

Communicating God's Word to Today's Catechumens

By Mark J. Lenz

[This essay is part of a series of essays produced by a joint effort involving Dr. Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for the 450th anniversary of Luther's Large and Small Catechisms in the spring of 1979. Pastor Lenz presented this essay to his Wisillowa Pastoral Conference meeting at Davenport, Iowa, Oct. 2-3, 1978.]

On one side of the table sits Charlie "the Champ," the star half-back for the 8th grade football team. By looking at him you can tell that he'd rather be out with a football. These several hours are the low-point of his week—unless you get him talking about his athletic prowess. Across the table sits Susie "the Siren." False eyelashes, lipstick, two wads of double-bubble contribute to her "wisdom of the world" look. By looking at her you can tell that she'd rather be out with Charlie. Next to Susie sits Grace "the Grease" with the thick-lensed glasses and two books under each arm. Grace can already recite all of the books of the Bible in 21 ½ seconds. Next to Charlie sits Fred "the Flunkee." Fred had to take third grade over. His body looks like 18, but he talks in monosyllables and grunts. Then there's Lester "the Pester," "Silly" Sally, and "Smilin'" Sam. How do you hold the attention of this group for two, maybe three hours? How do you get them all involved? How do you keep from boring Grace and bewildering Fred?

"What's the use? The job is impossible," we might say. "Why try to teach these kids anything? We'll just talk; maybe some good will come out of it." Or "I'll teach the way I always have. It's their fault if they don't get anything out of it." Or "Is all of this really that necessary? After all, confirmation isn't a sacrament; you can't find anything about it in the Bible. Am I breaking my neck in a lost cause?"

Is It Really All That Necessary?

Perhaps we vent our frustrations in those ways, but of course the answer is not to dismiss it all. The answer is not to sit back and let nature take its own course. Too often we hear, "We're going to let Johnny decide for himself about religion later on. We don't want to force him." But as a courageous Christian once told such a parent, "Madam, if you don't train him the devil will!"

We know that catechetical instruction is necessary, but it is important for us to review the reasons once in a while. Faith and the new life do not come about naturally. The Spirit causes these things through the Word. The Holy Spirit works faith in Holy Baptism, but that faith needs to be kept alive and nurtured by the Word. The Church is to spread and grow, but her nature as the "communion of saints" prevents her from receiving into fellowship any who do not share her faith and confession. God's holy Word explicitly commands religious instruction. Jesus impressed upon Peter that he was not only to feed the sheep but also the lambs.

But why have special classes? Isn't the training in the home and the worship service enough? Many churches have taken that route today. Becoming a full-fledged member involves little more than signing up and sitting through a couple of sessions. However, where thorough and orderly instruction in the Christian faith is absent, gaps, misunderstandings, and even false beliefs are inevitable. It might be alarming to realize how many members of Christian churches today do not even possess an adequate understanding of the very way of salvation.

Catechetical instruction is vital! "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Ro 10:17). Our responsibility is to use the means which God has given so that the Holy Spirit might cause our young people to lay hold on Christ Jesus by faith and all the blessings of His fellowship. That's what it is all about. It is not our purpose simply to drill them for the performance of churchly functions. Nor are we simply to inculcate an intellectual conception of the pure doctrine. Our training must always aim to establish a personal relationship between the young and Christ, their blessed Savior, or it has no right to exist.

In relation to this ultimate aim other things are taught of course. We want to train our youth for an intelligent and active participation of worship. We want to train them for the intelligent and personal use of Scripture, something which strangely enough seems to have received minimal attention in the Church of the Reformation. We want to train our young people for the special task which God has given His people on earth, that of bringing the Gospel of forgiveness to the straying and lost sheep, wherever they may be. The Christian Church has a history which must be introduced to our youth if their own Church is to be dear and precious to them, if they are to understand the factors which divide her from others and if they are going to take a firm stand. Every congregation has a constitution which ought to be explained so that the young understand their own congregation and can take an active part in the planning and work that needs to be done on the local scene. We want our young people to understand how God would have them live no matter what their station in life may be. We want to show them how they can live lives of gratitude to God and love toward their fellow man. We want to encourage many of them to enter full-time work in God's Kingdom.

How Did They Do It in the Early Church?

That's a mighty big assignment! How can we ever hope to accomplish such goals? First there are always lessons to be learned from past methods, and procedures.

