Gospel. Pride of place goes to the catechism of John Brenz. It was a work of 27 pages (compared with Luther's original 14) and it appeared one or two years before Luther's. Its first part was aimed at the youth and began with a series of questions and answers as follows:

Who are you? I am a Christian.

Why are you a Christian? Because I have been baptized.

What is Baptism? ----- and so on.

This introduction was followed by a series of questions on the Creed arranged in the traditional twelve articles, one question concerning God the Father, six concerning God the Son, and five concerning the rest of the Creed. Then the Ten Commandments according to the text in Exodus 20 (with what we call the Conclusion at its Scriptural place after the First Commandment). Then the Lord's Prayer with questions worked into this section on the Gospel and the Lord's Supper.

The second part of Brenz's catechism was aimed at adults. Its style resembles the formal system which follows Luther's Enchiridion in our publications of the catechism. It has the interesting feature that Commandments and Petitions are linked together. The First Petition is accompanied by the Second Commandment, the Second Petition by the Third and Fourth Commandment, and so on.

Then Luther's catechism appeared in 1529, and in the Small Catechism it came with a feature which I found in no other catechisms of the 16th century or beyond. This feature joined pictures with the text. Apparently, the pictures chosen for early editions of Luther's catechism then became standardized. In an example published at Nuremberg, 3" x 5" in size, I found the First Commandment illustrated with the Golden Calf story, the 4th Commandment with Noah's drunkenness, the 5th with Cain and Abel, the Tenth with Joseph and Potiphar's wife, Article I with the creation of Eve, Article II with Jesus on Calvary, the Fourth Petition illustrating the 5000 fed, the Fifth Petition illustrating Christ tempted by Satan who is outfitted in a Viking helmet with horns, and so on. In another of these sixteenth century picture catechisms, the text of each Commandment, Article, and Petition was accompanied by a "Golden Treasury" of Scripture passages.

Though Luther's catechism held the fort in many German principalities during the doctrinal controversies which fractured Lutheranism after the Reformer's death, there were states sympathetic to Melancthon's Calvinistic position on Christ's person and Christ's presence in the sacraments. Note this example of how Luther's catechism began to be recast into formal system and given a Melancthonian slant in the state of Hesse, where Luther once met Zwingli in colloquy at Marburg. Luther's simple song and sermon on the sacraments has been replaced with the following:

Q: What are the holy sacraments? A: Divine actions in which God, through visible signs, confirms and gives promised grace and blessing.

Q: Why were they instituted? A: To confirm faith in divine promises.

Q: What is Baptism? A: Through waterbath and Word, God graciously forgives our sin for Jesus' sake and makes us children and heirs of heaven.

Q: What is the Lord's Supper? A: A divine act in which the Lord Christ is Himself present and with bread and wine grants us His true body to assure us of the forgiveness of sins and the inheritance of heaven.

(And anyone who has made an in-depth study of the theological battles of this age will sense a subtle shift in the theology of the sacraments from Means of Grace to seals of the faith. The deliberate change of the preposition, from "under" to "with" the bread and wine also carries implications of a Calvinizing trend that may be lost on us today.)

The uniqueness of Luther's catechism style shows up most clearly when one examines other catechisms of Christendom from the 16th century and later. The first great rival of Luther's catechism appeared in the Calvinistic-leaning Rhine state of the Palatinate in 1562. Its style conformed to Melancthon's publications on dogmatics. It is the first in a long line of such catechisms where the style is no longer Scripture's, and therefore no longer Luther's, but rather the style of formal system. Since the Heidelberg Catechism is available for our own inspection at the college library, I will spend no more time with it here.

In spite of considerable contact between reformers in the Church of England and the men of Wittenberg regarding matters of doctrine and worship, the Anglican *Catechism of King Edward VI* of 1553 caught nothing of the style of Luther's catechism. It followed the pattern of formal system. Here is a sample of its questions:

What religion do you profess? What is the sum of the Christian religion? What do you think of law? Of Gospel? (Here a lengthy discourse for children on natural law and revealed law.) What do you think of Christ's exaltation? (As part of this answer: "If it were so that Christ might be everywhere present with all, then were He not man but a ghost.")

The *Catechism of King Edward VI* set the tone for later catechisms in England. Here are some questions and answers from the Westminster Catechism of 1708:

Q: What is the chief end of man? A: To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Q: What has God given to glorify and enjoy Him? A: His Word.

Q: What do the Scriptures teach? A: What to believe and what our duty is.

Q: What is God? A: A Spirit.

Q: What are God's decrees? A: What He has ordained.

Q: How does God execute His decrees? A: Through His creation and His providence.

