Luther's Enchiridion as Resource for Spiritual Formation

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My purpose in this essay is to consider Luther's *Small Catechism* as a resource for the spiritual formation of the faithful. That aim brings with it a number of automatic consequences. First, it requires that I take into account also Luther's *Large Catechism*—that book of advice to pastors in the spiritual formation of Christians. Second, it requires that I invite you to pay attention to the original setting and intention of Luther in writing and publishing his catechisms at the end of the first decade of reformatory activity in Germany. Third, it requires that we consider the catechisms in their ecclesial context, that is, as a part of the confessional writings of the churches of the Augsburg Confession. Fourth, it suggests that we make clear just what is included when we speak of Luther's *Small Catechism*; that is, we must give some attention to the more or less official content of that often-revised document. Fifth, it suggests that we let Luther's prose speak, as much as possible, for itself; accordingly, a portion of this essay will simply be an attempt to do so, composed of a catena of citations from the catechisms. Finally, it invites us to offer some practical suggestions for the implementation of what is gained from what I hope is a sensitive reading of Luther's manuals.

First, I shall comment on some of the historical considerations which are relevant for our concern with the use of the catechisms for spiritual formation. Next, I want to comment on some matters of theological consequence. Third, and this is the bulk of the essay, I shall invite you along on a sort of guided tour through the sacramental portions of the catechisms. Finally, and briefly, I want to comment on some practical matters which might affect the actual use of the catechisms for spiritual formation.
Luther was already a veteran of preaching on the catechism when he finally took up the task of preparing a catechism for the instruction of the faithful. There were several series of sermons preached before and after the time spent in the visitation of the parishes in Saxony during the fall of 1528; as is well known, these sermons formed the basis for much of the Large Catechism. Then, in December of 1528, he began work on the text of the Small Catechism, first published as a series of large charts, and then as an illustrated booklet, in May of 1529. Meanwhile, catechetical sermons continued through the fall and winter and spring of 1528-1529, and the first edition of the Large Catechism was printed in Wittenberg in April of 1529.

It is worth noting that both Catechisms underwent revision and republication, sometimes from Luther himself and sometimes with only his publisher's assumption of Luther's consent in the changes and additions. For example, the lengthy "Exhortation to Confession" in the Large Catechism was added by Luther in a second edition later in 1529, which was also the first edition of the Large Catechism to be illustrated--some of the cuts coming from Lucas Cranach the Elder. And Luther's longer preface was added for the third edition, in 1530. In the case of the Small Catechism, the Table of Duties and the Preface appeared in the first booklet edition in May of 1529, while the other parts were added in subsequent editions: the Baptism Booklet, the Marriage Booklet, and the Litany. The appendices with forms for morning and evening prayer, blessing the table, and thanksgiving for the meal appeared already in the chart editions--intended as it all was for hanging on the walls of the churches and schoolrooms.

A word about intended audiences/readers is in order. Given Luther's choice of the chart format for the earliest printings of the Small Catechism, and given the headings which Luther provided for each of the charts, "How the head of the family shall teach his household . . . ," it is evident that Luther expected the Small Catechism to be committed to memory by the faithful--parents, children, servants. The Preface, which appeared for the first time in the booklet edition, addressed the pastors with the
fourfold task of (1) teaching the young to "follow the text word for word so that the young may repeat these things after you and retain them in their memory"; (2) "after the people have become familiar with the text, teach them what it means"; (3) "after you have thus taught this brief catechism, take up a large catechism so that the people may have a richer and fuller understanding"; and (4) though "no one is to be compelled to believe or to receive the sacrament," "so preach that, of their own accord and without any law, the people will desire the sacrament and, as it were, compel us pastors to administer it to them."

In the case of the Large Catechism, Luther's tone is less pastoral and more argumentative, polemical, cajoling, as he addresses primarily the clergy, seeking to arouse "bored, presumptuous saints who will not or cannot read and study the Catechism daily" and to 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." So I need to warn you that a tour through the Large Catechism is not always a warm and fuzzy experience for the clergy.

II. Theological Considerations

I turn now to some theological considerations. Here I want to treat the question of the order of the chief parts, the significance of the not-so-chief parts (of the Small Catechism), and the whole matter of the nature of the Christian discipline in spiritual formation.

