

# The Catechism

by Harold E. Warnke

## I. What are the main facts in the life of Dr. Martin Luther, the author of our Small Catechism?

(1—Numbers refer to the questions in the 1956 WELS edition of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism.)

**A. Dr. Martin Luther's first 15 years.** (The notes that follow are based to a great extent on material taken from E.G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; 1950; and from that excellent biography by Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand*; New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press; 1950; other authorities were also consulted including J.H. Merle D'Aubigne, *The Life and Times of Martin Luther*; Chicago: Moody Press; no date.)

Unquestionably, Dr. Luther was a tremendously gifted man. One of America's Lutheran scholars said: "Dr. Luther was an infinitely greater man than you think he was." Indeed, he has, together with Abraham and St. Paul, been called one of the three great men that the Church has ever known.

Yet, in all of our discussion about Dr. Luther we must continually show our students the truth of I Cor. 15:10: By the grace of God he was what he was. He was only an instrument used by Almighty God to cleanse the Church of its heresies and to restore the purity of the Gospel. Therefore we must be careful to give all glory for the incomparable Reformation blessings to our God who alone made it all possible.

Martin Luther's parents, Hans and Margarethe, were able, hard-working, pious, peasant people, who lived in Eisleben. There Luther was born on November 10, 1483, and baptized the next day in the Tower Room of St. Peter's Church. The same baptismal font in which he was baptized was restored in 1827; it is still used in the present St. Peter and Pauls Kirche. He was named Martin after the saint of the day.

The family moved to the walled city of Mansfeld in the summer of 1484, possibly because it was in the heart of the mining region, and Hans was a miner. Mansfeld was a lovely town with the church and school next to each other. At this time the parents were still somewhat poor, yet they were thrifty, respected, and gradually became more prosperous, so much so that Hans finally was in business for himself. Eventually he left a rather sizable estate. The home life was strict, but good.

Luther started attending school in Mansfeld, possibly when he was about 4 1/2 years of age. His ability was soon recognized (at a later date people would have such a high opinion of him that 12 table companions recorded many of his conversations at the dinner table, and they became the famous *Tischreden*).

The school at Mansfeld was a *Trivialschule*, where grammar, logic, and rhetoric were taught. The beginners concentrated on learning elementary Latin-forms, also many parts of the liturgy and the propers. The second group had more formal Latin training, and the third group studied advanced Latin grammar, after which they were ready for the university. The great objective of all this early training was to teach the students how to speak Latin, since this was the language of the church, of law, and scholarship, and the like.

Music, especially church music and the theory of music, was also a part of the curriculum. In rhetoric good literature, especially from the ancient writers, was read and memorized. A wooden donkey was hung around the neck of the student who ranked lowest at the end of each morning, and this was recorded so that he could receive the proper whipping at the designated time. Mansfeld probably had a fairly good school, although opinions differ. It was a religious school to make students good Catholics. Students learned various parts of the liturgy; they sang Psalms and hymns; they were surrounded by churches, monasteries, priests, shrines, and the like. However, even at this early date every time that Luther heard the name of Christ, he regarded Him as a terrible Judge. Even at an early age he often suffered from acute religious depression. Everywhere he was confronted with the idea that monasticism was the sure way to heaven.

Early in 1497 Luther was sent to Magdeburg school for one year by his financially able father, undoubtedly because it had excellent schools. Magdeburg was a city of approximately 13,000 population with many chapels and churches, with a cathedral the center of religious life; there were many relics; and it is

possible that Dr. Luther saw his first Bible at the school here. He learned that there was much more in God's Word besides the familiar Epistles and Gospels.

### **B. Martin Luther's schooling and life at Eisenach and in the home of Ursula Cotta.**

In 1498 Luther's parents decided, for some unknown reason, to send him to school in Eisenach. Even though it was a small town of approximately 2,000 population, situated in a hilly country, with the Wartburg Castle on one of the hills, Dr. Luther loved the city; it had a highly religious atmosphere with three churches, and an estimated one of every ten people belonged to the clergy. The church controlled the wealth; there was a good school, highly valued by Luther; and there he continued the study of Latin, literature, poetic verse, and public speaking. Even though his father was financially comfortable, Luther begged and sang for food, a student custom ("A little bread for the love of God").

Here Luther met and stayed at the home of Ursula Cotta, "a pious Shunamite," as he later called her, the wife of Kunz Cotta, a prosperous businessman. Luther may have taken his meals at the Schalbe home (Mrs. Cotta was a member of this family). Both were excellent homes, with strong religious convictions, with many distinguished guests, and with much stimulating conversation. Here Luther developed academically and socially, especially in his acquaintance with literature, science, the fine arts, and the like. He became interested in playing the lute and singing. He never forgot his stay at Eisenach.

Luther was an excellent scholar, at the top of his class, and there were no more beatings (one time at a previous school he had been beaten 15 times for not knowing his Latin forms—pupils were frequently beaten in those days, but generally the punishment was not unreasonable). At the close of this period, Hans Luther decided to send his son to the university, even though there were six other children in the family. He chose Erfurt, because it had an excellent reputation, even though it was farther away.

### **C. Martin Luther entered the University of Erfurt for the study of law in 1501.**

Erfurt was a wealthy, cosmopolitan town with much trade, a population of possibly 20,000, crooked streets as usual, crushed stone on the streets, many churches, the cathedral, cloisters, chapels, hospitals. The University was well-established and well-known; it had 2,000 students who lived in dormitories where Luther retired at 8 p.m. and arose at 4 a.m. He dressed in a toga for street wear; the atmosphere was dignified, and the Bible was read at mealtime. If a student went out after 8 p.m., he had to have special permission, he needed to borrow a lantern at the rector's office and to return it. Students were allowed a certain amount of beer. This is where Luther lived under the strict supervision of a master for about four years. He received his B.A. in 1502 and his M.A. in 1505 in a minimum amount of time. He was regarded as an "erudite philosopher." Luther read the old Latin authors, Cicero, Virgil, Livy; he studied the Ancients including Aristotle's physics, metaphysics, and ethics for his M.A. His study of Contemporary Physics and geography gave him a good science background. After he received his M.A., he was ready to teach in a liberal arts school, but obeying his parents' wishes, he began to study law in May, 1505. He disliked it.

### **D. Martin Luther entered the cloister in Erfurt to become an Augustinian monk in 1505.**

Many people were shocked at Luther's application for admission to the Augustinian Cloister on July 17, 1505, but actually this decision was simply the climax of an idea that had long been forming in his mind. For years he had been unable to console himself with his baptism; the strongly religious Cotta and Schalbe families influenced him toward religion, as did his parents' piety; the cutting of his leg, followed by intense bleeding shocked him greatly; the death of a dear friend, whose name is unknown, made a deep impression upon him; and then he was caught in a severe storm, as he was returning from a vacation at his home. The lightning frightened him dreadfully. He could almost see Christ, the dreadful Judge, about to condemn him forever and

ever. In terror he cried, "Help, dear St. Anne, I'll become a monk." (St. Anne was the patroness of miners, his father's occupation, and the mother of Mary.)

Arriving at the university, he arranged for a farewell meal for his friends, sold his law books, told his parents (his father was enraged), and said to his friends, "Today you see me for the last time and then no more." The next morning he entered the monastery.

The Augustinian Order, one of the very strictest, had been founded in 1288 in Italy. When Martin Luther arrived at the gate, the prior told Luther that life in the monastery would be highly difficult with all its meager diets, endless prayers, mortification of the flesh, and the like. Yet, Luther entered it as a novice for one year, during which time he was robed in a white house dress covered with a black mantle (the cloister was known as the Black Cloister) Luther became a "militant soldier of Jesus Christ." He lived in an 8x10 foot unheated cell with a table, a chair, a straw bed and one window. There were prayers to be said seven times a day from about 1:00 in the morning to midnight; there was no noise or conversation in the corridors; and there was intensive study of the book on the mass, which made him a zealous Roman Catholic. After a year, he took the oath of poverty, chastity, and obedience. He endured all of the many hardships of monastic life in order that he might find peace with God.

#### **E. Martin Luther was ordained a priest in 1507.**

Fearfully (he was a sinner afraid of the all-holy God), Luther said his first mass on May 2, 1507, in the presence of his father and others. His father was still dissatisfied with his son's decision to become a monk, but he did contribute money to the monastery at this time. During the meal Dr. Luther asked whether his father was still displeased, and his father answered, "Have you not read that you should honor your father and your mother?" This made an impression on Luther. He tried to excuse himself by saying that he had been called through the thunderstorm But his father answered that he hoped it was not the vision of the Devil. He continued his studies that finally led him to the degree of Dr. of Theology. When Luther entered the monastery he determined to live a pious life, yet he was continually sad. He taxed his body with prayers, fasting (sometimes for three days at a time), sleeplessness, vigils, and the like, yet he had no peace. There was a continual, great soul struggle, although he always managed to pull himself together sufficiently to do the work that had been assigned to him. He did good works to the limit of his ability in one supreme, but unsuccessful, effort to obtain peace with God. He said that if ever a monk would get to heaven by his monkery, it would be he.

#### **F. Martin Luther journeyed to Rome in 1510.**

Luther and another monk were chosen to go to Rome to have the pope settle a dispute in the Augustinian Order. He regarded this as a high privilege and looked forward to the visit with great anticipation, believing that there he would surely find peace for his restless soul. After all, Rome had more relics than any other city in the world, and it was the center of the Christian Church. He cried, "Hail, Holy Rome," when he finally saw the city. In the month that he was there he said masses, made confessions, visited shrines, venerated relics, climbed Pilate's 28 stairs on hands and knees, and repeated a Pater Noster at each step to deliver a soul from purgatory, but at the end of it all he felt, "Who knows if it is so?"

Luther was soon greatly disillusioned by Rome. The Italian priests said several masses while he said one; the ignorance of the confessor was great; the irreverence of the clergy was shocking to a devout man like Luther; the immorality of the clergy, some of whom regularly visited the prostitutes' houses, was shocking; and after doing all of the prescribed things that could be done only in Rome, he was still in doubt. Did the superfluous works of the saints, of which the pope was the custodian, really have any merit? The answer would come loud and clear in just a few years.

#### **G. Martin Luther became a professor of Theology and Doctor of Divinity at the University of Wittenberg in 1512.**

During the years before 1512, Martin Luther still had many fearfully troublesome times, because of his sins and the knowledge that God would surely punish sin with eternal damnation. The Church taught that one could keep from sinning by one's own free will, and Luther found that this was totally impossible: Therefore he tried other ways of winning God's approval. He had tried the way of good works, and that failed him; he sought the merits of the saints (he chose 21 of them and prayed to three of them each day), and that helped not at all; he went to confession (often daily, on one occasion for six hours, until the confessors grew weary), and that brought no peace of conscience. He was certain that if sins were to be forgiven, they must be confessed, and he couldn't even remember all of his sins, much less confess them all.

Staupitz, the head of the monastery and a good spiritual advisor, tried to comfort him by pointing him to the statement, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," but Luther was so obsessed with his sins that even this could not comfort him; instead he became panic stricken. Here was an impasse—he had used every method that the Roman Catholic Church suggested, and none could help him. "I was myself more than once driven to the very abyss of despair so that I wished that I had never been created." Luther did not love God at the time; instead, he hated Him. "I was the most wretched one on earth...perpetually in torment."

Finally, Staupitz said to him one day under a pear tree (Luther loved that tree ever after), that he should study for his doctorate, preach, and teach the Bible at the University. Luther at first objected, feeling his total unworthiness, but finally accepted. Now he had to study the Bible.

Gradually, as he read, studied, and preached, the Holy Ghost began to enlighten him until he accepted the *Sola Scriptura*, the doctrine that Scripture alone determines all teachings and all conduct, possibly in 1508 or 1509. He became ready to discard all of the church fathers, if necessary, because they simply confused the issue. He had been much influenced by Augustine, but Augustine never really properly differentiated between justification and sanctification (the first is a one-time act and the second is a continual one). Luther also believed that salvation was only for the elect and all of the others were hopelessly lost, as Augustine had taught. Yet, even though he still looked upon Christ as the stern Judge, he did come to the point where he accepted Scripture alone. That was the first big step in his conversion.

After five years of difficult study, Martin Luther became a Doctor of Divinity in October, 1512, with the Elector Frederick providing the fees, if Luther would be appointed for life to the Bible Lecture Chair at the University of Wittenberg. He was appointed and remained there for, the rest of his life. Upon receiving his doctorate, he had to vow allegiance to the Holy Bible, and this comforted him no end in later years.

At that time Wittenberg had possibly 2,500 population with the Castle Church at one end of the town and the cloister, where Dr. Luther lived at the other. It had a newly founded university, promoted by Elector Frederick the Wise who sought outstanding teachers. In fact, Dr. Luther did become a highly popular teacher, attracting many students from far and near.