This is formal system. We find it without fail as we move from one catechism to another. Here is a sample from an Anabaptist catechism of the 1600's:

What is your religion? What is man's natural estate? What is man's state of grace? What are the principles of Christian doctrine? (Answer: repentance from dead works, faith to God, the doctrine of Baptism, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, eternal judgment.)

What is the Godhead? What are Holy Ordinances? What is the person of Christ? and so on.

Here is a Methodist catechism divided into three parts, Part I for children of "tender age," Part II for children "above seven years," Part III for "young persons." At all levels formal system is pursued. For example, under Part II:

What is the person of Christ? What is the work of Christ? What are the offices of Christ? What is faith? What is justification? and so on.

From a catechism of the Bohemian Brethren:

Who are you? Why did God make you? What is the basis of salvation? (Answer: faith, hope, love.) What is faith? What are Christ's commandments (Six are named.) What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit? (Seven are named.) What is the Trinity? (Discussion of the Trinity.) etc.

The Roman Catholic Catechism follows the same style, one section on the Apostles Creed in twelve articles, one section on seven sacraments, one section on the Decalogue, one section on the Lord's Prayer. Here is a sample from the "short version" of a Greek Orthodox catechism:

The first part treats of God's existence, which is demonstrated (for the edification of little children) from "self-knowledge, the testimony of conscience, the fact that creation must have a creator, the fact that people have a desire for the good, the fact that people believe in such an existence." After this, a part on the divine essence, then on divine worship, then a section on the Creed (12 articles), on the sacraments, on law, on the Lord's Prayer, all in formal system style.

I also found a Jewish catechism, publication date not given, which contained the 13 articles of the Jewish religion, together with this statement: "Nothing in this book is repugnant to Christianity, as some ignorantly imagine." Its style is formal system:

Who are you? Why did God make you? How can man aspire to God? What is faith? (Answer: the 13 articles.) Which are these? (Answer: 1) God is the cause and end of all, 2) God is simple and uncompounded, 3) God is without a body, 4) God is eternal, 5) God alone is to be worshipped, 6) God has revealed Himself to man, 7) Moses is the supreme prophet, 8) All of Moses was written by divine dictation, 9) Nothing is to be added or taken from the law, 10) God knows man through and through, 11) God deals with man according to his life, 12) God will send the Messiah to restore the Jews to their original kingdom on earth, 13) all will rise from the dead.)

Our survey of other catechisms within and without Christendom was carried, perhaps, to a point of surfeit. If, however, the uniqueness of Luther's catechism has thereby been thrown into sharper focus for us, not merely on the strength of hearsay but of the experience we just had, then this tedium was worth the price.

The greatness of Luther's catechism lies in its naturalness, its childlikeness. It lies in its conformance to Scripture's own style of teaching, of inculcating truth, of bruising selfish stony hearts, of making hearts warm and tender; of wooing and winning with sermons, stories, and sayings; of worshipping with songs of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. Catechism teaching comes alive when it follows the simple, natural Scriptural style. Formal system has a vital place both in teaching and in teacher education. But leave it in the teacher's workshop. Leave its rules and its outlines hidden behind the lesson. Formal system need not show itself in the presentation, and perhaps need not be placed into the children's hands at all. Many years ago a member of our Synod's catechism revision committee at the time told me of the formal system which accompanies our publication of the catechism that Pastor Gausewitz intended it to be an aid for teacher preparation rather than a learning tool used by children. This is hearsay; I can't vouch for its truth.

But system, because it is system, and especially when it is printed and, so to speak, becomes canned—not system as such but canned system threatens to stereotype teaching. It is right there, in everyone's hands. No one denies that it's handy; it's serviceable; it's practical, and it has the imprimatur of correctness. This is all true. But formal system is far removed from life. It lacks the naturalness of life. By its nature, it addresses itself more to the mind than to the whole person. And being canned and ready at hand for consultation by student as well as teacher, it makes more likely not only the canned preparation but also the canned presentation. Thus the learning process is deadened for both teacher and student.

The canned system threatens teacher learning. It inhibits the broadly ranging Scripture study that results in thrilling discoveries for the teacher at all kinds of unexpected corners of Scripture. One finds fresh expressions of familiar truths which can bring innovation and variety and, therefore, freshness, into the teaching. Of course, student learning is affected in proportion to the quality of teacher preparation. If the proclamation of law and Gospel becomes a follow-the-system routine, then what we build up in children hearts also stands in danger of becoming a follow-the-system religion, which is the natural religion we all coddle in our natural heart and for which our old man requires no encouragement.