I confess to you that I am radically of two minds on the question of the significance of the order of the chief parts in the catechism. On the one hand, Luther did make a conscious re-ordering of the traditional medieval catechism, and it is to be assumed that, since he comments on that re-ordering, he does not think it of no consequence. On the other hand, Luther's own carefully-worked-out theology of the distinction and relationship of the law and the gospel requires that the decalog be treated differently when it is used for the moral exhortation of the faithful Christian than when it is used for the preaching of repentance.
Prior to Luther's work in 1528/1529, the catechism consisted of four parts, in this order: Creed, Our Father, Decalogue, Ave Maria. Luther re-ordered the catechism, thus: Decalogue, Creed, Our Father, Sacraments, Prayers (Morning/Evening, Table), Table of Duties. And Luther comments on the sequence:

Thus far we have heard the first part of Christian doctrine. In it we have seen all that God wishes us to do or not to do. The Creed properly follows, setting forth all that we must expect and receive from God; in brief, it teaches us to know him perfectly. It is given in order to help us do what the Ten Commandments require of us... If we could by our own strength keep the Ten Commandments as they ought to be kept, we would need neither the Creed nor the Lord's Prayer. (LC II, 1,3)

In his wonderful commentary on the Large Catechism, Martin Marty observes that Luther's grounds for re-ordering the catechism were that one must first know one's obligatedness, and only then, when one is at a loss as to where to turn, does one consider the means for finding and enlarging one's strength. Besides, Marty comments, "our own culture has been promised so much, has been so overcomforted, overgraced, that we must begin with the demand and judgment of God in order then to participate in the joy of the Gospel,"

The trouble is that we do not, typically, confront only neophytes or "lazybellies and presumptuous saints" when we catechize our parishioners. We confront people, by and large, who have been attending Mass more or less regularly for much of their lives, who have heard the preaching of law and gospel from our pulpits and the teaching of the faith in church school for any number of years. And so dozens of catechetical manuals have appeared in the last generation which depart from Luther's order, usually by beginning with baptism or the creed. Why, it is even

known among us here at Valparaiso University's Chapel of the Resurrection that, during our Lenten Catechetical services of Morning Prayer, we not only begin with baptism but omit the decalog entirely! And that may not be a simple case of *lapis antinomianensis* (fall into antinomianism)!

The issue beneath the question of the order of the chief parts is, of course, the issue of the proper distinction between the law and the gospel. So we have no choice but to take on the unavoidable tension between legalism and moralism on the one hand and antinomianism and libertarianism on the other hand. And, for Lutherans oriented to the confessional writings, that also raises the perennial problem of the alleged third use of the law. Now, while it would be a detour from our mystagogical orientation in this Institute to try to argue the whole case, I suppose I must at least give an account of where I stand on the question and how I shall be interpreting the catechisms in relation to this problem. I shall do so in a series of assertions, with references as appropriate.

While Luther can speak of the decalog as the place where we can see "all that God wishes us to do or not to do," Luther nowhere speaks specifically of a third use of the law, a purely instructive or informative function of the law. When he speaks with theological precision about the operation of the law, he speaks of only two functions, a theological or accusatory function, and a civil or political or restraining function. This linguistic and theological usage is reflected in Melanchthon's recurring assertion in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*. "The law always accuses."

When the *Formula of Concord* (1577) seeks to put to rest the questioning about the so-called third use of the law, its compromise is careful and precise: if by third use of the law you mean merely that it is appropriate to use the law to exhort the faithful to good works, then, yes, there is a sort of propriety to that. But such continued relevance of the decalog in the life of the faithful is presented only as a continuation of the first two uses of the law.
If believers and the elect children of God were perfectly renewed in this life through the indwelling Spirit in such a way that in their nature and all its powers they would be totally free from sins, they would require no law, no driver. Of themselves and altogether spontaneously, without any instruction, admonition, exhortation or driving by the law they would do what they are obligated to do according to the will of God, just as the sun, the moon, and all the stars of heaven regularly run their courses according to the order which God instituted for them once and for all, spontaneously and unhindered, without any admonition, exhortation, compulsion, coercion, or necessity, and as the holy angels render God a completely spontaneous obedience.