Jesus constantly taught His often slow-learning disciples by means of parables, practical examples, illustrations, discourses, and questions. His question, "Who do men say that I the Son of Man am?" (Mt 16:13) is a beautiful example of this last method. Already from the beginning of His ministry Jesus was training His disciples to "become fishers of men." The Savior designated the means of discipling the nations, i.e., testimony concerning Him, baptism in the name of the Triune God, and the inculcation of all His commands (Mt 28:19, 20).

Although Jesus nowhere explicitly stated that instruction was a necessary part of the preparation for baptism, it was regularly required in the early Christian Church, at least as far as the Gentiles were concerned. Among the Jews, acquainted with the Old Testament prophecies as they were, all that was required as a condition for baptism was the confession that Jesus was the promised Savior. We notice that Peter's catechetical work on the day of Pentecost was rather brief, and Philip's way of dealing with the eunuch of Ethiopia, a Jewish proselyte, involved little more. But for the Gentiles there needed to be more. The method for instructing them was probably basically that employed by the Jewish missionaries in training proselytes.

The chief features of the proselyte catechumenate were as follows: When anyone had declared his willingness to become a member of the covenant people, he first received instruction in regard to the God that had created the world and wondrously guided Israel. Thereby he took upon himself "the yoke of the Kingdom of God." This was followed by instruction in regard to right morals based chiefly on Leviticus 18 and 19; its substance may still be found in the "Two Ways" of the *Didache*. Accepting this ethical standard, the proselyte submitted to "the yoke of the commandments." Probably an eschatological element treating of final judgment and Israel's ultimate glory was also included in this instruction. The preparation was followed by the tripartite act of reception: 1. Circumcision (followed by a feast); 2. the Shebilah, or baptism by immersion; 3. a sacrifice, or, in the dispersion, a fasting and alms.¹

A careful examination of the New Testament assures us that a certain amount of instruction was given. Paul had instructed the Thessalonians concerning morals: "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus" (1 Th 4:1,2). Paul had taught the Corinthians concerning the chief facts of the Gospel: "For I delivered unto you first of all

¹ M. Reu, *Catechetics* (Chicago, 1931), pp 17-18.

that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3,4). All the fundamental doctrines were taught, however, more and more: “Let us leave behind the ABC of Christ and not lay again a foundation of repentance from dead works, faith in God, teaching about baptisms, laying on hands raising the dead, and everlasting judgment. But let us go on to be mature” (He 6:1,2 AAT). The completeness of instruction in the early church is also evident from the *Didache* containing the following parts: 1–6 Instruction, 7 Baptism, Lord’s Prayer, Lord’s Supper.

The catechumenate of the early church was designed primarily for the preparation of adults for membership. But what about the instruction of children who had been baptized in infancy or children who had not been baptized for that matter? Such instruction seems to have been carried on, for the most part, in the Christian home. No doubt the example of Israel of old was followed where the parents were expected to train their children. God had said, “Thou shalt teach them (i.e., these words) diligently unto thy children” (Dt 6:6,7). In Jewish homes reading was taught, and the Ten Commandments, some of the Psalms, and important prayers were committed to memory. Often the Scriptures were read in the family circle. “From a child,” Paul writes to Timothy, “thou has known the Scriptures” (2 Tm 3:15). The early Christian homes acquired the same customs. Copies of the Bible were supplied to Christian homes, and in some areas people were visited by Christians who would read the Bible to them and their children. Though the instruction given in this way may have been somewhat incomplete, the prevailing Christian attitude in the home no doubt filled in the gaps.

The Graded Catechumenate

By the end of the second century a significant change took place in the life of the church. The period of rapid general growth and the persecutions began. These conditions caused the church to take great care in the reception of new adult members. She rejected those who did not seem able to meet the new demands and subjected all others to a lengthy period of probation and preparation. More stringent rules of admission into membership were adopted, and a graded catechumenate was developed.

In Alexandria entrance into the catechumenate was preceded by a course of instruction. During this time the catechumen received general information concerning Christianity and was observed as to his sincerity and uprightness. When the catechumen had satisfactorily passed this preliminary stage he was advanced into the catechumenate proper and began to attend the worship services. This two-stage catechumenate was also known at Antioch where transition from the first to the second stage was observed by prayer and the laying on of hands.

At the beginning of the fourth century the graded catechumenate was universally recognized. However, instead of the preliminary stage used earlier, all applicants were required to pass an examination in order to enter the catechumenate. After remaining here for some time they applied for baptismal instruction which ended usually around Easter time with the first Communion. The entire course seems to have lasted between two and three years.