In 1513 Dr. Luther began lecturing on the Psalms, in 1515 on Romans, and in 1516 and 1517 on Galatians, and now finally he was on the way to having the greatest crisis of his life solved. Ps. 22:1 must have been a partial turning point with its great question: Why must Christ suffer so dreadfully, even to the point of being forsaken by God? That was certainly not because of His sins, but, praise be to God, for us, because He had taken our sins upon Himself.

Dr. Luther was especially enlightened by his study of Romans with its blessed doctrine of justification and the thought that God justifies the sinner on the basis of Christ's work. At first Dr. Luther felt that the term "righteousness of God" meant that God condemned the sinner, and later the Holy Ghost showed him that it meant the righteousness that Christ earned and gives to us through faith. That was the turning point in Dr. Luther's life. Finally, after all the agonizing years, he had learned the way to heaven through faith in Christ. There was peace in his soul at last.

Then it seemed as if all heaven opened before him. He could hardly contain himself for joy that he had finally learned the way to heaven. He expressed some of his thoughts in that beautiful hymn, number 387 in the Lutheran Hymnal, "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice," a short biography of the great reformer.

Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice, With exultation springing, And with united heart and voice  
And holy rapture singing, Proclaim the wonders God hath done, How His right arm the vict'ry  
won; Right dearly it hath cost Him.

Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay, Death brooded darkly o'er me, Sin was my torment night and  
day, In sin my mother bore me; Yea, deep and deeper still I fell, Life had become a living hell,  
So firmly sin possessed me.

My own good works availed me naught, No merit they attaining; Free will against God's  
judgment fought, Dead to all good remaining. My fears increased till sheer despair Left naught  
but death to be my share; The pangs of hell I suffered.

But God beheld. my wretched state Before the world's foundation, And, mindful of His mercies  
great, He planned my soul's salvation. A father's heart He turned to me, Sought my  
redemption fervently: He gave His dearest Treasure.

He spoke to His beloved Son: 'Tis time to have compassion. Then go, bright Jewel of My crown,  
And bring to man salvation; From sin and sorrow set him free, Slay bitter death for him that he  
May live with Thee forever.

During these years Dr. Luther was, as usual, tremendously busy. He was a parish priest, lecturer at the university, writer of almost innumerable letters and of a commentary on the Psalms, the overseer of eleven monasteries, and the like.

During this time also Frederick the Wise was Luther's protector, but one point of disagreement between the two was the tremendous number of relics, 19,013 holy bones, that Frederick had collected. (They included a tooth of St. Jerome, 4 hairs from St. Mary, a piece of Christ's swaddling clothes, and the like.) If one viewed all of these relics on All Saints Day and made the necessary contributions, the indulgence for reduction in purgatory would be 1,902,202 years and 270 days.

Here a word must be said about the Roman Catholic doctrine of indulgences: This Church teaches that Christ removed eternal punishment for sin by His death on the cross, but that the temporal punishment of sin remains, either in this world or in purgatory. The Council of Trent pronounced a curse upon anyone who believes that the entire punishment for sin is forgiven by God for Christ's sake.

This anti-Scriptural teaching probably had its origin in the anti-Christian Sacrament of Penance that began to creep into the church several hundred years after Christ's death. The Roman Catholic Sacrament of Penance includes three things: sorrow for sin and the resolve to amend one's life; a confession of all sins committed; and a performance of a penance designated by the confessor. That penance might be the recitation of prayers, attendance at mass, giving of money, or other services to the church. According to Roman Catholic doctrine, if the penalty is not effected in this life, it must be paid in purgatory to which every Roman Catholic must supposedly go automatically, when he dies.

However, one could, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, escape this penalty both in this life and in the life to come by receiving an indulgence, or a remission of the temporal punishment for sin. The Church could easily provide for this, since it supposedly had a huge treasury of good works at its disposal. They are the superfluous good works performed by Christ and by the saints, who presumably did more good works than God required. By means of certain good works, for example, pilgrimages, or through the payment of money any repentant sinner could obtain some of these good works to apply to his account. Thus he would escape the temporal punishment for sin partly or entirely; thus he might have had his stay in purgatory reduced or in fact eliminated.

Unfortunately, some dreadful abuses crept into this matter. As competent historians agree, the Church began to look upon the sale of indulgences as a ready way to satisfy the ever-increasing demands for money. This money went to corrupt clergymen and to officials of the church and for the payment of St. Peter's Cathedral, a tremendously costly church complex that was then being built at Rome.

Matters became so bad that hawkers were sent throughout Germany with a promise of forgiveness for sins committed or about to be committed, as soon as the money was paid. Repentance was not needed.

Tear-jerking sermons exhorted the faithful and shamed them into releasing their parents' and relatives' souls from purgatory for the payment of money. The promise was repeatedly made: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs."

When Dr. Luther recognized what was being done, he was horrified. His reaction was the writing of the 95 Theses, and that is the date commonly accepted for the beginning of the Reformation. Dr. Luther had begun to preach against indulgences as early as 1516, calling them a great scandal. His sermons were not exactly heartily welcomed, because the payments for the indulgences supported both the Catholic Church and the University in Wittenberg. Yet, Dr. Luther was a parish priest, responsible for the welfare of the souls entrusted into his care, and he had to warn them against these evils no matter what the consequences.

#### **H. Dr. Luther posted Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg against abuses of indulgences on October 31, 1517.**

Albert of Brandenburg, already bishop of two sees, wanted a third one (Mainz), but purchasing it was horribly expensive, because indolent, spendthrift Pope Leo X; a calamity for Roman Catholicism, needed money to continue building St. Peter's. So Albert borrowed the money from the Fugger banking house, 10,000 ducats (the pope wanted 12,000 for the twelve Apostles, Albert offered 7,000 for the seven deadly sins; they compromised.) In return, the pope granted Albert the privilege of collecting indulgences for eight years. Tetzel, whom one could compare with a hawk at a circus, sold the indulgences near Wittenberg, not in the city, because the Elector would not permit it.

Angrily, Luther wrote and posted 95 theses or sentences on the church door in Wittenberg (the bulletin board of its day). With them he attacked the idea of German money being spent for St. Peter's, and he also denied that the pope had power over reducing penalties in purgatory, because he had no superfluous works of the saints. If the pope had the power to reduce one's time in purgatory, why did he not release everyone? Above all, Dr. Luther showed, that the buying and selling of indulgences induced complacency that imperiled the salvation of souls.

Dr. Luther originally intended the 95 Theses only as a matter for debate, but others quickly translated them into German from the Latin, printed them, and then spread them throughout all of central Europe. They soon became the "talk of the town." (The printing press was a tremendous help in spreading the work of the Reformation. By 1521, someone estimated, Dr. Luther's writings had appeared in about a half million copies, an almost unheard of number for that day.) Dr. Luther wrote Albert a humble letter, but one protesting vehemently against the selling of indulgences.

If Pope Leo had immediately removed the abuses against which Dr. Luther was fighting, all future events might have been different, since Dr. Luther was far from ready to battle the established Church. But months were to go by before anything positive was done. The pope did appoint a new general of the Augustinian Order, but many Augustinians defended Dr. Luther, contrary to the Dominicans, who supported Tetzel. Dr. Luther continued to study and to write, discovering in his studies that the Vulgate translation "Do penance," really meant, "Be penitent." Thus he suddenly realized that the basis for the sacrament of penance was not Scriptural at all (Matt. 4:17).

When the pope appointed someone to draft a reply to "refute the errors" in the theses, Dr. Luther answered in a sharply worded tract (sharpness, bitterness, and name-calling were wide-spread in those days). "You cite no Scripture; you give no reasons," he wrote. Worse than that, Dr. Luther dared to say that both the pope and a church council might err, while Scripture alone is the final authority. That was indeed the waving of a red flag before the enemy.

Dr. Luther was summoned to Rome, but he would not go. Therefore there was a meeting at Augsburg on October 18 (even here Dr. Luther feared for his life), where Cajetan demanded that Dr. Luther recant. Dr. Luther wanted to be instructed regarding his errors. An impasse followed, with Cajetan stating the pope was above Scripture and with Dr. Luther denying that and stating that Cajetan was no better fit to handle the case

than an ass to play a harp. Cajetan demanded that Dr. Luther recant; he did not, and feeling himself in danger he escaped to Wittenberg.

All of this placed Frederick the Wise on the spot, for, desiring only to be a good Christian prince, was pressured by Rome to deliver Dr. Luther. On the other hand, he wanted to protect his popular professor who clearly preached the Gospel and that is what he finally did, even though Dr. Luther was ready to run away and thus relieve Frederick of his embarrassment.

### **I. Dr. Luther disputed with Dr. Eck concerning indulgences at Leipzig in 1519.**

On November 9, 1518, a papal decree eliminated some of the worst features of the indulgences (only temporary, earthly penalty for sins may be reduced, and the purgatory penalty was to be diminished through the superfluous merits of Christ and the saints). Yet, meanwhile Dr. Luther began attacking papal power, stating that councils may err, and writing against the Sacrament of Penance. The matter of indulgences was far from settled.

Meanwhile Maximilian had died, and Charles V was elected Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, although Frederick was the leading figure in Germany for some time. The pope carefully cultivated the good will of Frederick by conferring various honors on him. The hope was that Frederick would turn against Dr. Luther and surrender him to Rome.

The Roman Catholic Church made other efforts to settle the dispute. For example, Miltitz was assigned to Cajetan to help him. Dr. Luther agreed to stop his attacks, if the opponents did the same. Tetzl was rebuked and retired to a monastery (Dr. Luther wrote him, “Do not take it too hard—you did not start this racket”), but the opponents did not keep quiet. The universities were becoming involved with Wittenberg, particularly learned, but impetuous, Carlstadt and scholarly Melancthon taking the side of Dr. Luther. On the other side was the University of Leipzig, to which the formidable Dr. John Eck, a German and originally a friend of Dr. Luther, came.

The debate between Dr. Eck and Dr. Luther was arranged for Leipzig. This was somewhat unusual, for Dr. Luther was already regarded as somewhat of a heretic. Dr. Luther strenuously prepared himself for the debate by studying the decretals of the previous 400 years. This strengthened his position. He even began to believe that the institution of the papacy was the anti-Christ. The debate was held on July 19th, with Dr. Luther, Carlstadt, and Melancthon plus 200 armed students on one side and Dr. Eck, also with armed men, on the other side. The debate was held in the Castle auditorium before a large audience with stenographers and judges from the universities of Paris and Erfurt. For a week Carlstadt and Eck debated the depravity of man, then Dr. Luther and Dr. Eck began their debate. The question of the early supremacy of the Roman bishop was defended by Dr. Eck, while Dr. Luther claimed that the papacy developed over the course of the years, something which all of us know is true. Then there was a long discussion about Hus, the Bohemian martyr. Dr. Luther claimed a layman with Scripture is to be believed above the pope or a council and that a council had no right to establish a new article of faith.

After that, purgatory was discussed and Dr. Eck cited II Macabees 12:45 to which Dr. Luther replied that the Apocrypha were not canonical.

So the debate went on for 18 days until the middle of June, when Duke George called a halt. Both Dr. Eck and Dr. Luther continued the debate with their pamphlets. The judges from the University of Paris reported two years later, condemning Dr. Luther but offering no Scriptural proof. The judges from Erfurt never did report on their reaction to the debate.

Soon Dr. Eck would be in Rome telling the pope that Luther was the Saxon Hus, while Dr. Luther began to agree with much of what Hus had written.

### **J. In 1520 the pope threatened to excommunicate Dr. Luther, but Dr. Luther burned the papal bull.**

During this time Dr. Luther gradually became an international figure with his writings printed and spread in thousands of copies. Many a printer earned a great deal of money from printing these writings, because almost every one of Dr. Luther's works became an immediate best seller. Some of his tracts were the *Address to the German Nobility*, the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, the *Freedom of the Christian Man*, etc., all written in one year, 1520. The *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* was directed against the sacraments, reducing them to two, and making the breach between Dr. Luther and the Roman Catholic Church almost irreparable. It also condemned the mass, the very heart of Roman Catholicism. The *Address to the German Nobility* had many accusations against abuses in the Roman Catholic Church. For example, Dr. Luther opposed the papal power over the civil authorities, the huge income of the Roman Catholic Church, and the celibacy of the priests.

Meanwhile, Rome was also girding for the attack and finally the bull was issued on June 15, 1520, calling Dr. Luther a serpent creeping through the Lord's field. (A papal bull is an official document sealed with the pope's seal.)

The bull listed 41 errors and gave him 60 days to submit. Also Rome sent a letter to Elector Frederick, asking him to help Dr. Luther to return to sanity, or if he persisted in his madness, to take him captive.

Three months later the bull reached Dr. Luther, and he appealed to Charles V, since appeals to the Pope for a council had been in vain.

Dr. Eck and another man were delegated to publish the bull in northern and western Europe, but they met with much opposition on the part of many people.