But in this life Christians are not renewed perfectly and completely. For although their sins are covered up through the perfect obedience of Christ, so that they are not reckoned to believers for damnation, and although the Holy Spirit has begun the mortification of the Old Adam and their renewal in the spirit of their minds, nevertheless the Old Adam still clings to their nature and to all its internal and external powers. . . .

Hence, because of the desires of the flesh the truly believing, elect, and reborn children of God require in this life not only the daily teaching and admonition, warning and threatening of the law, but frequently the punishment of the law as well, to egg them on so that they follow the Spirit of God . . . . (FC SD VI,6,7,9)

The antidote to libertarianism and antinomianism is the continued application of the law, also to the faithful. The antidote to moralism and legalism is the continued application of the law, also to the faithful. And in both cases, that application of the law is always curbing/restraining, and always accusatory and exposing of the fault of the old sinner self. For that reason, one may always expect the law to have its customary effect, to work wrath—both God's at sin, and the sinner's at the impossibly just demands of God.
In the light of these reflections, I acknowledge my radically-divided mind: Luther's re-ordering is indeed significant, but that does not mean I have taught the gospel faithfully if I simply follow that order. I must still perform the theological operation usually called the proper distinguishing of the law and the gospel. And when I do, I discover that the order of topics is not decisive. After all, the charts could be posted in any order on the classroom walls.

Next, I turn to the significance of the not-so-chief parts of the Small Catechism: Morning and Evening Prayer, Blessing before and Thanksgiving after Meals, in particular. The main point to be made here is that, given a chance to state its own case, the Small Catechism is more a book for the spiritual formation of the praying and worshiping faithful than it is a book for the catechizing of the neophyte or the emerging convert. What may we learn from these appendices?

First, we pray, and, praying, we use forms. "Prayer is to sanctify the rhythm of daily work and daily rest. It is to hallow the recurrent proofs that we are creatures after all." The rubrics, "In the morning as you get out of bed," and "In the evening as you go to bed," are reminders of the laudable daily rhythm of work and rest. Implied are warnings for the sluggard who seeks a little slumber instead of preparing for the day's work, as well as for the one who works instead of resting, rejecting the sleep that the watchful Lord gives to God's beloved ones.

Next, we note the parts, the fourfold action of daily prayer: (1) bless yourself with the Holy Cross; (2) say, "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"; (3) say the Creed; (4) say the Our Father.

The first thing, then, that we are to do in the morning is to make the sign of the Holy Cross upon

ourselves...as covering the body with the shield of salvation (so St. Ephrem the Syrian).

With that enacted prayer, joined to the following spoken prayers, we appropriate anew and each day the blessing of Holy Baptism, and we consecrate ourselves anew and each day to the Christ with whom we died and in whom we live. And the rite, the form, the gesture, is as much the prayer as the spoken ones which follow.

The second prescribed act is the invocation of the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the uttering for our defense and for the defiance of our spiritual enemies of the Name that lays hold on everything that God is, everything that God has done, and everything that God has prepared to do...It flings the mantle of God's mighty power around our puny frame...

Then, "kneeling or standing" (not in indolent reclining) we are to say the Creed and the Our Father. The Creed commits us to the faith of the holy community where God's Spirit keeps us united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. And the Our Father teaches us to lay hold of the audacious privilege of the friends of Jesus, making bold to say what no sinner would dare, to address the Almighty God as Abba, Dear Father. Blessed indeed the day so begun and so ended.

Oh yes, and "this little prayer in addition." We learn also to pray for ourselves. We begin with thanksgiving, directed to God through Jesus Christ (else we would not dare even to offer God our thanksgiving). We thank God for protection through the rhythms of day and night, of work and rest, of vigor and fatigue, of health and sickness. And our petition is simply for more of that same protection and sustenance for which we first give thanks.

3. Piepkorn 37.

4. Piepkorn 38.

Page 100
Morning and evening, our needs remain that we be upheld, totally.