By this time, for whatever reasons, most parents had begun to neglect their sacred duty of training their children in the home. In his writings from this time Chrysostom discusses the problem thoroughly. He appeals to congregations to take seriously this most urgent and essential of all tasks. He suggests that Christian parents read the Scriptures together with their children, attend worship services, and ponder the thoughts of the sermon together with them. So concerned was Chrysostom that he wrote a book on how fathers ought to teach their children Bible History. In this book he laid down some of the most fundamental principles of teaching. He wrote, “The stories shall be selected according to the mental capacity of the children, they shall be presented in the form of free and vivid narratives with due attention to the limited range of the children’s concepts, in the teaching process the cooperation of the children shall be engaged, and the religious and moral truths of each story shall be set forth.”²

² *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57.

But Chrysostom and others were able to reach only small numbers of people, and on the whole, indifference advanced too swiftly to be checked. As truly Christian living decreased in the church, faithful instruction of the children vanished from the home.

At The Time of Luther

During the Middle Ages things continued to deteriorate. Elaborate, but meaningless, initiation ceremonies and strange practices developed. It was not until the time of the Reformation that anything positive came about. The reformers realized once again the important teaching function of the church and understood evangelically and interpreted biblically the instructional materials handed down through the ages. As in nearly all phases of the Reformation it was Luther who did most of the work in this regard. His Small Catechism was the result of intense pastoral occupation with this matter over a period of thirteen years.

In 1516 Luther preached on the Ten Commandments and wrote a brief exposition of them to help his parishioners prepare for confession. By 1520 Luther had swept aside the whole mass of auxiliary material handed down from the Middle Ages. He said, "God so ordered it that the ordinary Christian who is unable to read the whole Bible, should be taught the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, for these three parts comprehend all the essentials of Christian knowledge."³ In 1524 Luther issued a proclamation directing all to attend to the duty of Christian training. He said in part, "Much money has been squandered on indulgences, masses, pilgrimages, and the like. Oh, that but a part of this money might be spent upon the training of the children."⁴ Luther commissioned Justus Jonas and Agricola to prepare a catechism, but when they failed to produce one Luther undertook the project himself and in 1529 published what came to be known as the Large Catechism. In the same year the Small Catechism was published. The original edition of this work had the following contents: 1. preface to pastors and preachers; 2. text and exposition of the five chief parts; 3. morning and evening prayers, and the blessing and thanksgiving at table; 4. a selection of appropriate "passages for various holy orders and conditions of men;" 5. the marriage booklet.

In the same year Luther published a Bible history book for the Christian home called the *Passionale*. This was a collection of 49 pictures with explanatory texts; 11 of them were from the Old Testament, the remainder from the New Testament. No less than 15 pictures illustrated phases of the passion of our Lord, hence the name of the book. The book was written so that parents might have a means of instructing their children in the Bible. In the preface Luther says that he collected the pictures and supplied the texts "chiefly for the sake of the children and the simple folks who will remember the sacred stories more readily when you use pictures and illustrations in teaching."⁵ As a matter of fact Luther had also inserted biblical pictures in his Small Catechism and had advised the teacher to use many biblical examples showing how God punishes the wicked and rewards the godly.

Luther had many other things to say about the method of instructing children. As far as the Catechism was concerned Luther said that the pastor should first take up only the text proper for the purpose of impressing it upon the memory. In order to avoid confusion he should never introduce changes in the text. When the children have become familiar with the words then the pastor must explain them. For this purpose the pastor may use Luther's explanation or some other brief explanation. Again Luther says he should not alter even a single syllable. When this explanation has been mastered then the Large Catechism or any number of other books should be studied. Luther advises that the pastor spend a great deal of time on such Commandments or other parts as are neglected or misunderstood by his people.

If the people do not respond properly or seem to be ungrateful, Luther in typical fashion advises the pastor that "Christ himself will be our reward if we labor with fidelity;" those who refuse instruction or are ungrateful are to be told that "they deny Christ and are not Christians; such persons shall not be admitted to the

³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 97.

Lord's Table, nor present a child for baptism, nor enjoy any of our Christian privileges, and are to be sent back to the Pope and his agents, and, indeed, to Satan himself."⁶

How Students Learn

We can learn much from a study of the past, but in "Communicating God's Word to Today's Catechumens" we also need to understand our students and how they learn. In Christian education success is completely in the hands of the Holy Spirit as He works saving faith, enlightens human minds, inculcates Christian attitudes, and produces desirable actions through God's powerful Word. But that does not mean that we should overlook or fail to acquire as much knowledge as possible about our students, how they learn, and various methods that we can use in teaching them.