Dr. Luther received the bull in October, 1520. He replied that it was a sacrilege and blasphemy of Christ and that it was the sum of all impiety, hypocrisy, etc.

Furthermore, the bull had come at an inopportune time, because Miltitz was still supposed to continue his discussions with Dr. Luther. In many areas, however, Dr. Luther's books were burned, and his followers in turn burned some of the Roman Catholic books, including the bull.

During all of this time Dr. Luther's ideas against the papacy were solidifying. For example, he believed the condemned articles of John Hus were Christian and the pope's were diabolical.

**K. In 1521 Dr. Luther was formally excommunicated from the Church of Rome by the pope; he was summoned to the Diet of Worms, where he defended himself with his famous "Here I stand." The Edict of Worms followed.**

By this time Dr. Luther had a tremendous number of followers. Emperor Charles wanted to root out Lutheran teachings, but Frederick all the while insisted that Dr. Luther be heard, that he be given a fair trial, and that he be convicted from Scripture. Dr. Eck and his followers insisted that Dr. Luther not be tried by the secular powers—he had been tried by the church and condemned.

Nevertheless, Dr. Luther's trial, though postponed for various reasons, finally took place at the Diet of the German nation at Worms, where Dr. Luther appeared in April, 1521, despite the bitter opposition of the Roman Catholics. Dr. Luther, remembering the Bible passage, "Whosoever shall confess Me before men him shall I confess before My Father which is in heaven," decided to go, despite the animosity. He knew that there was much enmity against him, even danger of violence from the opposing parties. He was vehemently denounced at the Diet (actually Alexander already had the excommunication bull).

Thereupon Charles renewed the invitation to Dr. Luther, who said, "I will enter Worms under the banner of Christ against the gates of hell." He expected to be killed, but he would go, though there were as many devils there as tiles on the roofs. Finally he appeared before the Diet, before the Emperor and many other officials. The scene must have been a dramatic one with a clergymen examining Dr. Luther, asking him if these were his books, and receiving the answer, "Yes." Then, "Do you defend them all?" Dr. Luther stated that he would think it over and Charles granted him time until the next day.

On the 18th a vast crowd of people came to hear what Dr. Luther had to say. Since a large number of the important rulers and nobility of the German nation were present, Dr. Luther had an excellent chance to make his



well known speech. Then he concluded, “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason...my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.”

Dr. Luther repeated his words in Latin and then went to his lodging. Charles V had apparently made up his mind that he would proceed against Dr. Luther as against a heretic. Four of the six electors agreed (not Frederick), and later the Edict of Worms was signed in the cathedral, stating that after 21 days no one was to harbor Dr. Luther, he was to be seized and kept safely until the emperor could act, his followers were condemned; and his books were to be burned. The Roman Catholic Church had apparently won the battle.

**L. Beginning in May, 1521, Dr. Luther lived secretly as Junker Georg (Knight George) at the Wartburg. There he translated the New Testament. He returned to Wittenberg in March, 1522.**

Frederick realized that Dr. Luther’s life was in danger. Therefore he secretly arranged for his “kidnapping,” which was done in such a convincing way that no one suspected that it was a plot to get Dr. Luther to a safe place, the Wartburg. There he assumed the manners of a knight, letting his beard grow, while he remained in his room.. It was a lovely area in which to live, overlooking the quiet, peaceful Thuringian hills, “in the land of the birds,” as Dr. Luther stated.

Here he had ten months’ time to think. and to write. He reassured his fearful friends in Wittenberg; he completed the Magnificat studies; he replied to the University of Paris faculty that had found 104 Lutheran errors and had condemned him for it, stating that they gave no Scriptural proof. He wrote against Auricular Confession; he wrote to Albert against the renewed sale of indulgences; he composed the tract *On Monastic Vows* stating that the monastic ideal was opposed to justification by faith, a perversion of the Gospel, and monks and nuns should be allowed to stay or depart. (One never ceases to be amazed the amount of work which he did.)

Undoubtedly the greatest work to come out of his enforced stay at the Wartburg was his translation of the New Testament. There were 14 previous German translations, but none of them was outstanding.

Dr. Luther used these previous versions and other materials, especially Erasmus’s 1519 Greek New Testament, to help prepare his translation. These materials, plus Dr. Luther’s outstanding gift of the German language, helped him to prepare a new translation that was not only one of the world’s best, but made the German language, as many scholars have testified. Dr. Luther had studied Greek and Hebrew before that time, and he had help from others. He completed the original draft of the New Testament in the unbelievably rapid time of 11 weeks. By September, 1522, the printing was complete and in the next dozen years approximately 100 editions with possibly 200,000 or more copies were printed and distributed. Copies were expensive by our standards.

Meanwhile, Carlstadt and others were tending toward radicalism, destroying images, demolishing altars, stating that organs were wrong, and committing other acts of vandalism. Also the Zwickau prophets came to Wittenberg, claiming that God had audibly called them to preach, falsely raving against infant baptism, and the like. Dr. Luther was increasingly disturbed by these evil reports. He wrote that a Christian must not use force, but the Word of God. Many people at Wittenberg were confused, and Dr. Luther decided to return, regardless of the dangers, in March, 1522.

He began to preach at once: Use the Word, not force; some things are adiaphora, use restraint. He preached particularly against the excesses of some of his followers, some of the more radical ones opposed him, but Dr. Luther insisted that man is always to be led by love and not by coercion; if the Gospel is in the heart, there will be love and obedience toward Christ.

**M. Dr. Luther stressed congregational hymn singing, wrote and published many hymns, beginning in 1524.**

Congregational singing in the middle ages was severely restricted, but Dr. Luther, mindful of Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16 (Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”), promoted hymn singing so vigorously that he is considered the father of modern Christian hymnology. The *Achtliederbuch* appeared in 1524 in Erfurt. This was the first Protestant hymnal; it included four hymns out of eight by Dr. Luther, the tiny source of the mighty stream that became Protestant hymnody.

Also in 1524 the *Gesangbuechlein* with 32 hymns, 24 of which are credited to Dr. Luther, appeared. “A Mighty Fortress” probably was composed about 1528; certainly it is the greatest hymn ever composed in any language, except those written by inspiration; it has been translated into many different languages; it is sung everywhere, including the Roman Catholic Church.

Dr. Luther was an accomplished musician with 36 hymns to his credit. Some of them were translated from the Latin, some are based upon the Psalms, some are paraphrases of other parts of Scripture, and some were entirely original.

German hymns are the richest and by far the greatest of all hymns, and they had their beginning with Dr. Luther at the time of the Reformation. A great burst of religious poetry set to music followed his initial efforts. He was determined to promote the cause of the Gospel through his and others’ hymns. They were to present a short, clear confession of one’s faith. Thus the people sang their way into Scriptural doctrines.

Twenty-three of Dr. Luther’s hymns are in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; 1941), including such famous ones as the following: “From Heaven Above,” no. 85; “To Shepherds as They Watched by Night,” no. 103; “Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord,” no. 224; “We All Believe in One True God,” no. 251; “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” no. 262; “From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee,” no. 329; “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice,” no. 387. So popular were these hymns and others that were composed about the same time that a Jesuit claimed that Dr. Luther’s hymns destroyed more souls than his sermons, a tremendous compliment indeed. Hymn singing became highly popular everywhere in the Land of the Reformation.

## **N. Dr. Luther married Catherine von Bora in 1525.**

In his 1520 *Address to the German Nobility*, Dr. Luther had already advocated the idea of clerical marriage, advice that was readily accepted by a number of his followers, including former Augustinian monks. Yet, at first, Dr. Luther was completely opposed to monks marrying (he regarded their case as different from those of the priests; he said, “They will not give a wife to me”), but he did study the matter. Later he wrote the tract *On Monastic Vows*, in which he approved of marriage.

By 1523 monks and nuns were leaving the cloisters, and Dr. Luther felt that he had to find husbands or homes for the women especially. Twelve nuns escaped in 1523, for all of whom husbands were found, except for Catherine von Bora. She remained a house maid for two years, when Dr. Luther suggested Dr. Glatz as her future husband. However, Dr. Glatz was completely unacceptable to Catherine.. She said to Dr. Amsdorf, who brought her this news, that she would marry either him or Dr. Luther. That was interesting, even though Dr. Luther was already 42 years old, while Catherine was only 26. Dr. Luther was far beyond the normal age of marrying; so was Catherine for that matter.

One of the matters that prevented Dr. Luther from considering marrying was that he might be martyred at any time. Yet, eventually, to please his father, to spite the pope, and to confess his faith, he decided to marry, but, “I am not infatuated” with Catherine. Later Dr. Luther changed his mind and said that he would not trade his precious wife for the entire kingdom of France (Italy could be thrown in also).

The betrothal took place on June 13, and thereafter Catherine and Dr. Luther were regarded as married. The public ceremony was held in the parish church on June 27, 1525, in the presence of many guests. To one of them he wrote: “Undoubtedly the rumor of my marriage has reached you. I can hardly believe it myself, but the witnesses are too strong.” Supposedly he also invited one of his friends to bring a barrel of beer, stating that if it wasn’t good he would have to drink it all by himself.

Marriage produced many adjustments for Dr. Luther. Before this time, his bed sometimes was not made for a year at a time, but he said that he was so tired when he went to bed that he never even noticed it. He stated that many adjustments had to be made during the first year of marriage. For example, one wakes up in the morning and finds a pair of pigtails on a pillow that were not there before. At first there were also financial difficulties because neither he nor Catherine had any money. Dr. Luther never received anything for writing his books, but Elector Frederick generously gave the new couple the revenues of the Augustinian cloister, doubled his small university salary, and often sent gifts. Even the archbishop sent a gift.

Katie, as she was often called, frequently had her problems with Dr. Luther, because he was exceedingly generous. He always wanted to give away things to people who were in need. One time he decided to give a silver goblet to someone who was being married, but he couldn't find it (Katie had hid it).

Catherine must have been a tremendous asset to Dr. Luther. She complemented him in many a way. For example, under her care there was a garden, an orchard, a fish pond, a barnyard whose animals she slaughtered herself, and the like. No wonder that he appreciated all of the things that she did for him. At various times. He wrote her love letters when he was away, with salutations like these: "To my beloved wife, Catherine, Mrs. Dr. Luther, Mistress of the pig market, Lady of Zulusdorf (where they had purchased a farm), and whatsoever other titles may befit your Grace."

Catherine's lot was made somewhat more difficult, because Dr. Luther was frequently sick with assorted ailments, but she always took good care of him. Six children were born to the family, and they brought great happiness to the parents.

The home frequently had many visitors, other children and students were taken in at the home and were housed there so that the household at times numbered 25. Katie supervised it all, although she did have men and women servants to help. Some of these students were the ones who wrote Dr. Luther's table talk with 6,596 entries.

Thus Dr. Luther established the Protestant parsonage. His views on marriage were these: The husband is the head of the home, the wife has her sphere, the apple must be placed next to the rod in chastising children, parents should choose the mates for their children, but neither parents nor children should be unreasonable about this. (Rebekah of Old Testament times was an ideal for him). The home was a place for training character, but he also understood that one had to love his wife and have much patience with her. The wife was to make her husband glad to cross his threshold at night and the husband was to act so that his wife would be sorry ever to see him leave.

Dr. Luther loved children. One example of this is his famous letter to the four-year old Hans in 1530 about heaven, the lovely garden. Dr. Luther possibly also wrote "From Heaven Above" for the home Christmas festival. When his Magdalena died at 14, the father was heartbroken, even though he knew she was in heaven. Yet, he had been blessed with a family, so he said, something which no bishop had had for a thousand years.

### **O. At the Diet of Speyer in 1529, Dr. Luther and his followers were first called Protestants.**

Because the Edict of Worms was too drastic for most German princes, the **first Diet of Speyer** was called in 1526. Emperor Charles did not attend. The meeting ended with the old principle called *Cuius Regio Eius Religio*, meaning that each German prince determined the religion for his region. This was really a green light for the Lutherans, because it gave them the dominant religion in each area where the prince approved of these doctrines. During this time much of northern Germany and parts of the south became Lutheran.

Gradually, however, Germany became divided into two armed camps with the Protestants on one side and the Roman Catholics on the other, especially after the **second Diet at Speyer** (poor Charles). That was begun on March 15, 1529; a majority of the delegates were Catholic princes; and they revoked the earlier clauses which gave the Lutherans the green light. In Lutheran areas the Roman Catholics were granted religious liberty; however, in Roman Catholic areas the Lutherans were not to be granted such religious liberty. The Lutherans, including Elector Frederick and a number of cities, naturally protested against such an arrangement.

As a result, they were called Protestants, a name that has remained until this day. Their protests did not change the decision of the second Diet at Speyer.