My concern is here not only with material "things." I am including my dependents and my benefactors: those for whom I pray and those for whom I ought to pray and those who pray for me; those whom I have helped and those whom my attitudes and my words and my acts and my omissions have hindered (God help me) on the way to salvation; what I have and what I hope for; my aspirations and my desires, the deep-down drives of my subconscious and my unconscious, and the potentialities that I have only partly actualized; that which I have repressed and that which I have sublimated; all the interlocking spiritual and political communities of which I am a member, the circles in which I pray and work and play and study and produce and consume; the Church and the State and the state of the Church and the state of the world.5

Finally, the holy angels. There is more to the universe than God and human beings and animals and plants and inanimate matter. Whatever and wherever, God is creator, and God's protection is power enough.

The theological point is not lost on us: then "you should go to your work joyfully"; then "quickly lie down and sleep in peace." Do we need much more than to be able to go to our work joyfully? to be able to lie down and sleep in peace? Unconscious, subconscious, conscious—the day begins and ends with the name and the shield of God. How shall we learn, really learn, that bit of spiritual formation?

Briefer, now, to Grace at table.

We are reminded that in every aspect of our life we depend utterly upon God and that every aspect of our

life is hallowed by the divine gift and the divine concern. However many intervening steps modern food processing may introduce between the farmer's fields and barns and the fisherman's nets and the fruit-grower's groves on the one hand and our table on the other, and however many people are involved in the process of bringing the food to that table, we are still dependent . . . upon God to give us our food in due season.  

And so we give thanks, and, disciplinedly, "through Jesus Christ, our Lord"--and so it is all gospel. For God has become lovable in the Beloved Son, and so we learn to receive our daily sustenance with thanksgiving. Enough it is, to learn to say "Benedicite" and "Gratias"; enough to fill a lifetime!

Finally, for this portion of my remarks, a comment on the whole matter of discipline in the spiritual formation of Christians. There is no formation without discipline. But a merely external discipline is likely to produce only an external formation. Use a club, and the disciple is impressed, literally, by the club. Corporal discipline is, as Luther himself admitted, but a fine outward training. Fine, but outward. How shall discipline affect the inward being? How shall there be a discipline that accomplishes a genuinely spiritual formation? It was Einar Billing who wrote, in that wonderfully seminal little study, Our Calling:

> Our one great discipline must be to attain to a new assurance of the forgiveness of sins through daily repentance and faith.

His footnote there is decisive:

> The more we rely on the forgiveness of sins and let this training . . . be our only discipline the greater will be the true growth in our inner life.

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Other disciplines exist only to make themselves superfluous.

Those observations gave Martin Marty the title for his manual: *The Hidden Discipline*. The spiritual formation of Christians is the cultivation of a hidden discipline; it consists in inquiring, constantly, "What does the Christian life look like if I believe in the forgiveness of sin?" Such discipline is never automatic. It is never warranted. It is never predictable. It can never be commanded. It is always vulnerable, pervertable, corruptible. But, as Pogo might have put it, "it's the onliest one we've got." And, as the Spirit's own discipline, it prompts in the faithful precisely those actions which are the will of God.

With those comments, I conclude my theological observations, now to turn to a simple attempt to read the discipline of the catechisms out loud. How will this manual for spiritual formation have its way with us?

**III. A Tour through the Handbook**

What is really called for at this point is a kind of commentary on the catechism, written from the perspective of our concern for the spiritual formation of Christians, for the development of a liturgical and sacramental piety. But that would be more than we all can take at this time of the day. Instead, I shall comment here only on the sacramental sections of the catechism, trying to lift up those ideas which have struck me, on my most recent reading of these parts of the catechism, as implying or furthering a liturgical piety. And I shall often try to let Luther's words speak for themselves.

**Holy Baptism**

The cultivation of the Christian discipline of repentance and faith and the holying of life has its source and

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7. As quoted in Marty xiv.
its sustenance in Holy Baptism and in the daily remembrance thereof. For Baptism has to do with who we are and how we shall live, with the resources we find for survival.

What do you say when the going gets really rough, when it's no longer the things you've blown that bug you, but the things you did reasonably well that nevertheless rise up to bug you to death? You can take what you've got coming, but when it seems that no matter what you do, you lose--what then? Out of Jesus' forsakenness, the catechism offers a word for those times when it's all caving in around you, when values crumble and even friends fail: then cry out, "I am baptized!"