Educators and psychologists have discovered many things that are good for us to consider and use in our teaching. They have learned that since man is a physical being with the various senses bringing messages to the brain it is important to organize teaching materials and methods so that as many senses as possible can transmit impressions to the mind. These impressions are strengthened when there is a chance to respond.

It has also been discovered that man in isolation does not learn as well as when he is with other people. In the company of others he is introduced to new ideas and insights. It therefore would seem to be important to permit the members of the class to bring into the learning situation their previous experiences, attitudes, and thoughts by means of discussion and by encouraging them to ask pertinent questions.

Learning is also helped if there is a sense of purpose. A teacher needs to learn the actual concerns and goals of his pupils, but he also needs to make them aware of needs that may not be felt, like the forgiveness of sins. He needs to see the value of each lesson for the fulfillment of the pupils' needs. He needs to plan, organize, and present the lessons so that these needs are met. He needs to evaluate periodically the progress which his pupils have made toward their goals. Doing these things will result in a sense of purpose.

It has been said that "the heart may have reasons of which the mind is unaware." The whole person, not just the "mind," is involved in the learning process. Experts in the field of education therefore say that a teacher does well to provide a healthy emotional situation for learning, to make the lesson intellectually satisfying, to appeal to the student's will, and to apply the lesson to the learner's social relations and life.

Learning is always built on previous experience. Each student brings his own experiences to the learning situation, and this in turn leads to new experiences. The sum total of his experience, it is said, constitutes learning. Some of that which has been learned in the past may be incorrect or undesirable. A teacher needs the patience to help a pupil unlearn the bad and learn the good.

Learning is affected to a large extent by the emotions. Some people have left the church because the Gospel was distorted by the unloving personality of their teacher or the unpleasant learning climate of their class. "Not justifiable reasons," we say. Perhaps, but it does impress upon us the importance of establishing and maintaining a pleasant and friendly learning climate. Threats and punishment are not as effective for learning as are encouragement and rewards.

Learning is always aided by planned instruction. The average individual needs the discipline of directed learning. (If you've ever taken a correspondence course you know what that is all about!) The open classroom concept has not been found to work very well with most individuals. A teacher needs to provide constant encouragement, stimulation, and order.

And then there is the whole business of motivation. If a teacher could just motivate the pupils, everything else would probably fall into line. But how does one go about that? Gospel motivation—"We love Him, because He first loved us"—needs to be behind it all, but there are other things to consider. Man is so constituted that he needs certain things in order to keep on living: food, sleep, air, water, etc. Then too each individual acquires his own set of specific wants. A wise teacher will take these things into consideration if he wishes to motivate his students. Emotions such as fear, happiness, anger, love, and gratitude are a source of

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

motivation. If students are filled with love and gratitude to God for His gracious blessings, they will want to learn more about Him and how they can live for Him. If they are filled with anger, fear, or frustration, they won't want to learn. Because man is a social being, learning is also stimulated by social motives. A person likes to feel successful in his relations with others whether by self-assertion, approval, or security. A teacher needs constantly to be aware of this. He needs to encourage and approve appropriate behavior, and he needs to provide opportunities for students to gain class acceptance in a positive manner. An activity in itself is a motive for completing the project. Finally, a person's habits motivate him. That's why a teacher needs to instill good habits.

Purposeful activity is an aid to learning. Oral instructions on how to use a Bible concordance need to be followed by actual experience.

Children mature at different rates, and learning needs to be adjusted to their particular level. It wouldn't make much sense to talk to first-graders about Christian marriage. On the other hand it may be necessary to provide more than just a superficial treatment of some things in catechetical instruction. The secret is discovering how mature the children really are. That can be a "fooler" sometimes!

What about giving tests? Although the goal of catechetical instruction is not achieving a 4.0 grade point average, tests can be very helpful in determining the students' progress. The students can gain a sense of achievement as they see the progress they have made, and they can see the gaps in their learning that still need to be filled. Care needs to be taken that a student does not feel that his Christianity is being graded, e.g. "I'm a B + Christian." That can be avoided if special care is taken.