**P. In 1529 Dr. Luther completed and published the Large and the Small Catechisms.**

A visitation program together with instructions was prepared in 1527 and 1528 with the Wittenberg faculty and others doing the visitation. This became necessary, because of the doctrinal ignorance and because of the problems with Carlstadt and other enthusiasts. It was necessary to use a great deal of patience, because so many of the pastors who had turned to Lutheranism from the Roman Catholic priesthood were highly incompetent. The actual conditions were truly appalling: Some country pastors did not know the major doctrines later included in the catechism; yes, some of them did not even know the Ten Commandments or the Lord's Prayer; in one region 190 or 200 clergymen were living in open fornication. However, only the most incompetent pastors were removed.

The Introduction to the Catechism tells us the horrible conditions that Dr. Luther himself learned about on his visitations. He was appalled by the spiritual ignorance that he had found.

To remedy this deficiency Dr. Luther prepared both a Catechism and a Kirchenpostille. The Catechism became extremely valuable for both the clergy and the teachers, for it was the epitome of Christian teaching; it contained all of the chief doctrines of Scripture, teachings that every Christian should know. (Note: Much more will be written about Dr. Luther's Catechisms in later sections of this paper.)

Next to his translation of the Bible, the Catechism is indeed a book which has had a tremendous amount of influence all over the world.

**Q. Dr. Luther disputed with Zwingli at Marburg regarding the Lord's Supper, beginning on October 1, 1529.**

Because the results of the second Diet at Speyer were so damaging to the Protestants, a number of people, including particularly Philip of Hesse, urged a meeting between Dr. Luther and Zwingli. The purpose was to present a united front against the Roman Catholic Church both politically and doctrinally. Dr. Luther refused to consider the political action, but he did agree to meet with Zwingli in an attempt to unite doctrinally.

A major doctrinal difference between Dr. Luther and Zwingli was the teaching about the Lord's Supper. Specifically, the dispute revolved around two Latin words, *est* (is) and *significat* (signifies). Dr. Luther and his followers stated that Christ meant what He said. ("This **is** My body; this **is** My blood"), while Zwingli claimed that it was impossible for Christ's body to be present everywhere on earth, since it was in heaven. He therefore claimed that Christ must have meant, "This bread **signifies** My body; this wine **signifies** My blood."

Philip of Hesse invited both men to meet at Marburg Castle. Actually it was a meeting of a number of men on each side.

In preparing himself for the meeting, Dr. Luther made very much of I Cor. 10:16, stating that it was as plain as anyone in the world could wish. He rejected the sacrament as a good work of men (the Roman Catholic position), and accepted the "real presence" stating that Christ truly came to sinful men in the sacrament. Christ is not limited to space and time. True, it is impossible to understand this, but just believe it. To express his views, Dr. Luther said that the body and the blood of the Lord Jesus is brought to us "in, with, and under the bread and wine," the earthly elements. The reception of Christ's body and blood was, of course, not something like a physical eating of meat by any means; it was a sacramental eating.

Zwingli, on the other hand, was a humanist of the Renaissance. He believed one received only bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, but by reflecting on Christ's death, one also received a spiritual blessing. The Lord's Supper was a commemorative feast, and the more sincerely the individual reflected on Christ's death, the greater blessing he received. Bread and wine became for him mere symbols for the body and blood, an explanation that entirely satisfied his reason. He, for example, referred to the words of the Lord Jesus, "I am the Vine."

When the meeting was finally held at Marburg Castle, it was really a clash of personalities and of ideologies between two opposing camps. The meeting lasted four days, from October 1 through October 4, although preliminary meetings were held by several of the theologians present. On October 2 the formal meeting began at 6 in the morning with possibly 50 people present. Both sides tried to find a common ground, but this was impossible. The next day the meeting continued with the same result. Since the debate had become rather acrimonious, on the last day each man begged pardon for the harsh words he had spoken. Dr. Luther and Zwingli signed 15 articles, but acknowledged that there was a difference of opinion regarding the Sacrament of the Altar. Everyone agreed that it was useless to continue. The Lutherans thereafter refused to accept Zwingli and his followers as brethren.

### **R. The Augsburg Confession was presented at the meeting in Augsburg, while Dr. Luther remained at Castle Coburg, in 1530.**

Another and perhaps the greatest attempt to reunite the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics occurred at Augsburg, although it really marked a final clash between the two systems. This time Dr. Luther was not even present, as he had been at Worms; for safety sake he was forced to remain at Castle Coburg, over 100 miles to the north of Augsburg. However, there were many Lutherans, particularly Lutheran princes, present to espouse the Lutheran cause.

There were several reasons for the Diet at Augsburg. Among them were the Turkish threat which required unity of the Empire, and Emperor Charles wanted a reconciliation between the two parties. Unfortunately, Charles could not understand the basic ideas of Lutheranism, although he did know that some reformation was necessary. He was a staunch Roman Catholic.

In January, 1530, the Diet was announced and Charles determined to preside over the council. When the invitation to the Council arrived, some Lutherans had great expectations; others felt it was useless. The Roman Catholics expected that the revolt would be crushed; the Lutherans expected that they would at least receive a fair hearing when they presented their Bible teachings; but both sides were disappointed.

Dr. Melancthon had been asked to prepare the Lutheran defense. Probably aware of the unfavorable atmosphere, he worked feverishly to present a good case. Using materials that had been prepared previously (Schwabach and Torgau Articles), he wrote the *Augsburg Confession* in three parts, the Articles of Faith, the Abuses, and the Conclusion. They were sent to Dr. Luther for revision, and he said, "It pleases me right well," although he was never quite satisfied that it was sharp enough in its attack against the Roman Catholic abuses. In fact, he said at this time that he could not tread so gently as did Dr. Melancthon.

Emperor Charles arrived amid great pomp, but immediately there were some irritating happenings (no Protestants could preach, the Corpus Christi Festival was celebrated, etc.), and these almost caused the cancellation of the Diet. Charles met with both sides, but the Protestants refused to take part in the mass.

The Protestants insisted on reading the Augsburg Confession publicly, and it was finally read in German on June 25, 1530, taking two hours for the reading. Many heard the Confession that was signed by a number of German princes. (Additional notes on the Augsburg Confession will be written later in this paper.)

The reactions varied, and even Dr. Eck had to confess that he could not refute the Confession with Scripture, but only with the writings of the fathers. Charles V had the document analyzed by Roman Catholic theologians, and they finished their work early in July. But their reply was so bitter and sarcastic that it was returned for revision, especially since Emperor Charles still hoped to conciliate the Lutherans.

Later on the *Confutatio Pontifica*, with the bitter parts removed, was read in the same room in which the *Augsburg Confession* had been read earlier. The Lutherans were allowed to see a copy of this confutation only if they would accept it and not attack it, something to which they could not possibly agree. Fortunately, someone took notes, and on the basis of these notes Dr. Melancthon immediately began a reply, the so-called Apology to the Augsburg Confession. Thereafter a committee was appointed with equal representation from both sides, but no progress was made.

On September 22, Emperor Charles stated that he had considered both sides and he gave the Lutheran officials in the cities till April 15, 1531, to rejoin the Roman Catholic Church. Meanwhile, the Lutherans were not to publish or to promote their faith among the Roman Catholics; although Emperor Charles would try to have the pope call a council. As far as the Emperor and the Roman Catholics were concerned, the matter was closed.

Dr. Melancthon had the Apology ready before the end of the convention, but it had recessed and Charles refused to accept the Apology. The Apology reveals a stronger stand than does the Augsburg Confession. When Dr. Melancthon later received a copy of the Confutation, he rewrote the Apology, finishing it in the spring of 1531.

The Protestants were deeply disappointed, yet the Emperor had made up his mind early, and from that time onward Germany was really divided into two camps, the Evangelicals and the Catholics. For all practical purposes the holy Roman empire was at an end.

### **S. Dr. Luther published his translation of the entire Bible in 1534.**

The translation and the publication of the German Bible were surely, the crowning achievement of Dr. Luther's life. The German Bible became the center of the church service, it provided daily spiritual food, its importance for the Reformation is beyond calculation, and its influence upon the German speaking world since that time is also immeasurably great.

Dr. Luther had begun his translation at the Wartburg, publishing the New Testament in September, 1522, but he was not completely satisfied with the work. He was always revising his translation, and new editions appeared regularly.

Dr. Luther had begun the translation of the Old Testament soon after the New Testament appeared, but the work progressed rather slowly for several years, since he was just too busy with other matters. In 1531 he was working about two hours a day at the translation; he also eventually translated the Apocrypha. The first complete Luther Bible was published in 1534; it had 124 wood cuts; it is known for its excellent printing and other artistry.

In his translation Dr. Luther strived to render the exact original meaning in contemporary German; he did not attempt a literal translation. This is one of the great strengths of his German translation: He succeeded in making the Apostles and Prophets speak German, a tremendous and far-reaching task.

In translating the Old Testament and in checking the New Testament, Dr. Luther had a great deal of help. Much of the work was highly difficult; for example, the translators had many problems with Job, sometimes spending three or four days on just a few lines. Dr. Luther once wrote about the hard toil required to compel the writers against their will to speak German. Also he was very meticulous about details, even observing the slaughter of a lamb so that he could learn the various parts of its body.

Dr. Luther wrote at one time: "I have undertaken to translate the Bible into German. That was good for me: Otherwise I might have died in the mistaken notion that I was a learned man. All those who think that they are learned ought to do some such work."

The Luther Bible was revised and reprinted in 1541, to some extent on the basis of the many notes for revisions that he had made in the margins (his original copy is still in the Jena Library).

There were many sessions with his coworkers before the 1541 edition. After 1541 there were minor changes in the Old Testament, but the New Testament was extensively revised, and the entire Bible appeared again in the new edition in 1546. This was the final, complete Luther Bible.

The popularity of this German Bible is almost beyond calculation. Nineteen High-German and four Low-German editions appeared in Wittenberg within just a few years; there were 83 editions in High-German and 19 in Low-German during Dr. Luther's lifetime, from 1522 to 1546.

### **T. Dr. Luther wrote the Smalcald Articles, his confession for the Council at Smalcald in 1537.**

The Emperor Charles V continued to promote the idea of a council, and Pope Paul III sent his representative to Germany to prepare for it. Dr. Luther said that the Protestants did not need it, for they had the true doctrine, but Christendom needed the council to rid itself of its errors. That highly displeased the Pope's delegate.

However, Dr. Luther finally agreed to the meeting, provided that it was a free council, that the Lutherans would not be considered as heretics, and that the Bible would decide all issues.

In September, 1536, Dr. Luther began to prepare a confession, because he was not completely satisfied with the Augsburg Confession; furthermore, he felt that he had but a short time to live. This Confession would then be his last will and testament.

The document was ready by Christmastime; it was accepted and signed by numerous Lutheran theologians and princes; it contained 21 articles, rather sharply worded against the abuses and false doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, and stating the Lutheran or Scriptural position.

The Protestants gathered at Smalkalden to continue preparations for the council, but Dr. Luther became ill, Melancthon took over, he belittled Dr. Luther's work, and the Articles never really were presented at Smalkalden. In 1538 Dr. Luther reedited these Smalcald Articles, and they gradually began to replace the Augsburg Confession and the Apology as the document which stated the official Lutheran position. (The Smalcald Articles will be treated in greater detail later in this paper.)

#### **U. The Roman Catholic Council of Trent begun in 1545, formulated Roman Catholic doctrine and it was meant to counteract the Lutheran Reformation.**

The Council of Trent was in many respects the most important council ever held by the Roman Catholic Church. There were 25 sessions in all, meeting in 1545-47, 1551, 1552, 1562; 1563. Those sessions had a profound influence upon the Roman Catholic Church during all of the succeeding years up to this very day.

After much prodding by the Emperor and many delays, the meetings were finally begun in Trent. Though the Emperor expected that the Council would attempt to reunify the Christian Church, the sessions opened and closed on a decidedly anti-Protestant basis. The Council was an important part of the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation.

The most important achievements of the Council were the following:

It defined and codified Roman Catholic doctrine, something that had not been done before, and declared that these doctrines were unalterable.

It began to correct some of the worst abuses, for example, some phases of indulgences, the education of the priests, the holding of several offices by one person. There was an attempt to put the Roman Catholic house in order; mission work soon began to flourish.

It strengthened the papacy. Although it did not adopt papal infallibility, it did regard the pope as the vicar of Christ on earth.

It strengthened the Roman Catholic Church's administrative structure, giving the bishops more power in certain matters, for example.

With most of these measures it prepared itself for battle against Protestantism. From this time onward the Protestants were considered heretics, and the breach in the Church became irrevocable.

The Council of Trent was definitive for Roman Catholic doctrine—even Vatican II specifically denied any attempt, to change the doctrines adopted at Trent. Among the many doctrines codified were a number, like the following, that are particularly obnoxious to us:

The Old Testament Apocrypha and some traditions were placed on a par with the Old and with the New Testaments; the Vulgate became the official Roman Catholic Bible (Session IV).

One is not justified by faith alone (Session VI, Canon IX, contrary to Rom. 3:28), but one can increase his justification by good works (Canon XXIV); one can cooperate with God's grace. No one can be certain about his salvation (Session VI, Chapter XII).