What is that good for? A few splashes of water, back before we remember anything at all. What is that against the inevitable fact that I have a ton of "got-to" and only a few pounds of "can-do," against the inescapable fact that this bag of bones is marked for the cosmic garbage dump? What is baptism, in the face of that? "Baptism is not merely water, but it is water used according to God's command and connected with God's Word." And that starts with the Word made flesh, who dwelt among us, full of grace and truth--the Word of God inseparable from God, now inseparable also from us who are baptized into that Name, who have his identity conferred on us: daughter, son, apple of the divine eye.

Baptism says who we are, says where we are. Baptism is the watered-up Word of God, locating us in the Body of Christ, claiming us for himself, assuring us that we shall not be abandoned, not be cut off. God acts, in watery word, to do the Name thing, so that the last word about us is not death but life, not anything else but "Father-Son-and-Holy-Spirit." So what do we say when life is threatening to disintegrate? "I am baptized!" I am who I am because God is who God is--abba, for Christ's sake.

And if baptism is the life-changing, acted-out promise of God that changes what and who and where we are, then that says volumes about the daily grind, about the daily routine. For there we daily face in countless ways the deep and nagging questions about ourselves, our worth, our health, our career, our future. We face the uncertainties
that come from wondering whether we'll make it finally, whether we can do enough to hold back the rushing tide of chaos long enough to amount to something, whether there's a fig leaf big enough to hide our shame at being anything but who and what and where we're meant to be. But what is a little water against all that? How shall water produce such great effects as forgiveness, deliverance, certainty, salvation?

It is not the water that produces these effects, but the Word of God connected with the water, and our faith which relies on the Word of God connected with the water. (SC, IV, 1, 2)

That Word is the promise of God that this ritual bath is in fact God's own doing. "God himself stakes his honor, his power, and his might on it. Therefore it is not simply a natural water, but a divine, heavenly, holy, and blessed water." (LC, IV, 17) Oh yes, and our faith. "Our faith... relies on the Word of God connected with the water." "Faith clings to the water and believes it to be Baptism." (LC, IV, 29) Faith trusts the promise that God makes, or, better, does to us in the water bath. It counts on God to mean it when God promises new birth in God's own Spirit. Such faith makes Baptism useful; "without faith baptism is of no use." For a promise is useless unless it is trusted; but when it is trusted, then it matters, even in life-changing ways!

It matters, all right.

It signifies that the old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new self should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God's presence. (SC, IV, 4, 12)

It matters daily, for our sorrow and repentance--so that our sorrow may not be empty grief, but a holy dying with Christ, as we suffer the loss of all things so as to be found in him. It matters daily, by anchoring us in the cross of Jesus, putting us to death with him, so that St.
Paul can say that we were "co-buried" with Christ, "co-crucified" with Christ, "co-dead" with Christ, and thus "co-living" with Christ.

It matters daily, so that "in baptism every Christian has enough to study and to practice" all life long. It matters daily, so that we may "draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and we [may] retort, 'But I am baptized!'" (LC, IV, 44) For baptism is the whole Christian life in miniature. And so we may use our baptism, when each morning we greet the new day with the sign of the dear holy cross and the remembrance of the baptismal Name. And we may use our baptism when we do what our vocation calls for us to do, as freed and forgiven persons, reflecting and exemplifying the new "way" of life in Christ. We may use our baptism, living in and out of it, when at day's end and at life's end we retire at peace and say of our work what God says about the divine creation: "That's good!" We may use--live in and out of--our baptism when in the face of all contrary appearances, in the teeth of pain and suffering and especially death, in spite of all life's dilemmas and ambiguities, and in contrast to all grief and all anxiety, we nevertheless live, really live. For "we were buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

**Holy Absolution**

Confession consists of two parts. One is that we confess our sins. The other is that we receive absolution or forgiveness from the confessor as from God. (SC, V, 16)