Successful teaching also depends upon what is being taught, whether facts, concepts, attitudes, skills, or desirable actions. Dale Griffin in his book, *Teaching the Youth of the Church*, offers some helpful suggestions as to how to teach for specific outcomes:

The Learning of Facts (e.g. the six chief parts of the Catechism)

1. Organize facts into appropriate, logical learning units.
2. Try to secure the correct answer on the first try.
3. Reward and reinforce correct responses.
4. Practice until the facts are firmly established.
5. Help the student evaluate his responses.

The Learning of Concepts (e.g. God's providence)

1. Organize concepts into logical learning units.
2. Encourage and guide independent thinking.
3. Present realistic experiences along with concepts.
4. Define the meaning of the concept clearly and concisely.
5. Provide for applications of the concept.
6. Help your pupils evaluate the adequacy of their understanding of concepts being studied.

The Cultivation of Desirable Christian Attitudes (e.g. attitude toward the government)

1. Identify the attitudes to be acquired.
2. Define and clarify the meaning of the attitude.
3. Provide experiences that cultivate the desirable attitude.
4. Provide identification figures for the learner.
5. Provide pleasant emotional experiences that reinforce the desired attitude.
6. Use group techniques to facilitate understanding and acceptance.

The Cultivation of Skills (e.g. reading the Bible or witnessing for the Savior)

1. Analyze the skill before you try to guide the learner.
2. Demonstrate the skill in use.
3. Guide the initial trials by the pupils.
4. Provide adequate and appropriate learning sessions.
5. Space (distribute) the practice rather than mass it into one session.

6. Provide the pupil with the results; correct incorrect practices.
7. Help the learner evaluate his responses.

The Development of Desirable Action Patterns (e.g. living a truly Christian life)

1. Identify acceptable action patterns.
2. Motivate your pupils to perceive the value and importance of desirable action patterns.
3. Demonstrate by your own attitudes and actions that these action patterns are desirable and important to you.
4. Inhibit undesirable actions.
5. Reward (praise, etc.) the evidence of good action patterns.

What Materials Shall We Use?

As we communicate God's Word to today's youth, we need also to be concerned about the materials, the textbooks, etc. that we are going to use. It is self-evident that we will use Luther's Small Catechism. But there are other things that are desirable to use.

Our Synod's *Bible History for Christian Schools* would seem to be a necessary companion to the Catechism—especially in congregations without Christian Day Schools. Acquaintance with the people, places, and events of the Bible is essential to an understanding of the doctrines of the Bible. How often isn't reference to a story from the Bible received with a blank and unknowing look?

The Lutheran Hymnal is a necessary textbook too. Not only do we want our children to understand the liturgies so that they can worship intelligently and actively, but we also want them to know and appreciate our great Lutheran hymns and to become acquainted with the other valuable features of the Hymnal.

A copy of *You and Your Synod* is an invaluable textbook. One loves and appreciates only what one knows. In this day and age of cults and denominations of every kind and description our young people need to know about their own Wisconsin Synod and its uncompromising confession of the truth of God's Word. Our young people will not gladly join our church nor actively advocate her interests unless they have been made acquainted with what she is and what she stands for.

A copy of the congregation's constitution is also a very important item, especially during the final year of catechetical instruction. In addition to everything else we want to train our young people so that they might take active roles in the activities and functions of the congregation. From the constitution they can become acquainted with the various officers and committees. They can understand the important qualifications for called workers. They can become familiar with the importance of becoming a voting member. And in general they can learn about all the different ways in which the Lord's work can be done by them in their congregation.

Of course, a Bible is imperative for each member of the class. But a Bible isn't much good if our pupils don't know how to use it. Training in the use of the Bible is a most important part of catechetical instruction for a variety of reasons: "1. The Bible remains with a person when the voice of a teacher has died away and when other books have been discarded. 2. Personal Bible reading is essential for vital Christianity. Only hearing the Word cannot take the place of personal reading. 3. The Bible is intended for all people—not just the clergy. 4. Dynamic lay leadership requires Bible reading and study. The priesthood of all believers demands much of the individual Christian. Familiarity with the Scriptures is a must for Christian leadership. 5. Firsthand knowledge of the Bible strengthens conviction. People who take their knowledge of religion only from other people are not as likely to be rooted so deeply and firmly in the Word as are those who regularly approach the Bible directly."⁷

One of the goals of our catechetical instruction surely ought to be developing in our students an affection for the Bible as God's Word. Many people have an inferiority complex when it comes to the Bible. That we need to help our students overcome by giving them meaningful experiences with the Bible. But how do we go about doing that? We need to give our students the necessary handling skills. The concept of the Bible as

⁷ Alan Hart Jahsmann, *Leading Children into the Bible* (St. Louis, 1950), pp. 13-14.

a library can prove helpful. We need to encourage them to read and study the Bible daily with a purpose always in mind. We need to emphasize personal use of the Bible in their daily lives.

