

Large Catechism Week 4  
Part 1: The First Commandment

**Opening Discussion**

Read Luke 12:13-21 and Matthew 6:24

What do these verses teach us about the first commandment?

**The 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment**

¶ 1-3

-What is Luther's point about the confidence and faith of the heart?

¶ 4-10

-What is Mammon?

-What of prosperity preachers?

¶ 11-17

-What does the commandment require?

-What does it mean to "have" God?

**Excursus: The Reality of the Sinful Nature**

You will find yourself trying to get around aspects of the commandments that Luther will bring up.

-Our preclusion to consider getting around the commandments shows the depth of our sin.

-Running to exceptions first instead of to the rule

-Use the exceptions to water down the rule

¶ 18-21

-What is idolatry?

-Ultimately, it is the worship of what?

**Excursus: Trust**

An overriding theme of the Large Catechism and of human life

-Trust is understood not just in "religious" terms, but in what it means to be human.

-Our lives are permeated by the need to trust.

-What are some very practical ways you exhibit trust daily? (Be very obvious.)

-This is so true that people trusted in gods they invented [I. 11-12, 18-21]

To be a human being is centered around God's promise to be God.

-We cannot understand our humanity apart from our relationship to God.

*"Only when our idols disappoint, do we learn to distinguish between the illusory world of idolatry that people create for themselves (and which God destroys) and the real world established by God. Conversely, the promise leads us to perceive the hidden hand of God within creation. In this way, 'trust passes through the*

*world and clings to the God who is not of this world.'*<sup>1</sup>

¶ 22-29

- What is the trouble with our conscience?
- What is the 'apple-god'?

¶ 30-34

- How limited is the effect of our sin?
- Is there ever really individual sin?
- What of the idea: as long as it does not hurt anyone else?

### **Excursus: The Importance of the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment to Luther**

The 1st Commandment harbors important teachings of the faith on righteousness and original sin. Luther saw the book of Psalms as reflections on the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment. He does not hold up the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment with the others in equality.

- Read Exodus 20:1-6.
- Where does Luther place v.5-6 in the Small Catechism?
- Like the string that runs through a pearl necklace rather than a pearl itself
- We are to be always living out the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment, and there are nine ways to live out the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment. These are nine ways of taking God seriously as Lord of our lives.
- Furthermore, breaking the other nine commandments also means you broke the 1<sup>st</sup>.

¶ 35-42

- How does God deal with those who disregard his commandments?

¶ 43-48

- "They have wasted their toil and labor"* [I. 43]
- In ¶47, what is Luther's point about the shoemaker or the traveler at the inn?
- How does this connect to our vocation?
- How are we to regard the creation and the things we have been given?
- Why doesn't Luther just say to run away from the world?

### **Excursus: Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD)**

This term was coined by Christian Smith to describe a dominant if not the dominant view of God among our teenagers and thus the wider culture.

Smith interviewed a number of teenagers about their faith.

- He concluded that most teenagers are "basically content to follow the faith of their families with little questioning."<sup>2</sup>
- The problem is what is believed by the teenagers.

*"Very few U.S. teenagers are rocking the boat when it comes to religion. Rather, most volunteer*

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1 Arand, 155.

2 Christian Smith, "God, Religion, Whatver: On Moralistic Therapeutic Deism," *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 120.

*benevolent and amiable comments, such as that they 'don't have anything against religion' and that 'it is really good for a lot of people.' Most U.S. teenagers thus tend to view religion as a Very Nice Thing."*<sup>3</sup>

- 1) God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
- 2) God want people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
- 3) The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
- 4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
- 5) Good people go to heaven when they die.

**(Moralistic)** MTD *"is about inculcating a moralistic approach to life. It teaches that central to living a good and happy life is being a good, moral person.*

**(Therapeutic)** MTD *"is, second, about providing therapeutic benefits to its adherents. This is not a religion of repentance from sin, of keeping the Sabbath, of living as a servant of a sovereign divine, of steadfastly saying one's prayers, of faithfully observing high holy days, of building character through suffering, of basking in God's love and grace, of spending oneself in gratitude and love for the cause of social justice, etcetera. Rather, what appears to be the actual dominant religion among U.S. teenagers is centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people."*

**(Deism)** MTD *"is about belief in a particular kind of God: one who exists, created the world, and defines our general moral order, but not one who is particularly personally involved in one's affairs – especially affairs in which one would prefer not to have God involved."*<sup>4</sup>

How does the Catechism's discussion of God contrast to MTD?

What does conformity to Christ look like?

## Closing Application

1) What are the 10 Commandments?

- Not an impersonal code of ethics; rather they are the personal will of the Creator.
- Bringing us face to face with the Creator.
- How does that understanding shape our lives as Christians?

2) The reality of the Law

The Law (10 Commandments) does a very good job of revealing that you are a sinner.

- Why can we say that is a good thing?

3) Evangelism

When evangelizing, it is important to find a point of contact with your neighbor. From our discussion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment, we already know that we all need something/someone to hold everything together. How does Luther's understanding of what is a god help us in making that point of contact with our neighbor? What will eventually be true about all false gods? What does that do for evangelism?

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 124.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, 163-4.

#### 4) Christian Formation

What does the catechism do to your daily life as a Christian? What should it be doing?

How do you reflect the Christian faith as taught by the catechism in your daily life – among family?