There is a purgatory from which earned merits can release one; principally, one can be released by the "acceptable sacrifice of the altar" (Session VI, Canon XXX; Session XXV).

There are seven sacraments (Session VII, Canon I).

One's understanding of Holy Communion must be transubstantiation (Session XIII, Canon II).

There must be invocation of the saints, veneration of relics, and acceptance of indulgences, but with some of the abuses eliminated (Session XXV).

## **V. Dr. Luther died at Eisleben on February 18, 1546. He was buried in the Castle Church at Wittenberg, Germany.**

The years from 1537 until his death were some of Dr. Luther's most blessed ones. His table companions were with him, many visitors consulted with him, he had at least some relief from the continuous strife of the previous years, and the true visible church had been reestablished. The years were somewhat marred by his unfortunate advice to the bigamist Philip of Hesse (thinking of some Old Testament heroes of faith, Dr. Luther sanctioned the bigamy, but "keep it secret," since it was against the law of the land.) When the secret was out, Dr. Luther was furious. He said that thereafter if anyone practices bigamy, let the devil give him a bath in the depths of hell.

Dr. Luther apparently also sanctioned persecution of the Anabaptists, who blasphemed the true faith and who disobeyed the civil rulers.

Both Dr. Luther and his enemies continued to abuse one another in violently written and verbal attacks. For example, in 1545 Dr. Luther wrote against the papacy of Rome, founded by the devil: "One would like to curse them, so that thunder and lightning would strike them, hell fire burn them, the plague, syphilis, epilepsy, scurvy, leprosy, carbuncles, and all diseases attack them." All of this did not help the cause, but everywhere people respected Dr. Luther for his genius, his bravery, his earnestness, and his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Over the years the many fastings, labor, suffering, controversies, and lack of proper food in his early years took their toll in Dr. Luther's health. He was ill frequently during the last years of his life. He gradually became highly weary of life, and longed for deliverance. He was becoming conscious of his impending death ("I shall not live much longer").

In 1545 the counts of Mansfeld had quarreled, and Dr. Luther was asked to settle the quarrel. He wasn't eager to undertake the arduous 80 mile journey in the wintertime, but felt that he must go. He arrived at Eisleben from Wittenberg on January 28. The next three trying weeks were spent in settling the quarrel; also he preached several times. The dispute was finally settled on February 17. That was his last day on earth.

Much is known about Dr. Luther's death, since there were 14 eyewitnesses. Three of them, including Pastor Justus Jonas, prepared a document outlining exactly what had happened and had it printed soon after Dr. Luther's death in order to quiet the slanders that soon arose. (See *The Last Days of Luther*; Garden City, New York; Doubleday and Company, Inc.; 1970.)

During the night Dr. Luther had several sharp chest pains. His friends became greatly anxious, especially when his third and last attack came later in the evening. It was the most severe of all, and everyone seemed to know that the end was near. Several times Dr. Luther confessed: "I place my soul into Your hands, for You, God, have redeemed me." He also prayed John 3:16 and Ps. 118 ("Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free...with the Lord on my side, I do not fear...I shall not die, but I shall live"—RSV).

Pastor Jonas asked, "Reverend Father, are you willing to die in the name of Christ and the doctrine which you have preached?" Dr. Luther answered in a loud voice, "Yes," and died shortly thereafter at 4:00 a.m.



On February 19 Pastor Justus Jonas preached the funeral sermon before a large crowd in St. Andrews Church, just a few blocks from where Dr. Luther had been born. There was a second service on the next day with a sermon by Pastor Michael Coelius. Then the body was taken for burial to the Castle Church at Wittenberg, the church that was closely associated with him during his lifetime.

All along the way large crowds gathered to mourn his passing. The bells tolled and there was much hymn singing. The huge procession marched through Wittenberg with relatives, faculty, student body, town councilmen, distinguished citizens, and, some of the largest crowds Wittenberg had ever seen.

Drs. Bugenhagen and Melancthon (who was buried beside Dr. Luther) preached, and everyone knew that one of the really great leaders of all history was called out of this world. Dr. Melancthon called him the greatest theologian since St. Paul, specifically because of his preaching of Christ, the Savior of the world. Then the body was lowered to the grave directly in front of the pulpit, where his resting place may be seen to this day.

## II. For what purpose did Dr. Luther write the Small Catechism? (2-4)

### A. Why was the Small Catechism necessary?

In his *Story of the Catechism* (Concordia Publishing House, 1928), Dr. Theodore Graebner quoted this paragraph of Dr. Luther's writings:

No one knew what was Gospel, what Christ, Baptism, Confession, Sacraments; what was faith, spirit, flesh; what were good works, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer; what was praying, what suffering, what comfort; what was government, matrimony, parents, children, lords, servants, babies, maid; what was Devil, what angel, world, life, death, sin; what was righteousness, what forgiveness of sins, God, bishops, clergy, Church; what was a Christian and what the Christian cross. In a word, we knew nothing of what a Christian ought to know.

Among the reasons for this woeful spiritual ignorance was the lack of schools (except for the clergy) and the meager rote learning of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. Besides this there was so much emphasis upon good works, Christ as Judge, the saints, Mary "the Queen of Heaven," and relics that the main truths of salvation were effectively hidden. (Dr. Luther himself, even though he was a monk and a teacher within the visible Church, did not know the way to heaven until he was in his late 20's or even early 30's; millions of church members also probably never really knew Christ as our gracious Savior.)

By the middle 1520's, however, the Reformation with its glorious rediscovery of the precious Gospel, had become well established. Yet, even here there remained one tremendous lack and void that just had to be filled: There was no well-trained ministry, few capable teachers for the schools, and few spiritually-knowledgeable parents who could teach their children the major truths of the Christian faith.

This tragic spiritual ignorance overwhelmed Dr. Luther like a dreadful storm toward the end of 1528, when he visited a number of congregations in Saxony. He wrote about this experience in his Preface to the Small Catechism:

The deplorable condition which I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple Catechism or statement of Christian teaching. Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatsoever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, nor the Ten Commandments, they live as if they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the Gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty.

How will you bishops answer for it before Christ that you have so shamefully neglected the people and paid no attention at all to the duties of your office? May you escape punishment for that! ... You do not take the slightest interest in teaching the people the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, or a single part of the Word of God. Woe to you forever!

I therefore beg of you for God's sake, my beloved brethren who are pastors and teachers, that you take the duties of your office seriously, that you have pity on the people who are entrusted to your care, and that you help me to teach the Catechism to the people, especially to those who are young.

Dr. Luther was not the only one to recognize the deplorable spiritual ignorance of Church members during these days. Historians everywhere acknowledge the same truth. It was indeed a sad time in the history of the Church reminding one of those well-known words of the Prophet Isaiah: "Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people" (Isa. 60:2).

If ever the people were to be enlightened spiritually; yes, if multitudes of Church members were to learn the simplest, basic truths of Christianity without which one cannot be saved, something had to be done immediately. A book of instructions was mandatory, even as it is mandatory for us in the Twentieth Century.

## **B. What is the historical development of the Catechism?**

Beginning as early as 1516, Dr. Luther preached a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. He wrote explanations of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer that were warmly received. He emphasized these three chief parts particularly, stating that they are the three essentials of all Christian knowledge, and he continued preaching on them. He wrote a treatise on these three parts in 1520, a document that was often used before 1529. During these years he continued to rework the material and to preach additional sermons on all five chief parts of the Catechism (the Office of the Keys and Confession were written later).

During this time, too, Dr. Luther increasingly recognized the need for a short Catechism on the major truths of the Bible. Since he was extremely busy with many matters, he asked Justus Jonas and Johann Agricola to prepare such a catechism especially for children. When this did not materialize, Dr. Luther himself undertook the work, writing during the winter of 1528-1529, and completing both the Small and the Large Catechism early in 1529. He used thoughts and phrases from material that he had prepared previously.

The Small Catechism was first published in chart or poster form for hanging on the wall, where every member of the family would see it and review it regularly. At first there were probably just three charts, one for each of the first three parts, but by the middle of March, 1529, there were posters for all five chief parts. Soon thereafter the Small Catechism appeared in book form. Shortly it was also translated into Latin. It appeared later in various editions, sometimes with pictures and sometimes with slight variations. Yet, essentially the form of the Catechism, except for several additions, was not changed materially from the day when it was first printed. Dr. Luther had written in the Preface, "We, too, should teach these things to the young and unlearned in such a way that we do not alter a single syllable or recite the Catechism differently from year to year. Choose the form that pleases you, therefore, and adhere to it henceforth."

## **C. What is the content of the Small Catechism? (4)**

We know from Dr. Luther's earlier writings how much stress he placed upon the first three Chief Parts of the Catechism. He wrote that the Ten Commandments teach us to know that we are sinners (also what to do and what not to do); the Creed tells us where to find the medicine to cure us from the sickness of sin (God's grace in Christ); the Lord's Prayer tells us how to ask for and to receive grace by humble, trusting prayer. "These three things comprise the entire Scripture"; they are the kernel of Christianity.

Yet a fourth question also remains: How does God nourish my spiritual life? He does that through Word and Sacrament. Consequently, after one has learned the three chief parts, he must also be instructed in the two sacraments which Christ instituted. That explains the reason for including the brief instruction on the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

The first edition of the Catechism does not include the Ministry of the Keys and Confession. The section “How Plain People are to be Taught to Confess” was added by Dr. Luther in 1531. The Ministry of the Keys was written by someone else; it is not a part of the Lutheran confessions; but it is Scriptural, and it is included in many editions of Dr. Luther’s Catechism. With the Ministry (or Office) of the Keys and Confession forming one part, we now have the Six Chief Parts in Dr. Luther’s Small Catechism. Even though they are but six simple parts, they do in fact present almost every doctrine of Scripture in a form that even a little child can easily understand.

The section headed “Daily Prayers” in our edition of the Catechism omits some of what Dr. Luther wrote. We shall list the omissions according to the translation by Dr. Tappert. What is included in our Catechism is indicated by ellipsis.

In the morning when you arise, make the sign of the cross and say, “In the name...  
Then, kneeling or standing, say the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. Then you may say  
this prayer: “I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father...  
After singing a hymn (possibly a hymn on the Ten Commandments) or whatever your devotion  
may suggest, you should go to your work joyfully.  
In the evening, when you retire, make the sign of the cross and say, “In the name...  
Then, kneeling or standing, say the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. Then you may say  
this prayer: “I thank Thee...  
Then quickly lie down and sleep in peace.

(Blessing before eating)

When children in the whole household gather at the table, they shall reverently fold their hands  
and pray: “The eyes of all...  
(It is to be observed that “satisfying the desire of every living thing” means that all creatures  
receive enough to eat to make them joyful and of good cheer. Greed and anxiety about our  
food prevents such satisfaction.)  
Then the Lord’s Prayer should be said, and afterwards this prayer: “Lord God, Heavenly  
Father...

(Thanksgiving after eating)

After eating, likewise; they should fold their hands reverently and say, “O give thanks unto the  
Lord, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever. He gives to the beasts their food,  
and to the young ravens which cry. His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his  
pleasure in the length of a man; but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those  
who hope in His steadfast love.”  
Then the Lord’s Prayer should be said, and afterwards this prayer: “We thank Thee, Lord God...

The Table of Duties might be called Lessons in Practical Christianity. Exactly when they appeared is difficult to say, although it was at an early date. The quotations are all in the form of Bible passages. A few of them have been omitted in our edition of the Catechism. For example, in the paragraph “What We Owe to Our Preachers and Teachers” Luke 10:7; I Thess. 5:12,13 are omitted. Under “Civil Government” Matt. 22:21 is omitted; also the passages quoted should be Rom. 13:1,5-7; and I Tim. 2:1,2; Titus 3:1; I Pet. 2:13,14. In the first section, “Bishops, Pastors, and Preachers” Titus 1:9 is not in the original. To our Catechism we might also add the individual verses as follows: I Tim. 2:2-6; Gal. 6:6,7; I Cor. 9:14; I Tim. 5:17,18; Heb. 13:17; Rom.

13:1,5-7; I Pet. 3:7; Col. 3:19; (omit Eph. 5); I Pet. 3:1,6; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21; Eph. 6:1-3; Eph. 6: 5-8; Eph. 6:9; I Pet. 5:5,6; I Tim. 5:5,6; Rom. 13:9; I Tim. 2:1.

The Christian Questions and Answers, included in some editions of the Catechism and written on pages 230-233 of our Catechism, might be the work of John Lange, a friend of Dr. Luther's. They probably were first introduced about 1549.

Thus within just a short time after it first appeared, the Catechism, as we have it today, was complete.

Note: In the WELS edition of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism, the great reformer wrote only the first 21 pages (actually a little less than that). The rest of the book, pages 25-247, was prepared by a synodical committee that finished its work in the 1950's. In question and answer form these 200 plus pages seek to explain, to instruct, and to apply the truths simply expressed by Dr. Luther.