A number of methods have been suggested. One is the “read the entire Bible in a year” method. This often leads to superficial reading and may even lead to pride in having accomplished so monumental a task. Other methods are much better, e.g. allowing the child to read selections at random, reading and discussing entire books, focusing attention on units of thought, studying selected chapters, using the Bible in the studying of a topic, and searching the Bible for the answer to life’s problems. Activities that can lead children into the Bible are often very good. Here are some examples: “Bible drills, contests, riddles, tests, and games; map work; making booklets about some Bible character; depicting Bible stories through art projects, such as murals; dramatizing Bible scenes; making a museum of Bible miniatures; preparing Bible scrapbooks; keeping a bulletin board of news about the Bible; developing programs for church festival days; constructing a miniature building such as Solomon’s temple; playing Bible charades or Bible baseball; observing Bible Week with an exhibit of Bibles, Bible posters, and Bible pictures; and comparing Bible verses in different versions.”⁸

Often confirmands are given a Bible or a hymnal on the day of Confirmation with their name inscribed in gold and various and sundry fancy trappings. That is a custom that could well be transformed. It is vital that each student, on the first day of class, have not only a Catechism, but also his own Bible (and hymnal if possible). It is to be hoped that each student might also have his own Bible history book, a copy of *You and Your Synod*, and a copy of the congregation’s constitution. If we really want to train our young people to be active and concerned members of the church at large and the Christian congregation these materials would seem to be essential.

We have discussed general methods for teaching specifics such as facts and concepts. We have considered methods of getting our students into the Bible. But we also need to consider the methods that we regularly employ in the classroom situation in general.

The Question-And-Answer Method

Probably the most commonly used procedure in religious instruction is the question-and-answer method. We refer to it as the “catechetical method” although the word “catechetical” literally means “to instruct or teach by word of mouth.” Melancthon is the one responsible for its use in reference to the question-and-answer method. Be that as it may, it is a most effective method of teaching. From little on children ask questions, and they get used to answering questions put to them by their parents and others, e.g. “Did you brush your teeth yet?” As mentioned earlier this was one of the teaching techniques regularly used by our Savior. “What went ye out into the wilderness to see?” (Mt 11:7). “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?” (Mk 3:4). Teaching through questioning became common practice in the early church. Luther’s Catechism is of course in the form of questions and answers.

However, as we all know, it isn’t a simple matter. Questions need to be worded clearly so that the pupil understands. Questions need to be specific and to the point. Questions need to be geared to the comprehension level of the pupil. Care needs to be taken that the question cannot always be answered by a simple “yes” or “no” lest it become simply a guessing game. One needs to be sure that the question does not give away the answer. There must be sufficient time for the pupils to think after the question is asked. The entire class needs to become involved, not just the couple of students who are quick to answer every question. The habit of repeating the question and/or the answer needs to be avoided. The habit of recasting the question is a danger. E.g., “What is the function of—What purpose do the means of grace—Of what use are the means of grace to the Church?” Questioning cannot be all one-sided either. The pupils need to feel free to ask questions. Rambling questions need to be avoided lest the continuity of thought be lost. The question-and-answer method dare not become too stiff and formal, nor ought the questioning become slow, dull, tedious, or filled with inordinately long pauses.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Not only the art of questioning but also the various kinds of questions are important. Analytical questions are used to break down a whole into its component parts. This whole may be a sentence, an answer in the Catechism, or a Bible passage. Developing questions lead the student from known facts to previously unknown facts which are finally grouped into a whole. Testing questions are quite similar to examination questions, but they are used differently. At the beginning of the lesson they tell a teacher how much the pupils already know. During the course of the lesson they help the teacher realize how much the pupils have understood thus far. At the end of the lesson they serve the purpose of fixing the facts in the pupils' minds. Review or examination questions help the pupils remember what they have learned previously. Impossible questions stimulate thought and help to fix a fact firmly in the mind. E.g., "When did Elijah die?" Then also there are other types of questions such as: cause-and-effect questions (Why were the apostles able to speak in numerous foreign tongues on the day of Pentecost?), comparison questions (How would you compare the character of John with that of Peter?), selective recall questions (Which prophets worked in the Northern Kingdom?), summary questions (What would you include in a brief account of the history of Judah from the death of Solomon to the Babylonian Captivity?), and general thought-provoking questions (How did Peter, after the Lord's resurrection, repeatedly show his great love for Jesus?).