That sounds pretty basic. Luther: "When I urge you to go to confession, I am simply urging you to be a Christian." You can't get more basic than that. But we don't live in the Middle Ages any longer. Some of us have noticed that. Then it was clear: to be a Christian meant most visibly and most obviously to go to confession. Nowadays repentance and confession of sins have become rarities--or merely slogans, public jargon devoid of significant content, devoid of experiential content. We live with the "real absence" of sin and repentance and forgiveness.
To speak of a need for confession and absolution is to speak of the very life of the Christian community and of its focus in the discipline of repentance and faith and a holy life. We have to face the fact that we live "between the times," both before and after the dawn of God's new age. We have to face the fact that in baptism we have been taken out of the old life and put into the new and gracious reality of the kingdom of Christ. Yet the new age has barely dawned, and the old age has not yet fully set. We live between the times, caught in the binds of the old and not yet enjoying the fullness of the new. We still suffer. We still die. We still know our obligation and our missed responsibility and our culpable failure. "Reflect on your condition in the light of the Ten Commandments." We still need, desperately need. Confession is when we utter that need, when we plead that God stand by the promise not to give us what we deserve. Confessing our sin is admitting our bad situation; absolution is the focused, specific, targeted good news for our need.

We confess, daily, to God in the Our Father. We commit ourselves, daily, to share the word of forgiveness with "those who sin against us." Beyond that, we get to beg of Holy Mother Church yet another boon, that on human lips, in and for and by the whole church, the word that brings forgiveness and life and salvation be spoken to us in our need. If we understood that aright, said Luther, "such a desire and love for [confession and absolution] would be aroused that people would come running after us to get it, more than we would like"! And he adds, "If you are a Christian, you should be glad to run more than a hundred miles for confession, . . . coming and compelling [pastors] to offer it." (LC, V, 30)

Marvelous, the grace of God. Here, between the times, living as we do still in the old order, but by our baptism also already in the new order of love and forgiveness, we "in-between" people are made to be a holy community, a special people destined to be God's showcase to the world of what that new thing is that God has begun in Jesus Christ. The new people of God, sent to woo others into the range of the love of God, we are nevertheless the people who get in the way of that mission by our unholliness; the people who give the lie to God's truth by our pettiness, our selfishness, our insistence on our rights,
our demand for what's coming to us; the people, thus, of bad faith, who confess that we belong to a merciful God but who fail to live out of the mercy we have received; the people who betray God's mission to the world.

And yet, for just those scandals, for just those offenses against the mission of God's people, for just those betrayals of our Lord anew, for just those lies against the gospel of truth we confess, there is the offer of reconciliation. When we have destroyed the holiness of God's people, we may seek forgiveness. When we have failed to forgive our sister or brother, we may seek forgiveness. When we have betrayed the Lord's trust, we may seek forgiveness. When our secret shame overwhelms us, we may seek forgiveness. When we have "considered our station according to the Ten Commandments," and we repent in sorrow and grief, we may say, "Pastor, please hear my confession and declare that my sins are forgiven for God's sake." And, having named those offenses, we may hear,

God is merciful and blesses you. By the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I, a called and ordained servant of the Word, forgive you your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (SC, V, 26, 28)

Holy Communion

I want to begin speaking about the Holy Communion under the rubric of an anticipation of the heavenly eschatological banquet—not because that is the dominant motif of the catechism, for it is not. My warrant is simply that, as the catechism puts it at the end of its first sentence in this part, "for us Christians to eat and to drink." With that reminder of the simple fact that we are dealing here with a meal, with something for us to eat and to drink, we have opened for us the Apocalypse's wonderful description of the heavenly liturgies and the marriage feast of the Lamb. And in this way I want to account for
the simple and modest descriptions of the Lord's Supper in the catechisms.

As surely as every Lord's Day is a celebration of Easter, so surely every Lord's Day Eucharist is a celebration of the Feast of the Lamb. The point is that we get to celebrate it, already here, already now. We get to break the bread of the heavenly banquet already here, already now. We get to drink the cup of the new covenant already here, already now. In anticipation of that someday cosmic party, we may give thanks, we may celebrate the mystery of our redemption. We may, in repentance and faith, eat and drink with Jesus Crucified and Risen, already here, already now.

For the meal we share as the Lord's Supper, which we share in obedience to his mandate and trusting in his promises, is the mystery of God's new age, breaking into this old order, already here, already now. It is the sacrifice of our praise and thanksgiving, the remembrance of our Lord's own sacrifice once and for all for our redemption. It is the presence of Christ with all his gifts in the midst of his people--and thus is a kind of appetizer for the joys of the new age.