Every Lutheran body has a similar explanation of the Small Catechism, prepared by a committee or by an individual. One should also note that the various Lutheran bodies have translations of the Small Catechism that differ somewhat from each other, since no common English translation has been accepted by all Lutheran bodies in the middle 1970's.

Finally, Dr. Luther completed his Small Catechism with this excellent admonition: "Let each his lesson learn with care, And all the household well shall fare."

#### **D. What is the value of the Catechism?**

This tiny twenty-one-page book is really the culmination of many years' work by one of the greatest spiritual intellects of all the ages. In a masterful way it condenses and clearly presents every major Scriptural doctrine, every important truth that Christians must know. It stresses faith and the works that follow and the works that flow from it, and that is Christianity.

Pedagogically, the Catechism also is outstanding; it has a high literary form; it is easy to memorize; it has rhythm; it is written in attention-requiring question and answer form (a catechism is a book for teaching in question and answer form); it is so simple that even a little child can grasp its truths quite easily. It ties together every one of the Commandments with its "We should fear and love God that..." Each of the Three Articles is an organic unit, centering upon the three all-important doctrines: Creation, redemption, and sanctification. The explanation to the Second Article might well be the greatest sentence ever written by man, outside of the Scripture itself. The Catechism is personal; it does not just present a series of objective truths, but time after time it speaks of **my** life, **my** faith, **our** Father, the significance of **our** Baptism, the way in which **we** are truly prepared to receive the Lord's Supper, etc.

Dr. Luther's masterful pedagogy is also shown in other ways. He did not, for example, include all of Exod. 20:1-6 in the First Commandment, nor all of Exod. 20:7 as the Second Commandment. Some Christian churches do include all of Exod. 20:1-17 as the Ten Commandments, but Dr. Luther, making use of his freedom as a Christian, chose only the essentials. He retained everything essential, but made it as easy as possible for the children to memorize.

Again, Dr. Luther removed all sections from Exod. 20:1-17 that apply only to the Jews, for example, the reference to graven images and the long section that treats the Sabbath Day.

He removed Exod. 20:5b,6 to the end of the Commandments, stating correctly that this threat and promise applied with equal force to every Commandment. He retained the numbering of the Commandments that had been suggested by Augustine and had long been in use in the Church at the time of the Reformation. Thus people would not be confused by a different system of numbering. (More will be said about this later in the paper on the Commandments themselves.)

Yet, though written for children, the Catechism has so many profound truths in it that one can study it a lifetime without really mastering it. On this point Dr. Luther wrote:

As for myself, let me say that I, too, am a doctor and a preacher—yes, and as learned and experienced as any of those who act so high and mighty. Yet, I do as a child who is taught the

Catechism. Every morning, and whenever else I have time, I read and recite word for word the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Psalms, etc. I must still read and study the Catechism daily, yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the Catechism, and I do it gladly.

Those twelfth graders and adults who take this course will surely agree: the Catechism, though written for children, is no child's play, but has highly practical, eternally valuable truths in it for everyone, truths that can be especially appreciated as one grows older.

Some of the greatest men in the Church have recognized the blessings of the Catechism. Dr. Theodore Graebner in his *The Story of the Catechism* has collected a number of these opinions, several of which are listed in the paragraphs to follow:

Justus Jonas, Luther's friend and coworker, wrote: The Catechism is only a small book, which may be purchased for six pennies, but which six thousand worlds do not outweigh in value. I am convinced that the Holy Spirit has indited it to our sainted Luther.

Similarly Mathesius: If Dr. Luther in his career had accomplished no more than the restoration of the Catechism to the home, school, and pulpit, all the world could not sufficiently thank or repay, him for it.

Polycarp Leyser: The sainted Luther never applied greater care to any work than to this brief summary of all those extended works which make up the body of his writing. In a Small Catechism, more precious than gems, we find ecclesiastical doctrine and prophetic and apostolic purity. The whole of Christian doctrine is there so concentrated and so clearly set forth that it may not improperly be called a standard of the Church being throughout taken from the sacred Scriptures. It can truthfully be said that in this tiny book such a wealth of truth is contained that if all faithful teachers of the Gospel treated nothing else in their sermons throughout their days, if only they explained to their people the mystery of divine wisdom comprehended in these few words and set forth the Scriptural evidence on which they are based, they could never exhaust its immensities.

Leopold Ranke, one of the greatest of modern historians: The Catechism of 1529, concerning which Luther himself said that he "prayed" it, no matter how long he had been a theological doctor, is as childlike as it is profound, as clear as it is unsearchable, as simple as it is sublime. Happy the man who sticks to it and nourishes his soul upon it! He has in every moment a fountain of unfailing comfort. He possesses, under a thin shell, the very kernel of truth, sufficient unto the wisest of the wise!

Millions of people everywhere in the world agree with these high praises. Because pastors, teachers, and parents everywhere recognize the value of Dr. Luther's Small Catechism, they use it wherever the Lutheran Church is found. It is undoubtedly true that no other textbook in the history of the world has been so widely used and printed in so many copies. It has been translated into many languages; it was the first book ever published in any American Indian language (1696). Certainly, it's the only sixteenth century textbook that is still used by millions of people in the twentieth century. All of the other textbooks of that day have disappeared or are known only to scholars, contrary to the Small Catechism, which is known and loved by millions. It has stood the test of time.

### **E. How should the Catechism be used?**

How should this supreme book of religious instruction be used in order that we might receive the most benefit from it? Dr. Luther already indicated the answer by his heading to everyone of the Six Chief Parts: "As the head of the family should teach them (it) in all simplicity to his household." That good advice, laying the

responsibility for teaching these truths upon the head of the household, is exactly in keeping with what Scripture says: “Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). How should this be done? Dr. Luther suggested that first the text be learned (“drill it word for word”); then let someone explain its meaning so that this does not become a mere exercise in rote learning; finally, provide an in-depth explanation and application from the Large Catechism or from other books.

A section of the Catechism should be recited at morning and evening prayers. In one of his sermons Dr. Luther said: “Whoever is able to read should study every morning a Psalm or some other chapters of Scripture. This is my own custom, and then I pray with the children the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and some Psalms. This I do in order to retain what I have learned and not permit the mildew of pride to settle upon my Christian understanding” (Theodore Graebner, *The Story of the Catechism*, p. 1280.) Every week, so Dr. Luther advises, let every house father examine his children to see how much they have learned from the Catechism. Pastors are to preach on some Catechism truths at the Monday or Tuesday Matins service.

In this course we shall follow the good advice of the great reformer. We shall relearn and review the text of the Catechism. Where necessary, simple explanations will be made so that everyone at least understands the general idea of each part. But primarily, we shall study these great, vital truths in depth on an adult level. We shall attempt to do exactly what Dr. Luther advised in his Preface to the Small Catechism:

After you have thus taught this brief Catechism, pick up a Large Catechism so that the people may have a richer and clearer understanding. Expound every Commandment, Petition and part, pointing out their respective obligations, benefits, dangers, advantages, and disadvantages, as you will find all of this treated at length in the many books written for this purpose. Lay the greatest weight on those Commandments or other parts which seem to require special attention among the people where you are. For example, the Seventh Commandment, which treats of stealing, must be emphasized when instructing laborers and shopkeepers, and even farmers and servants, for many of these are guilty of dishonesty and thievery. So, too, the Fourth Commandment must be stressed when instructing children and the common people in order that they may be encouraged to be orderly, faithful, obedient, and peaceful. Always adduce many examples from the Scriptures to show how God punished and blessed.

This will mean digging deeply into Scripture. Since the Small Catechism is a compendium, a concise summary of Scriptural doctrine, we shall refer to many Bible passages and bible stories that explain, enlighten, and confirm these truths. Then, since all of these teachings are a part of our daily Christian lives, we shall use many illustrations from contemporary life, always making the necessary applications to our lives.

Thus we shall strive to make this course intensely practical, showing exactly how we must fight regularly against that unholy threesome, the Devil, the world, and our flesh, and continually pointing the way to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that assures us of a blessed life in this world and the glory of one hereafter. May all of us ask for the guidance, help, and blessing of the holy Spirit open our work.

Lest anyone among us should presume that he already knows the Catechism truths well enough, let him by all means ponder exactly what Dr. Luther wrote about this:

Therefore, I beg these lazy-bellies and presumptuous saints, for God’s sake, to get it into their heads that they are not really and truly such learned and great doctors as they think. I implore them not to imagine that they have learned these parts of the Catechism perfectly, or at least sufficiently, even though they think they know them ever so well. Even if their knowledge of the Catechism were perfect (though that is impossible in this life), yet it is highly profitable and fruitful daily to read it and make it the subject of meditation and conversation. In such reading, conversation, and meditation the Holy Spirit is present and bestows every new and greater light and fervor, so that day by day we relish and appreciate the Catechism more greatly.

This is according to Christ's promise in Matt. 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

Nothing is so effectual against the Devil, the world, the flesh, and all evil thought as to occupy oneself with the Word of God, talk about it, and meditate on it. Ps. 1 calls those blessed who "meditate on God's law day and night." You will never offer up any incense or other savor more potent against the Devil than to occupy yourself with God's Commandments and Word and to speak, think, and meditate upon them. This, indeed, is the true holy water, the sign which routs the devil and puts him to flight.

For this reason alone you should eagerly read, recite, ponder, and practice the Catechism, even if the only blessing and benefit you obtain from it is to rout the Devil and evil thoughts. For he cannot bear to hear God's Word. God's Word is not like some empty tale...but as St. Paul says in Rom. 1:16, it is "the power of God" indeed, the power of God which burns the Devil and gives us immeasurable strength, comfort, and help.

Look at these bored, presumptuous saints who will not or cannot read and study the Catechism daily. They evidently consider themselves much wiser than God Himself, and wiser than all His holy angels, prophets, apostles, and all Christians! God Himself is not ashamed to teach it daily, for He knows of nothing better to teach, and He always keeps on teaching this one thing without varying it with anything new or different. All the saints know of nothing better or different to learn, though they cannot learn it to perfection. Are we not most marvelous fellows, therefore, if we imagine, after reading or hearing it once, that we know it all and need not read or study it anymore? Most marvelous fellows, to think we can finish learning in one hour what God Himself cannot finish teaching! Actually, He is busy teaching it from the beginning of the world to the end, and all prophets and saints have been busy learning it and have always remained pupils, and must continue to do so.

### **III. Besides the Small Catechism, what are the other confessions of the Lutheran Church? (253)**

On June 25, 1580, there appeared in Dresden, Germany, a volume called the *Book of Concord*. It contained nine official documents called "Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church," or "The Lutheran Confessions," or simply, the "Book of Concord." It was accepted by 76 electors, dukes, counts, and cities. Ever since this noteworthy year, much of the Lutheran Church all over the world has confessed "We accept all of the Confessions of the *Book of Concord* without reservation, because they are a true presentation of Scriptural doctrine." In thousands of Lutheran congregations everywhere, every member subscribes wholeheartedly to these Confessions.

We shall quote several sentences from the Preface of the *Book of Concord*:

In these last times of this transitory world Almighty God in His immeasurable love, grace, and mercy toward mankind has permitted the pure, unalloyed, and unadulterated light of His holy Gospel and of the Word that alone brings salvation to appear to our beloved fatherland, the German nation, and to light its way out of papistic superstition and darkness.

It is a matter of common knowledge, patent and unconcealed, what very perilous events and troublesome disturbances took place in our beloved German fatherland shortly after the Christian death of that enlightened and pious person, Dr. Martin Luther, and how in this anguished situation and amid the disruption of well-ordered government the foe of mankind bestirred himself to scatter his seed of false doctrine and discord and to bring about destructive and scandalous division in churches and schools so that he might thereby adulterate the pure doctrine of God's Word, sever the bond of Christian charity and agreement, and in this way hold back and perceptively impede the course of the holy Gospel.

Mindful of the office which God has committed to us and which we bear, we have not ceased to apply our diligence to the end that the false and misleading doctrines which have been introduced into our lands and territories and which are insinuating themselves increasingly into them might be checked and that our subjects might be preserved from straying from the right course of divine truth which they had once acknowledged and confessed.

In conclusion, we repeat once again that we are not minded to manufacture anything new by this work of agreement or to depart in any way at all, either in content or in formulation, from the divine truths that our pious forebearers and we have acknowledged and confessed in the past, for our agreement is based on the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and is comprehended in the three Creeds as well as in the Augsburg Confession, submitted in the year 1530 to Emperor Charles V, of kindest memory, and the Apology that followed it, and in the Smalcald Articles, and the Large and Small Catechism, of that highly enlightened man, Dr. Luther. On the contrary, we are minded by the grace of the Holy Spirit to abide and remain unanimously in this confession of faith and to regulate all religious controversies and their explanations according to it.