Other Methods

But "variety is the spice of life." The use of variety in teaching methods and procedures not only makes teaching more enjoyable but also increases the interest of the pupils. The question-and-answer method will probably be used most, but no single method should ever be used to the exclusion of others. When pupils are subjected to a constant barrage of questioning, it can become boring and learning can become blurred. Jesus regularly used stories, parables, discussion, and lecture in conjunction with questions. The parable of the Good Samaritan was followed by the question: "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?" (Lk 10:36)

The lecture method has been much maligned by some, but it can serve very worthwhile purposes. The lecture is useful for introducing or summarizing a new lesson, or for providing additional information in the middle of a lesson. It is the best method of presenting new material in the least amount of time. However, to be effective, the content of the lecture needs to be presented logically and in a pleasing style, and there also should be ample time for comments and questions.

The story method is probably the oldest teaching procedure in existence. God instructed His people in the Old Testament to tell their children of the marvelous deeds which the Lord has performed in the course of their history. Surely this method can be used occasionally in catechetical instruction either to teach a pertinent Bible story or to illustrate a point of doctrine with a story from the past or a story from daily life. We can learn a lot about the story method from Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. Notice that the story is not packed with minor details; that it moves, is brief, and to the point. Likewise when we use this method we will want to tell the story in simple, forceful and correct language with proper vocal and facial expressions and gestures that are appropriate.

The group-solving of a relevant problem can be an effective method. In connection with the study of the Fourth and Fifth Commandments this problem might be discussed: "Is it wrong for a Christian to be a soldier?" Background information needs to be offered, resources need to be suggested, and directions for study need to be given. After the students have obtained the information, the problem is discussed and the common consensus, based upon God's Word, is written on the chalkboard.

A similar method for large groups is the "Phillips Method," named after J. Donald Phillips. The main topic or problem is written on the chalkboard, subtopics are suggested by the class and listed, and the class is divided into several committees which meet separately. Each group considers one of the subtopics and elects a secretary to record and report on the main points of the discussion. After a certain period of time the teacher asks for a report from each group, and the main points are placed on the chalkboard. Each subtopic is then

discussed, and at the conclusion the secretaries of all groups meet to formulate a general report to present to the entire class.

Related discussion methods are: 1. *Committee Work*. Small committees are formed to research various problems and then report their findings to the entire class. 2. *Panel Discussion*. A panel of from three to six students is given a topic for special study. Each student investigates one phase of the topic and after thorough preparation they present a panel discussion, with one student serving as moderator. Other members are invited to ask questions after the panel presentation and discussion. 3. *Forum Discussion*. Two or four students select different views concerning a controversial subject. After advance preparation each student presents his views before the class. The speakers then question each other briefly, after which the moderator invites the entire class to submit questions to a specific speaker. A representative of each view concludes with a brief summary. 4. *Symposium*. Several students give short talks or statements on an assigned topic or problem, and discussion follows.

The advantage of these or similar discussion methods is that every member of the class is involved and is provided with an opportunity to express his thoughts and opinions. It is primarily a pupil activity. The teacher's function is to see that the discussion does not stray, that eventually it leads to a proper conclusion and that everybody stays busy and involved.

Role playing can be an exciting change of pace if you have willing and able pupils. Characters in Bible stories may be impersonated in order to make events more real. Real life situations, such as witnessing to an unchurched friend, can be dramatized with only a little rehearsal if any at all. This technique helps the teacher understand his students' attitudes and knowledge, and the student gains understanding and sympathy for the situations and people involved.

Projects can be an invaluable teaching method, particularly for those who are more "mechanically inclined" than they are intellectually gifted. Building a model of Herod's temple, or a synagogue, or your church building, or dressing a doll as a high priest will probably have more impact on some students than many a class period.

Students can be assigned topics for research to be concluded with an oral report presented to the class. Books and magazine articles can be suggested for collateral reading with a report either handed in or presented to the class.

An ideal teaching method is to use experiences in the students' lives as learning opportunities. Perhaps one of the students is absent because of illness. That is an ideal time to have another student say a special prayer for him. Perhaps a student has been trying to get his friend to come to church. It is surely time well spent to help him learn what to say to his friend. We need to grasp every opportunity to help our students learn by living. "Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only" (Ja 1:22).