All of that, I submit, is behind (should I say "in and with and under"?) the simple prose of the catechism: "Instituted by Christ himself, it is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given to us Christians to eat and to drink." And the benefits? They're named "in the words 'for you' and 'for the forgiveness of sins.' By these words the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given to us in the sacrament, for where there is forgiveness of sins, there are also life and salvation." (SC, VI, 6)

When we've said that, we've said it all. Eat and drink the blessed bread and cup, and what we do is suddenly so much more. We share the presence of Christ, the Word of God Himself, there in the otherwise ordinary eating and drinking. It is then the "daily food and sustenance" for the new being that our baptism has made of us. (LC, V, 24)
Amazing, isn't it? Luther calls it a "daily food and sustenance." As if we'd get to celebrate this anticipation of the marriage feast of the Lamb with the Church every day—and by that "daily food and sustenance" have our new selves sustained, nourished, strengthened to be Christ's body in the world—already here, already now.

"For you, for the forgiveness of sins," our Lord says. That's the celebration. That's why it's also "for the remembrance of" Christ. He is our peace, our forgiveness, our life, our salvation. He, the crucified and risen one, who has tied us by Holy Baptism to his death and resurrection, who keeps on enlivening us by the focused forgiveness of Holy Absolution, he it is who lets us in on the Ultimate Party—by the forgiveness of our sin.

Some years ago a fellow theologian took me to task for making so much of the forgiveness of sins. "There's just more to it than that!" he insisted. He had pretty good sense, for it would be a terrible oversimplification to see the Lord's Supper as the forgiveness of sins—unless we can come to see that the forgiveness of sin is the whole of the Christian life. Yet that is precisely what we may come to see. The mystery of our redemption is that our sin is forgiven, that our enmity with God is changed to peace and love. The presence of Christ, crucified and risen, is the confirmation of his word, "Cheer up, your sin is forgiven!" The communion in his body and blood is our share in what he gave his body for, in what he shed his blood for—"for you, for the forgiveness of sins."

The Eucharist or thanksgiving is the celebration of thanks for our redemption. The sacrifice is always only his, yet in us and through us and for us. As Luther put it, we offer Christ when we plead his merits as the grounds for the Father's forgiveness, and thus when he offers us to the Father as those washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. All is forgiveness then, and forgiveness is all.

Forgiven, we have life. Forgiven, we have salvation. That's how the Holy Communion deals with our earthbound and chaotic life. It bids us eat and drink the blessed bread and cup, and so, as the Body of Christ we thereby become, it places us once more within hearing distance of the Word of life; it places us there where God can reach us and forgive us and enliven us and sustain us in our
mission as his people, sent from the celebration to do his
will in the world, to live as those conformed to the cross
and resurrection of Jesus.

IV. Concluding and Practical Reflections

I wish to conclude with a few practical suggestions and
a final reflection on the relationship between catechet-
cal and liturgical formation.

First, I think that any hope for catechetical formation
will have to begin by taking Bl. Martin Luther at his
word.

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 imagi-
ine that they have learned these parts of the Cate-
chism 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 ever new and
greater light and fervor, so that day be day we
relish and appreciate the Catechism more greatly.
(LC Preface 9)

Catechetical formation of the faithful begins with the
catechetical formation of the catechist. If it does not,
there simply will not be any catechetical formation.

Second, I have become convinced that there is a great
deal of wisdom in Luther's other bit of advice to pastors,
namely, that they preach regularly on the catechism,
especially in Lent. For nine years now we have been doing
that with a small staff of preachers at the Chapel of the
Resurrection here at Valparaiso University. To be sure,
the turnover of student generations precludes any cumula-
tive effects. But these attempts to make the catechism
the focus of both our preaching and our praying, and to do
so as part of a disciplined program of spirituality, have
met the test of a previous Dean of the Chapel. When the sheep are fed, said he, they "Baa" in contentment.

Third, what we really need to do is the rituals of worship themselves. John Westerhoff, writing on "Litur­gics and Catechetics," observes:

While the processes of formation are complex and diverse, at the heart of formation is participation in the church’s rites. When we ask the most important influence in the shaping of faith (a people's perception of life and their lives; their world view or construction of reality, character (a people's sense of identity and their disposition to behave in appropriate ways; their virtues or their values), and consciousness (a people's attitude and awarenesses), the answer is the rituals and ceremonials of their primary community. These symbolic actions, words and behaviors, expressive of the community's sacred narrative, influence significantly a people's faith and life.

