

Large Catechism Week 2
Historical Context for the Catechisms

Opening Discussion: Exegetical vs. Systematic Theology

What is exegetical theology?
-Narrative

What is systematic theology?
-Dogma

Which is more important? Why?

Misconceptions of systematic theology
-Irrelevant for 'real life'
-How can doctrine be practical?

*"Systematic theology is simply the contemporary application of God's timeless truth. In other words, systematic theology carefully considers and appraises the immediate context of the church and the world and then from the wealth of the church's deposit of truth, or its regula fide, it selects and speaks the appropriate aspect of God's truth for that culture. Indeed, if systematic theology is irrelevant, then it is not systematic theology. By definition, it must be both relevant and applicable to the immediate reality that surrounds it."*¹

Events that shaped the catechisms

- 1) Peasant's Revolt begins-1524
- 2) Luther marries Katharina von Bora June 13, 1525
- 3) Saxon Visitation-1526
- 4) Confusion of Law and Gospel

Peasant's Revolt 1524

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." Gal. 5:1

What is the freedom that is described here?

Some people who read Luther and the freedom of the Gospel became radicals and revolutionaries.
-They incited rebellion.

Societal structure of the day was Feudal.

-Unjust treatment of workers and peasants definitely provided the tinder for the fire.

Under the banner of the freedom of the Gospel, the peasants rebelled.

Luther recognized many of the peasants' demands, but he always and vehemently rejected rebellion of any kind.

*"Above all, he condemned as blasphemy their appeal to Christian liberty and the gospel as justification for self-serving violence."*²

¹ <http://concordiatheology.org/2017/05/wholly-citizens-an-excerpt-from-joel-biermanns-new-book/>).

² James M. Kittleson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and his Career*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986), 191.

Marriage to Katie June 13, 1525

Luther was 42 when he married Katie. [*to make angels laugh and the devils weep*']

*"I wanted to confirm what I have taught by practicing it, for I find so many timid people in spite of such great light from the gospel. God has willed and brought forth this action, for I am not 'in love' or burning with desire. But I do love my wife."*³

Melanchthon hoped that marriage would cure Luther's love for coarse jokes.⁴

They had six children.

-His son Hans was about 3 when Luther was writing his catechisms.

-Luther was "one of the first theologians in the West to witness his own child...learn to speak and ask simple questions."⁵

-*"Was ist das?"* What does this mean? Or more literally, what is this?

The Visitations 1526

Teams of parish visitors, including Luther went into various congregations in Germany.

-The goal was to assess the state of the church at the local level.

*"The devil, the world, and the sinful self,'...do not commonly want for employment...there was compelling evidence of difficulty, both in behavior and in knowledge of the basics of the biblical message, among the laity and the clergy."*⁶

The results were not pleasing. Remember, Luther saw many of these accounts firsthand.

-Alcohol abuse

-Sexual, familial, and social difficulties

-Ignorance of defining features of the Christian faith

-One congregation refused to memorize the Lord's Prayer because it was too long.

-Passing understanding of the Christian witness

-Difficulty with clergy

-Infidelity and sexual immorality

-In one congregation, the sacrament had not been administered in two years.

-*Sleep Soundly and Sermons That Preach Themselves*

The Small Catechism's preface reflects Luther's disgust of the what he saw during the Visitations.

"The deplorable, miserable condition that I discovered recently when I, too, was a visitor, has forced and urged me to prepare this catechism, or Christian doctrine, in this small, plain, simple form. Mercy! Dear God, what great misery I beheld! The common person, especially in the villages, has no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine. And unfortunately, many pastors are completely unable and unqualified to teach. This is so much so, that one is ashamed to speak of it. Yet, everyone says that they are Christians, have been baptized, and receive the holy Sacraments, even though they cannot even recite the Lord's Prayer or the Creed or the Ten

3 Ibid, 203

4 Ibid.

5 Charles P. Arand, *That I May Be His Own: An Overview of Luther's Catechisms*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 102.

6 Charles P. Arand, Robert Kolb, and James A. Nestingen, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of The Book of Concord*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 66.

Commandments. They live like dumb brutes and irrational hogs. Now that the Gospel has come, they have nicely learned to abuse all freedom like experts." [SC.Preface. 1-3]

Law and Gospel

Johann Agricola confuses Law and Gospel by eliminating the Law.

- The Gospel functions in the role of accusing and exposing sins.
- The Gospel was even supposed to instruct how to live in faith.

The Catechisms

The overall goal of Luther's catechisms was "reach the people in the congregation and to improve preaching."⁷

Two Catechism strategy

- Large Catechism
 - Written for pastors, teachers, heads of households
- Small Catechism
 - Used by families to instruct their children
 - Taking the catechism to the home allowed for the Reformation to move to the masses.

Luther's catechisms articulate the creedal faith that has been handed down by the church.

- Assume "doctrinal basis for his statements to emphasize the personal confession of faith."⁸
 - "True man," "true God"

"They consistently touch on points where the Word and experience meet in daily life."⁹

- As you read the Large Catechism you will feel like:
 - Luther has been reading the daily news as you read the 10 Commandments.
 - He gets the struggles of faith and unbelief, hope and despair in the Lord's Prayer.
- "Faith is formed by the Word in the crucible of everyday life."¹⁰

Closing Questions

- 1) How would you describe what it means to be a Christian to someone?
- 2) How do you see the Christian life as grounded in reality, in day-to-day life?
- 3) How does Sunday morning affect or shape the rest of your week?

"Faith involves a living relationship in which the hearer, confronted by the accusing voice of the law, gets grasped by the word of forgiveness and resurrection and is, thereby, freed to live as Adam and Eve were originally intended to live-in the freedom of creatureliness."¹¹

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid, 75.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid, 76.

11 Ibid, 72.