Since your congregation undoubtedly has a paragraph in its constitution stating that it accepts the nine Confessions of the *Book of Concord*, it behooves you to know something about them. We shall therefore present a summary of them in the paragraphs to follow. (A better course would be, if every home would own and regularly consult the *Book of Concord* in an edition like that by Theodore G. Tappert, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1959.)

In each case we shall divide our presentation into three short parts:

1. Why was this document necessary?
2. What is its historical development?
3. What are its contents?

Since it will be impossible in this course to read each Confession in its entirety, you are urged to do that by yourself. Most of the quotations in the paragraphs that follow from the Lutheran Confessions are taken from the book previously mentioned by Theodore G. Tappert. Other quotations are taken from Willard Dow Allbeck, *Studies in the Lutheran Confessions*; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952. Both books are heartily recommended for your own library. A few quotations are from the *Concordia Triglot*, Concordia Pub. House.

## A. The Apostles' Creed.

**1. The need:** Our Lord said, "Whosoever shall therefore confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32). St. Paul wrote, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus..." (Rom. 10:9). Also I Cor. 15:3,4, NIV, sounds as if it could be the beginning of our Creeds: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve." Various Bible passages like these, as well as the practical teaching needs of the early Christians, required a statement of what the Church believed about God. Also the baptismal formula needed a statement of the faith into which the child or person was to be baptized.

**2. The historical development:** No one knows the exact story of how the Apostles' Creed was written. Its origin may date from Peter's excellent confession in reply to Jesus' question: "Whom say ye that I am?" "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15,16). Then the Apostles' Creed must have developed gradually over the years, until finally completed, probably about 700 A.D. Major parts of it go back as far as Tertullian, about 200 A.D., and a copy from Yugoslavia about 400 is almost identical with our present text. It



certainly was not written by the Apostles, as an old tradition has it, but it bears the name of the Apostles, because it is based upon the fundamental doctrines recorded by them in the Scriptures. It is commonly regarded as the oldest Confession.

**3. Contents:** The Apostles' Creed is really an outline of what we believe about God. Allbeck wrote that it "expresses the common convictions and the united testimony of Christian believers. It is a bond uniting all who profess Christian faith in baptism" (p. 25). There are three parts, one for each Person in the Godhead, that briefly describe their work for use. Every candidate for baptism was required to believe and to accept these truths; indeed, without them there can be no Christianity. We therefore accept them without reservation.

## B. The Nicene Creed.

**1. The need:** Arius, one of the leaders of the Church in Alexandria (about 300 A.D.), taught that Christ is the greatest of God's creatures, that He has a nature **like** God, (*ὁμοιούσιος*), but that He does not have the **same** nature as God (*ὁμοούσιος*). He was, according to this false doctrine, simply a creature of God, albeit the highest and the best. This teaching was, unfortunately, something like that of the Unitarians of today, who also deny the equality of the Holy Trinity. Arius had many followers, and one can see that something had to be done about this heresy; otherwise the Christian faith, the doctrine of our salvation through Christ, would have no basis whatsoever.

**2. The historical development:** After some unsuccessful efforts had been made to settle the controversy, the Emperor Constantine, the first Christian-emperor, called for a church council at Nicea in Asia Minor in 325 A.D. It was the first great council of the Christian Church, with leaders present from many parts of the kingdom.

The Council essentially formed the Nicene Creed as we have it today, although a number of minor changes and additions were later made. Some of these changes and additions more clearly present the deity of the Holy Ghost, His relationship to the other two Persons, and His work. Later church councils reaffirmed adherence to this Creed. The statement that the Holy Ghost proceeds also from the Son, was not added until 589, at the Council of Toledo, an addition that created differences between the Eastern and Western Churches. It was, in fact, one of the points that led to the break between the Eastern and Western Church in 1054. The Nicene Creed is commonly regarded as our second oldest Confessional writing.

**3. The contents:** Like the Apostles' Creed, this one also has three parts, one for each of the three Persons in the Holy Trinity. However, the Second Article, regarding the Person of Christ, is much more emphatic and comprehensive than that of the Apostles' Creed in declaring that Christ is truly God, of the same nature as the Father. He is indeed "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father." Everyone of these phrases and clauses thoroughly condemns the false doctrine of the Arians.

The Nicene Creed also clearly presents the deity of the Holy Spirit, as was mentioned previously. While it is not a summary of all Christian doctrine, it is an excellent statement of the fundamental Scriptural truths regarding God. (It says nothing about Christ's descent into hell, since this doctrine was not in dispute at that time.) Since the Nicene Creed so clearly states the true doctrine of Christ's person, it is particularly appropriate that our churches generally confess it at Communion services, even as it is the creed of the mass in both the Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox Churches.

Allbeck wrote of this Creed (p. 40): "It is the victorious monument of a great doctrinal struggle in the past." Though it has some limitations, "it still carries with it the echoes of battle as it serves the present age in a declaration of full-blooded Christian faith."

### C. The Athanasian Creed.

**1. The need:** Arianism did not die suddenly. There was also a need to guard against other errors regarding the doctrine of God. A clear statement was needed to present to all the world the true Scriptural doctrine regarding both the Holy Trinity and Christ's person.

**2. The historical development:** The origin of this Creed is uncertain. Almost surely it was not composed by Athanasius, because it is never mentioned by him or by his contemporaries. Therefore its name is really a misnomer. Yet, in another sense it is appropriately named, for it truly expresses the true doctrine about God that was ably presented and defended by Athanasius, that great defender of the Christian faith. It may have originated in France or in Northern Africa, possibly in the Sixth or Seventh Century, but no one knows its author. The first, almost complete copy dates from 870. At that time it was regularly used as a canticle, not as a creed, to be sung at prime (early morning).

**3. The contents:** This Creed has two major parts, the first a long section on the Holy Trinity. Each one of the three Persons is carefully identified, each one is equal, each one truly God, yet there is only one God, not three Gods. "Trinity in unity" is the major thought. This Creed far surpasses both the Apostles' and the Nicene in its lengthy presentation of this doctrine.

The second section treats the Person of Christ and His dual nature. Each of His two natures is perfect and united into one person, yet without loss of identity.

Unfortunately, the Athanasian Creed, although occasionally used in the Roman Catholic and in the Episcopalian Churches, is not frequently used in our churches. That is true despite the fact that Dr. Luther called it the grandest production of the Christian Church since the time of the Apostles. It may well be used, especially for the Trinity Festival. It is one of the three ecumenical creeds, commonly accepted by churches almost everywhere in the world, for it states, that "whoever wishes to be saved... must think thus about the Trinity."

### D. The Small Catechism.

This Confession has been extensively treated in sections I, II, and III.

### E. The Large Catechism.

**1. The need:** The need for the Large Catechism was essentially the same as for the Small Catechism: The common people, yes, even many of the spiritual leaders were abysmally ignorant of the most basic Scriptural truths.

The Small Catechism was written to meet the needs of the children. But parents, teachers, and pastors needed helps in teaching the truths of the Small Catechism. For this purpose Dr. Luther wrote the Large Catechism, although it is really much more than an explanation of the Small Catechism; it provides background material for parents, material for sermons, and polemics against the adversary. It just doesn't take each, major point of the Small Catechism and explain it.

**2. The historical development:** This, too, parallels the development of the Small Catechism. For some 15 years Dr. Luther had at various times been preaching and writing on Catechism truths, especially on the first three chief parts. When he then began work on the Small Catechism, it appears that he wrote the Large Catechism simultaneously. (He simply called it *German Catechism*; the title *Large Catechism* was added later to distinguish it from the other one.) It first appeared in print in April, 1529, shortly after the posters with the Small Catechism. Some months later a second edition was published. It contained additional material, especially an "Exhortation to Confession" and more notes on the introduction to the Lord's Prayer. A third edition appeared in 1530, while the last edition with revisions by Dr. Luther was printed in 1538. Fortunately, well-translated, contemporary editions are available to us, and every home should have a copy. This would

greatly aid the parents in teaching Catechism truths to their children, besides giving them an insight into these truths that they might never have had before.

**3. The contents:** One could call the Large Catechism a little Bible for laymen, teachers, or pastors. The first edition had just five chief parts, but the second edition, which soon appeared, had “a brief Exhortation to Confession” making six chief parts in all. There is a longer or shorter section for each part of the Small Catechism, except the Ministry of the Keys, which, as we mentioned previously, was not written by Dr. Luther.

## **F. The Augsburg Confession.**

**1. The need:** Emperor Charles VI had long been pressured by the pope to root out the Lutheran doctrine by force. In addition the entire Christian world was at that time threatened by the unbelieving Turks, and Charles required a united front against this terrible menace. He felt that all of this required religious unity. Therefore he invited the princes and representatives of three cities to discuss their religious differences at an imperial diet in Augsburg during April of 1530.

Furthermore, the religious teachings of the Lutherans had never been codified into one complete statement. There was need for a document that precisely stated the doctrines in which the Lutherans agreed with the Roman Catholics and the points of disagreement. An imperial diet, like the one called for Augsburg, would be an ideal place to present and to confess the true Scriptural doctrine before a large and important audience.

**2. The historical development:** Charles’ summons seemed to be conciliatory. He wrote that the purpose of the diet was

to allay divisions, to cease hostility, to surrender past errors to our Savior, and to display diligence in hearing, understanding and, considering with love and kindness the opinions and views of everybody...so that we all may adopt and hold one single and true religion; and may all live in one communion, church, and unity, even as we all live and do battle under one Christ (Allbeck, p. 46).

In reality Charles had already promised the pope that he would wipe out the “Lutheran heresy.”

Electoral John of Saxony asked his theologians at Wittenberg (including Dr. Luther and Dr. Melancthon) to prepare a paper, stating their position.

The members of the committee undertook their task with the understanding that they were to explain to the emperor the nature of their doctrine and the changes made in the practice of their congregations. They felt that it would be wise to defend the changes on the basis of Scripture and the Church fathers” (Allbeck, p. 47).

The paper was completed shortly and presented to the elector at Torgau (hence the name “Torgau Articles”). It dealt primarily with corrections of abuses within the church.

When the Lutherans arrived at Augsburg (Dr. Luther remained at Coburg, because there were fears for his safety), they discovered that Dr. Eck had written some theses which claimed to prove that the Lutherans were “wild radicals.” As a result, the Lutherans decided to include in their presentation “all-articles of Christian doctrine in proper succession, that everyone might see how unjustly our churches were slandered in the lying papal writing” (Allbeck, p. 48).

With the help of previously written articles and with suggestions from others, Dr. Melancthon then wrote the Augsburg Confession. It was sent to Dr. Luther for his comments. He wrote: “It pleases me very well, and I know of nothing therein to improve or change; nor would it be proper, for I could not tread so gently and softly. Christ, our Lord, grant that it may bear much and great fruit as we hope and pray” (Allbeck, p.50).

Later Dr. Luther again wrote about how softly the Augsburg Confession treads, since it mentions none of the abominations like purgatory, the adoration of the saints, and the pope who is the anti-Christ.

The Augsburg Confession, signed by seven princes and representatives of two cities, was read in German at the Bishop's Palace, where Charles V was staying, on June 25, 1530. The gathering was large and impressive, composed of electors, princes, theologians, representatives of three cities, and foreign ambassadors. It was said that Dr. Christian Beyer read the document in such a loud and clear voice that those who were gathered in the spacious courtyard could hear every word. After the reading, the document was given to Charles V in both German and Latin versions.

With the Augsburg Confession the Lutherans were showing the world that "they were Christians in the best sense of the term, not dangerous heretics, and that therefore they should be permitted to continue their reform practices and doctrines in their territories" (Allbeck, p. 54).

Yet, even though many people must have been impressed with its clear presentation of Scriptural doctrine, Charles V did not accept the Augsburg Confession. Undoubtedly he, as well as the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, knew full well that, if it were accepted, that would certainly spell the end of the Church as they knew it at that time. The entire system of works, monastic orders, mass, the hierarchy with the pope at its head, etc., would surely disappear. Charles V therefore appointed a group of Roman Catholic theologians to prepare a document to show that the Lutherans were wrong. However, their first attempt was so unsatisfactory that the Emperor rejected it. At the beginning of August the group returned with another document, called the *Roman Confutation*, that attacked the Lutheran position. Emperor Charles demanded that the Lutherans admit their position had been refuted, something which the Lutherans, of course, refused to do. He gave them until the next April to recant their doctrines.

In the following years Dr. Melancton made a number of changes in the Augsburg Confession, including a glaring one in 1540. At that time he changed Article X on the Lord's Supper to make it more acceptable to the Reformed, a move that was vehemently opposed by the loyal Lutherans. Thereafter one finds many references, even in today's churches, to the U.A.C., the "Unaltered Augsburg Confession."

**3. The contents:** The Augsburg Confession is the greatest and most important statement of Lutheran doctrine; even the Roman Catholics had to admit that it was convincing in parts. It is an excellent presentation of the Gospel of Christ who gave Himself into death that He might become our Savior. It is the Lutherans' basic creed.