Audio/visual aids are certainly valuable. Bible maps and a chalkboard are indispensable; an overhead projector is something to purchase as soon as possible. There are some really fine filmstrips to be had through the Audio/Visual Aids Department of our Synod. Filmstrips on Bible lands, books of the Bible, Bible characters, and the six chief parts of the Catechism are available. Like anything else they should not be used too often, but they do offer change of pace, and they can be very profitable if they are previewed and discussed afterward.

What about the mechanics of the instruction period itself? A pre-session of perhaps fifteen minutes can be a good time to get to know the students, to hear recitations, or for the students to browse in the church library or at the reading table. Punctuality is essential; it is the first indication that this is very important business. The devotion might consist of a Scripture reading by one of the students and a prayer prepared beforehand by one of the students and checked carefully by the teacher. A person might want to sing a hymn and acquaint the students with one of the liturgies, or one could read responsively the versicles and the propers from the previous Sunday or a psalm. This is a good time to teach the importance of worship and proper worship behavior. A teaching situation exists when all the students are ready and attentive. This means of course that all conversation has ceased and that all possible disturbances have been removed. It is probably a good idea to take care of the

memory work first lest some spend their time worrying about reciting instead of listening and participating in the lesson.

Memorization

That raises a point that needs to be considered. Memorizing is something that just isn't done very much in school anymore. That means that we have to work all the harder at it, because it is extremely important. Memorizing Bible passages, hymn verses, prayers, and the Catechism text supplies the Christian with an ever ready source of comfort, a weapon in the face of temptation, and a wonderful means of summarizing and sharing his faith. As a boy of twelve, Jesus in the temple must have been able to quote a great deal of Scripture from memory.

What can we do to make memorizing effective? First we need to show our students the purpose and the value of memorizing by referring to the example of Jesus and the experiences of Christians. We need to make reasonable assignments, so that it doesn't become burdensome or even impossible for the student to master them. We need to recognize individual differences in children. Some just aren't able to memorize as much as others. We need to assign material which has been studied and explained. Vain repetition of words doesn't serve any worthwhile purpose. We need to encourage our students to think of the meaning of the passage as they read it, to divide a passage into its component parts, and to spend a little time every day memorizing instead of "cramming" it all in on the evening before class.

Recitation of memory work in class need not be in the form of a complete recitation by every pupil. One might start the Second Article for example, another might continue it, and a third might finish it. Or the entire class might recite it together. By watching the pupils' lips the teacher can soon tell who knows it and who doesn't. Or the entire class might be asked to write the memory work.

The Bible ought to be used in every class period, for it, finally, is *the* textbook.

It has often been said that good teaching depends on good discipline. That is absolutely true! But good discipline doesn't necessarily mean "birching" and "dunce caps." If the students fear and hate the teacher, it doesn't lead to voluntary and satisfying learning. Students need to understand that God demands that they respect and obey their teacher; that the teacher functions in place of their parents; and that the study of God's Word is sacred and demands an attitude of reverence. But all of this needs to be motivated by the love of God in Christ Jesus. They need to understand that disobedience or misconduct grieves their heavenly Father who loved them so much that He sent His Son into the world to die for their sins.

In discipline as well as in many other things "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." A teacher needs constantly to see and hear what is happening in the class. When the pupils notice that the teacher always knows what is going on, they will be less inclined to cause trouble. A sudden look at a pupil, a pause by the teacher, or a question directed to a pupil who is on the verge of causing trouble is much more effective than a scolding after the offense has taken place. If there is persistent misconduct, the parents need to be contacted. If that doesn't work, after due consultation with the Education Committee, the pupil may have to be asked to take the class at a time when he displays more maturity and seriousness.

Conclusion

"Communicating God's Word to Today's Catechumens" is an assignment from our Savior Himself who says, "Feed My Lambs." It is something which deserves our very best efforts. But how often don't we need to pray *Luther's Sacristy Prayer* also in regard to this most important work?

Lord God, Thou hast made me a pastor and teacher in the Church. Thou seest how unfit I am to administer rightly this great and responsible office; and had I been without Thy aid and counsel I would surely have ruined it all long ago. Therefore do I invoke Thee. How gladly do I desire to yield and consecrate my heart and mouth to this ministry. I desire to teach the congregation. I,

too desire ever to learn and to keep Thy Word my constant companion and to meditate thereupon earnestly. Use me as Thy instrument in Thy service. Only do not Thou forsake me, for if I am left to myself, I will certainly bring it all to destruction. Amen.

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