Ritual word-acts carry meaning prior to our understanding of them. They are significant because they make present a reality that we have not fully appropriated and which we appropriate only through participation in the activity itself.

That, I submit, takes us back to the catechism. For the common element in both the sacramental chief parts and the appendices is the assumption that the rites in fact are done. Baptism is not to be merely remembered or thought about; it is to be brought to daily exercise. Confession is not to be merely recalled or thought correctly about; it is to be done, by popular demand, as the pastors are compelled by the faithful who are ready to run a hundred miles to obtain absolution. Holy Communion is not to be merely thought about in an orthodox and sacramentally-realistic manner; it is to be celebrated; it


Page 112
is for us Christians to eat and to drink; it is to be our
daily food and sustenance. Prayer mornings and evenings,
with the sign of the dear holy cross, is to be done to
hallow our working and our resting with the Name of the
Triune God. Mealtime adds prayer to eating and drinking,
done to cultivate a sense of dependence on God and a
gratitude for the giftedness of "all things."

I join those writers like Westerhoff and Bernard Lee
and Alexander Schmemann who bemoan the separation of
catechetical and liturgical concerns—as if we could have
the one without the other. Too many parish education
materials are still in use which are culpably unaware that
they are for the use of people who at the center and basis
of their life are (or are in the process of becoming) wor-
shipers, materials which speak of the sacraments only as
notions merely to be thought about in an orthodox manner.
Now, if we cannot yet expect the religious education folk
to do their work with liturgical sensitivity, we can at
least do our pastoral work of catechetical formation with
liturgical sensitivity, and our pastoral work of liturgi-
cal formation with catechetical sensitivity. Westerhoff
approves of Norman Pittenger's suggestion (in *Life as
Eucharist*), that we celebrate the eucharist so that we
might live a eucharistic life; he continues:

> the celebration of the eucharist alone is not suffi-
cient to result in eucharistic life. We need to
help persons reflect on their daily lives and what
they bring to the liturgy, to be engaged by the
lectionary for the day, and to plan the liturgy as
preparation for meaningful participation. Then
following the eucharistic celebration, persons need
an opportunity to reflect on their experience at
eucharist, that is, to describe their experiences
and how they felt and feel, to name insights gained
and implications discovered, and to discuss how the
community might aid them to live a more faithful and
responsible life during the week as the reconsti-
tuted body of Christ.

If we are willing [he continues] to set the liturgy
in the context of these two educational moments we
will have provided the church with a unique way to take both liturgy and education seriously.

I would prefer to add that, if we set educational moments into the context of well-done liturgical celebrations, then we will have done well.

In his insightful study of the catechumenate, Mark Searle asks, "What do the sacramental celebrations of the Church add [to the educational work of catechesis]?" His answer is twofold:

First, the rites of the Church heighten our awareness of what is at stake in the life of faith upon which we are embarked. God's gracious intervention in human life is not restricted to explicitly liturgical moments. . . . God may break into our lives on occasions as mundane as a chance encounter with a stranger or a catechumenal session with coffee and doughnuts. In the saying and doing of human interaction, God may be found to have spoken and acted. While the liturgy shares the same structure of saying and doing and makes the same claim to mediate an encounter with God, the ritualized character of the event means that we are set up for this encounter.

. . .

A second dimension of the liturgical rites which needs to be recognized is their performative character. . . . we not only describe a state of affairs which exists or might exist, but we actually do something, as often as not; i.e., we bring a state of affairs into existence.

. . .

So with the liturgy of the Church: its words and gestures, too, are performative and thus really

efficacious, for they have the effect of reordering our relationships in such a way as to make them the kind of relationships that belong to the Kingdom and thus signs of God’s victorious presence in human life. 10

Luther’s catechisms, at least, will not let us rest with separated catechesis and liturgy. For both the catechism and the liturgy have to do with mystagogy, the spiritual formation of Christians.

That’s why I have implied that Luther’s catechisms are, first and foremost, mystagogical catecheses.