The Augsburg Confession does something more than outline the doctrines professed by Lutherans. It indicates also the mood of their movement. For it is an expression of their theological conservatism in contrast to radicalism. It shows their appreciation of historic continuity and apostolicity in contrast to novelty and modernism. And it commits the Lutheran Church to such an attitude. This does not necessarily mean a static theology. But it does mean that the Lutheran Church is to heed the lessons of the past while facing the problems of the present (Allbeck, p. 56).

Dr. Allbeck also wrote: "Its tone is friendly and conciliatory, because at that time some Lutherans still believed that the adversaries might be won for the truth of the Gospel if only they would hear it clearly stated."

The Augsburg Confession has 28 articles, divided into two parts. The first 21 articles on faith and doctrine treat such topics as God, Original Sin, the Son of God, Justification, the Ministry of the Church, Baptism, the Use of the Sacraments, Civil Government, the Freedom of the World, Faith and Good Works. The last seven treat abuses that had crept into the church, abuses which had been corrected by the Lutherans: Both Kinds in the Sacrament, Marriage of Priests, the Mass, Confession, Distinction of Foods, Monastic Vows, and Power of the Bishops.

## **G. The Apology to the Augsburg Confession.**

**1. The need:** The Roman Catholics advised Emperor Charles V to appoint a committee which would prepare a reply to the Augsburg Confession, and Charles agreed. The Lutherans thereafter were to submit to his judgment. After several revisions, the *Roman Confutation* appeared on August 3, 1530. Emperor Charles accepted it as an answer that refuted the Augsburg Confession. There was, consequently the need to defend the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession. This was done in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (apology in the sense of a defense).

**2. The historical development:** Even though the Lutherans were not allowed to have a copy of the *Roman Confutation*, sufficient notes had been taken so that Dr. Philip Melanchthon, with help from others, could be called upon to begin immediately with the writing of a defense of the Augsburg Confession. The first draft of the Apology was ready for submission to the Emperor by September 22, 1530, but he refused to accept it. Thereupon the Lutherans left the diet, since “the differences were basic and irreconcilable. There could be no hope of a peaceful settlement without a complete surrender by one side or the other” (Allbeck, p. 139). In succeeding months, Dr. Melanchthon continued to revise and to expand the document. It was printed possibly at the beginning of May; 1531. Dr. Tappert writes: “At first regarded as a private publication of Melanchthon, it became an official confession of faith when, it was signed, along with the Augsburg Confession, in Smalcald in 1537.”

**3. The contents:** In the Preface to the Apology Dr. Melanchthon briefly outlined the historical development, telling especially why this document was written. The Apology explains why the Lutherans could not accept the *Roman Confutation*. “I have assembled the main arguments, to testify to a nations that we hold to the Gospel of Christ directly and faithfully. We take no pleasure in discord...But we cannot surrender truth that is so clear and necessary for the Church.” The Apology is considerably more polemical than the Augsburg Confession.

The Apology is about seven times longer than the Augsburg Confession, but it does not treat all 28 articles of the latter document. It omits entirely any reference to Article V (Ministry), VI (New Obedience), XXV (Confession, although much is written about Penitence, Article XII), and XXVI (the Distinction of Foods). In a few other instances very little is written in defense of the original article in the Augsburg Confession, probably because there was little dispute in that particular doctrine. For example, Article I (God), III (Christ), IX (Baptism), XIV (Ecclesiastical Order), XVII (Christ’s Return to Judgment), XIX (the Cause of Sin) take but a very few pages in the Apology. On the other hand, many pages are devoted to a defense of the evangelical teachings regarding such articles as IV (Justification, which covers about one-third of all the pages in the Apology), XII (Penitence), XXIV (the Mass), and XXVII (Monastic Vows). These articles were especially attacked by the *Roman Confutation* and the true teaching is ably defended in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession.

Again and again the Apology quotes Bible passages and testimonies of the Church fathers to prove that the Lutherans truly teach what the Church had once believed. Allbeck wrote:

The Biblical quotations reveals a thorough mastery of the Scriptures. Melanchthon showed the ability to quote not only extensively but also with keen discrimination. He demonstrated that the Reformers were thoroughly acquainted with the Word of God. Furthermore, they knew how to use it. They understood its nature and the basic import of its message” (p. 141).

Again: “The scholarship of the Apology means, of course, that the document was intended for those theologically trained, rather than for general reading by laymen” (p. 141). And, “The Apology makes evident to any fair-minded person that the *Confutation* had failed to upset the Confession...It exhibits a profound as well as a scholarly understanding of the Gospel” (p. 142).

## **H. The Smalcald Articles.**

**1. The need:** Dr. Tappert writes:

During the early years of the Reformation Luther and others proposed again and again that a general council of the church be convened to discuss and arbitrate the questions of doctrine and practice that were in controversy...Pope Paul III finally called a council in June, 1536, to meet in Mantua (Italy) the following May. Although the council did not actually convene until 1545, and then at Trent, the papal summons confronted the Lutherans with the necessity of deciding what their attitude toward such a council should be.

The purpose of the council, according to Pope Paul, would be “the utter extirpation of the poisonous, pestilential Lutheran heresy.”

Although the Lutherans were for some time undecided about what they should do, Elector John Frederick of Saxony became favorably inclined toward attending the council. Documents stating the Lutheran position would therefore be required. (The Augsburg Confession was considered too mild for such a conference.) Consequently, the Elector asked Dr. Luther himself to prepare a statement indicating in which articles no concession, even at the peril of death, could be made and in which articles some concession could be made.

**2. The historical development:** Dr. Luther began work on the Smalcald Articles late in 1536. However, “when he became very sick on December 18, he had finished Parts I and II and Article 3 of Part III. The rest he had to dictate” (Allbeck, p. 189). The manuscript was examined, approved, and signed by a number of theologians and then submitted to the Elector, who was highly pleased with its contents.

Early in February various Lutheran princes and theologians convened in Smalcald to discuss the proposed council at Mantua. The Elector wanted Dr. Luther to present the articles at this meeting, but Dr. Luther’s illness prevented his attendance. Meanwhile, Dr. Melancthon and perhaps others, feeling that this document was too sharply worded and that the Augsburg Confession was sufficient; prevented the Smalcald Articles from being presented to the assembled theologians.

There were, however, three concrete results of the meeting at Smalcald: The Lutherans decided not to attend the council meeting at Mantua, but to review and to strengthen the Augsburg Confession; Dr. Melancthon was authorized to prepare the “Treatise on the Power and Supremacy of the Pope,” a document that was officially adopted and later added to the Smalcald Articles; and finally, even though Luther’s articles were not officially presented or adopted at this meeting, some 40 theologians nevertheless indicated their approval by signing them. As a result, they became known as the Smalcald Articles, and, after being accepted in various places, they were formally included in the 1580 *Book of Concord*.

**3. The contents:** In his Preface to the Smalcald Articles Dr. Luther wrote: “I have decided to publish these articles so that, if I die before a council meets...those who live after me may have my testament and confession...to show where I have stood until now and where, by God’s grace, I will continue to stand.” They are really his last will and testament to the Church.

The Articles are a three-part, bold, clear-cut confession of the Lutheran Church; they sharply distinguish the Lutherans from the Roman Catholics. “Since nothing is to be gained by dodging issues, the irreconcilable differences were frankly expressed” (Allbeck, p. 191). The first, short part “treats the sublime articles of the divine majesty,” the Holy Trinity, concerning which there was no dispute in the Church at that time. The second, considerably longer part “treats the articles which pertain to the office and work of Jesus Christ, or to our redemption” (Christ and Faith, “Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed...On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the Devil, and the world.”)

The third part treats “matters that we may discuss with learned and sensible men, or even among ourselves. The pope and his court do not care much about these things; they are not concerned about matters of conscience but only about money, honor, and power.” These articles are on Sin, the Law, Repentance, the Gospel, Baptism, Sacrament of the Altar, the Keys, Confession, Excommunication, Ordination and Vocation, Marriage of Priests, the Church, How Man is Justified Before God and His Good Works, Monastic Vows, Human Tradition.

“The articles are the work of the mature Luther who was sure that the young Luther had started out on the right path” (Allbeck, p. 192).

The appendix is Dr. Melancthon’s “Treatise on the Power and Supremacy of the Pope.” It is a rather surprisingly strongly worded document against the false claims of the papacy (“it is necessary to resist him as anti-Christ.”)

## I. The Formula of Concord.

**1. The need:** Politically and spiritually the Lutheran Church suffered many hardships for some 30 years after Dr. Luther’s death in 1546. Politically the Lutherans, who had united in the Smalcald League to protect themselves after the unfavorable verdict at Augsburg, were defeated at the battle of Muehlberg in 1547.

Because of various factors, Charles could not deal with the Lutherans before this time, even though he had given them a deadline of April 15, 1531, for accepting the *Roman Confutation*. These conditions; at first unfavorable, later were somewhat modified.

Spiritual conditions also deteriorated dreadfully with many differences in doctrine. Some Lutherans taught that man can cooperate with God in his conversion, that original sin is not serious, and that the Law has no place in the church. There were disputes concerning the Lord’s Supper, Christ’s descent into hell, and others.

Clearly these doctrinal differences needed to be solved if the Lutheran Church was not to be split into at least two major factions, perhaps even to disappear altogether.

**2. The historical development:** After Dr. Luther’s death, the Lutherans tended increasingly to split into two major parties. The one was led by Dr. Melancthon, who tended to compromise in various doctrinal areas. The other was led initially by Matthias Flacius, then later also by Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae. They contended steadfastly for the true doctrine, as presented by Dr. Luther.

Many attempts were made to settle matters; many meetings were held; many theologians became involved; and a number of documents were prepared in determined efforts to settle the controversies.

Finally, in 1576 the Elector Augustus of Saxony called a meeting at Torgau of leading Lutheran theologians from various areas. Using primarily two major documents that had been prepared previously, they completed the so-called *Torgau Book*. This book was widely circulated in succeeding months, after which a series of meetings was held in the town of Bergen to consider all of the suggestions and corrections that had been made. The resulting document was called the *Bergen Book*.

By this time the document had become so long that Jacob Andreae summarized it in the so-called *Epitome* (a short statement of the main points). The longer document is called the *Solid Declaration*. During the following three years 8,188 theologians, pastors, and teachers signed the *Solid Declaration*. It truly became a *Formula of Concord* (agreement). Ever since that time it has been accepted by almost all Lutheran bodies everywhere, either mentioned directly in their constitutions or at least regarded as an “important interpretation of the doctrines set forth in the Augsburg Confession” (Allbeck).

**3. The contents:** Dr. Theodore Mueller wrote in his tract on the *Lutheran Confessions*:

The *Solid Declaration* has the same doctrinal content as the *Epitome*. Only it offers more detail, many proof passages from Scripture, numerous testimonies from the Church Fathers, the Lutheran Confessions adopted before 1580, Luther’s writings, and other Lutheran authorities.

The *Epitome* has an Introduction, while the *Solid Declaration* has both an Introduction and a Preface. In both cases the Introduction confesses that the Bible is the only source and rule of faith and life. The Preface supplies the historical background of this great Confession.

The Formula of Concord has 12 important articles, exactly the same in both the *Epitome* and the *Solid Declaration*. They truly set forth the Lutheran teachings in both affirmative theses and antitheses. This format is one of the great strengths of the *Formula of Concord*, since it exactly states, not only what Scripture teaches regarding these important doctrines, but also the errors that we must reject in each of these doctrines.

Article I treats of “Original Sin,” the teaching that man by nature is totally corrupt. II. “Free Will” is the doctrine that man cannot convert himself. III. “The Righteousness of Faith” is the doctrine that all who believe in Christ are declared righteous (justification). IV. “Good Works” are necessary, and they are the product of our faith. V. “The Law and the Gospel” must both be preached to show us our sin and the forgiveness of our sin. VI. “The Third Function of the Law”: It is our rule, showing us how God wants us to live. VII. “The Holy Supper of Christ” brings to us the true body and blood of Christ under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of our sin. VIII. “The Person of Christ” tells us that Christ has two natures to redeem us. IX. “Christ’s Descent into Hell” shows that Christ’s person descended into hell and destroyed its power. X. “Church Usages called Adiaphora or Indifferent Things” concerns matters that are neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture. XI. “God’s Eternal Foreknowledge and Election” teaches the comforting doctrine of our election to salvation before the world was made. XII. “Other Factions and Sects which Have Not Committed Themselves to the Augsburg Confession” lists errors that cannot be tolerated in the Church or in society.

That was a great day in the history of the Church when approximately two-thirds of the Lutherans in Germany finally accepted the Formula of Concord. May all of us make the prayer written at the close of Article XI of the *Epitome* our own: “May the Almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ grant us the grace of His Holy Spirit that we may all be of one heart in Him and constantly abide in this Christian and God-pleasing accord. Amen.”