We might afford the formal system style in teaching grammar or mathematics or science—though here too I do not advocate it—but we cannot afford it in teaching Christian truths. To repeat the fourth thesis:

catechism teaching will be strong and full of life to the degree that it follows its own (Luther's!) unique style, the faithful reflection of Scripture's style. In a recent issue of our theological journal, I again read what has been said many times, namely, that the best help and handbook for teaching Luther's Small Catechism is Luther's Large Catechism. But who uses it? The Large Catechism is the one teaching help which I would heartily recommend not only for teacher preparation but that it, be brought right into the classroom, surely for the upper grades. Its style is that of the Small Catechism. There is formal system in the Large Catechism, but the system lies hidden behind sermon, story, and song. The Large Catechism is a proclamation which addresses itself beyond the mind to the whole person.

The time scheduled for this presentation will not permit much opportunity for what may be on the minds of many of you right now, that the physician should heal himself. Perhaps such matters should be reserved for the smaller group meetings this afternoon. My own general rule would be: let story and sermon predominate in the presentation, followed by questions interspersed with saying and song. Set the story and sermon foursquare into its natural Scriptural setting and thus into the natural context of Bible life. The stronger the knowledge of the historical setting for a Bible event, a Bible saying, a Bible song, the sharper the clarity of its message.

To offer some application of these principles, instead of confronting children with the doctrine of the Trinity at the beginning of the Creed section, my way would be to make this mystery the crown and climax of the study of the three Articles. Let the doctrine of the Trinity be the natural sequel to the truth that God is our Father, that our Savior Jesus Christ is very God and why this is so vital and comforting, and the same for the Holy Spirit, and that, because God is God, our reason cannot grasp Him. Thanks be to God for the mystery of the Trinity. Yes, let this truth be a song instead of an *apriori* doctrinal proposition! I would treat the doctrine of angels not in connection with God's creative activity—that would be the handy formal system place—but with God's guidance and government of affairs in the world. In this context we meet angels in the Bible. This is the natural historical setting. In connection with the First Commandment or with its superscription, "I am the Lord thy God," I would draw on the Psalms, for example, Psalm 139 or Psalm 115, because the entire book of Psalms is an exercise on the First Commandment, the First Article, and the first three Petitions; and if the Psalm or some other Bible chapter lends itself to the exercise, I would play a game with the children to search out the hidden beauties of God's nature or God's providence in the Psalm—Psalm 107 is a good candidate for this—always aiming to help the children learn the stories or sayings or songs so well in connection with the classroom activity that memory work with assigned passages might become less tedious at home.

Surely, this way makes greater demands from teachers for Bible reading. But Scripture is our meat and drink indeed; faith lives upon no other. Neither does Christian teaching. If we do not stay with Scripture study and keep at it but content ourselves with drawing all our water from the cistern of formal system, we and those whom the Lord has placed into our care go to sleep. The more we tell Bible stories in their natural historical setting and the more we explain Bible passages in their natural context, the more truly Biblical our teaching will be. Hab. 2:20 is a powerful Scripture passage: "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him." How much brighter these colors glow, however, when we teach the passage in its context. Show the children how the whole second chapter of Habakkuk rolls to its climax in the 20th verse. We did this one year during my pastoral ministry with children of the 4th and 5th grades. We studied the minor prophets together, and for home assignments they had to draw pictures of the prophets' messages. With Bible reading and picture drawing we also committed outstanding passages to memory with perhaps a little less student rebellion.

The more we see a Bible event or a Bible saying in its natural life context, the more sweetness we teachers extract from it to nourish our own faith life and to pass on the sweetness to our students. Consider the story of the Tribute Money in Mark 12. It will lend itself for teaching the Sixth Petition, or the Fourth Commandment, or some aspect of the Second Article. Draw in as much of the background, as much of the context as you can: the time when this event happened—during Passover Season when Jerusalem was full of a homecoming crowd imbued with homecoming chauvinism; the kind of money Jesus requested and how He wanted it publicly shown; the problem of images on that money; also, what the superscription on that money claimed, namely, that Caesar was a son of a god. The more a teacher is familiar with these natural details so interwoven with the original event, the more this story comes to life and the greater its impact on the hearts of

the hearers. Feature the two-facedness of those Jews who some years earlier went on a rampage, supposedly for conscience reasons, when Caesar's eagles were brought to Jerusalem to be installed near the temple, but who quietly forgot their religious scruples and tolerated Caesar's image where the pocketbook was concerned. In contrast to this duplicity, behold the honesty and fearlessness of Jesus. And though the coin proclaimed Caesar a god, Jesus separated this human being from God; He drew a sharp distinction between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God.

The more we treat the Bible as a history instead of a storehouse of proof passages to support our formal system, the better we serve the Bible.

The more we teach the Bible in its natural setting, the sharper its remarkable reality impacts the ears and hearts of those who hear the Bible.

I have a story to share with you which, possibly, all of you will now hear for the first time. "On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee." Down in Judea weddings were regularly celebrated on Wednesdays. That's when the brass at Jerusalem said weddings should be solemnized, I do not know why. But among the simple rustics down in Galilee, Tuesdays were preferred for weddings. According to their simple view, Tuesday, the third day of the week, was the only day among the six days of creation on which the Genesis record declares, not merely once, as on all the other days, but twice that the things God made on that day were good. Thus, the third day of the week surely had a double goodness about it. Therefore, according to the piety of the Galileans, Tuesday was the best day for two people to be married. Now, of course this tiny sidelight is not vital to the story. However, such details, because they bear simple, matter of fact witness to the historicity of this event, add to its reality. The miracle at Cana is set firmly into a certain time and place and local custom. It is chock full of the natural, unaffected circumstances of life-as-it-is. We have here no romanticizing fantasy of the writer's dream world. The Cana event, from beginning to end, carries an authentic scent of the earth. God be thanked for it. Now our story is done and you must judge whether it held your attention.

What we need for our children is a catechism richly furnished with pictures from Bible history and Christian life—rich, interpretative pictures, not jejune illustrations of which there are too many in our publications. The catechism of which I speak can serve at least the intermediate grades and, perhaps, keep on serving right on up through confirmation. With this catechism we shall include a treasury of Scripture and of hymns, some of the treasury to accompany the text of the Enchiridion, some of the treasury in a sequel to the Enchiridion and possibly also enhanced with pictures. Besides these two parts, our catechism would also include pictures with explanations of other aspects of Christian life, chiefly our formal worship life. Formal worship on the Lord's Day is the one main avenue of regular communication between our people and their Bible, between our people and the Body of Christ. From their childhood, our people should know what they are doing when we come together to worship our Lord. Besides these parts in our catechism, there may be room for other parts, such as short histories of great men and women of the church, and so on. But our catechism ought not grow too large. It should be a booklet to serve for the rest of the owner's life. It will serve at the sickbed. It will bring comfort by word and picture to old age and approaching death. So our catechism shall also include a short treasury of fine prayers for all occasions.

Such a catechism I have proposed and pleaded for over many years, but with no result. Who would be interested in such a catechism? It makes more demands on teachers. Where would it find a market? Who would fund it? Good art is expensive! Furthermore, the present system is deeply entrenched in our ecclesiastical marrow and is supported by vested interests. It undergoes refinement with every generation. And I have no quarrel with it. Let this formal system be retained! Let it serve teachers and, perhaps, children about to be confirmed. Or, better, let it be replaced with a fresh, new formal system aimed solely at teachers, but less prescriptive, more widely ranging, and offering more challenge to teachers by way of more widely reaching Bible study. I leave this to those who have more expertise in such matters.

But for the children, give me Luther's Enchiridion and the Scriptures, accompanied by a treasury of pictures, prayers, and hymns. Let these be learned through and through. Let children be taught the Enchiridion

after its own style. From such teaching let them learn to know the Enchiridion and love the Enchiridion as the faithful reflection of God's song of salvation in the Scriptures. We have Bible knowledge to inculcate, but, with the knowledge, hearts must be won and kept for the Savior. The Holy Spirit has shown us the way in the God-given literature of the Scriptures. Let this Bible way be our guide and model, and, Lord God, grant us your promised increase.

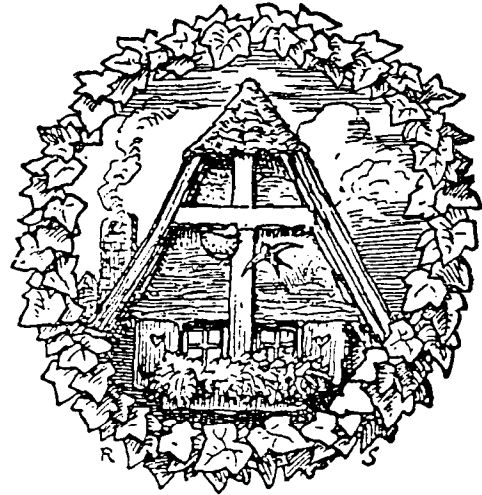


The Sixth Commandment

You shall not commit adultery.

What does this mean?

Out of reverence and love for God we should be pure and practice self-control in all we say and do, and husband and wife should treat each other with love and respect.



Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were brought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

I Cor. 6:19, 20