

# *Dr. Martin Luther's Large Catechism*

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*HIS INTRODUCTION TO EVERYBODY FIRST & THEN ESPECIALLY  
TO ALL PASTORS AND PREACHERS*

*Wilhelm Weber*

INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN SOCIETY OF WITTENBERG | OLD LATIN SCHOOL



Cover of the first edition published in Wittenberg 1529

## 2. Dr. Martin Luther's [Introduction to the Large Catechism](#)

### 0. All are to learn Christian doctrine continuously

Dr. Luther firstly addresses all Christians, that they should seriously learn the Christian doctrine as summarized in the Catechism. This is not just a teaching for children, but rather for all, who want to be faithful Christians.

For just like any tradesman would be excluded from his guild as incompetent and unsuitable, if he didn't know his trade, so too a Christian needs to know (*Notwendigerweise!*) this doctrine by heart. Housefathers need to teach the members of their household well, so that these don't just hear God's Word and Luther's teaching, but learn and know it more and more. It is a sad state of affairs if older Christians remain infants in the faith and don't know more than is taken for granted amongst young schoolchildren.

Although the need to grow in the Christian faith is highlighted, Dr. Luther restricts the basic requirements for the congregation to the traditional chief articles of Christianity, which have been preserved through the ages. These are the following:

### 1. The ten commandments given by God

- 1.1. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.
- 1.2. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain.
- 1.3. Thou shalt sanctify the holy-day.
- 1.4. Thou shalt honor thy father and mother.
- 1.5. Thou shalt not kill.
- 1.6. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- 1.7. Thou shalt not steal.
- 1.8. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
- 1.9. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house.
- 1.10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his cattle nor anything that is his.

### 2. The chief articles of our faith (The Apostolic Creed)

- 2.1. I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.
- 2.2. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
- 2.3. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

### 3. The Lord's prayer i.e. the "Our Father" as taught by our Lord Jesus Christ

- 3.1. Our Father who art in heaven.
- 3.2. Hallowed be Thy name.
- 3.3. Thy kingdom come.
- 3.4. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
- 3.5. Give us this day our daily bread.
- 3.6. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
- 3.7. And lead us not into temptation.
- 3.8. But deliver us from evil. Amen.

#### 4. This is the basic “Christian Summary” in commandments, creed and prayer.

Dr. Martin Luther stresses, that these chief articles of faith should be memorized by heart and daily repeated verbatim when getting up from bed, sitting at table for meals and again before going to sleep at night. Just as in the Small Catechism he encourages the parents to keep the children from eating and drinking until this faithful practice has been accomplished. These articles are short, comprehensible and basic summary of Holy Scriptures by the holy Fathers and apostles, whoever they may have been. It is a

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*Summary of the doctrine, life, wisdom, and art of  
Christians, of which they speak and treat, and with which  
they are occupied.*  
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#### 5. Two sacraments need to be added as instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ

##### 5.1 The institution of Holy Baptism

Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

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*So much is sufficient for a simple person to know from the  
Scriptures concerning Baptism.*  
.....

##### 5.2 The institution of the Lord's Supper

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and gave it to His disciples and said, Take, eat; this is, My body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me.

In the same way also He took the cup, when He had supped, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me.

#### 6. Conclusion of this first general introduction aimed at all Christians

We cannot take it for granted, that people will learn and remember these chief articles of faith just by hearing them mentioned in sermons or read during the lessons from the lectern. Rather they should be heard, learnt and then also recited word for word again and again. Added to this suitable psalms and catechetical hymns are helpful supplementation and positive fortification, so that the people may be introduced further and further into the biblical Scriptures, thereby making daily progress in their lives as faithful Christians.

This basic and ongoing learning and comprehension is not supposed to end there, but rather should be promoted even further by faithful teaching, sermons, lessons and workshops: *“devoted to the Catechism, that they may hear it explained, and may learn to understand, what every part contains, so as to be able to recite it as they have heard it, and, when asked, may give a correct answer, so that the preaching may not be without profit and fruit. For the reason why we exercise such diligence in preaching the Catechism so often is that it may be inculcated on our youth, not in a high and subtle manner, but briefly and with the greatest simplicity, so as to enter the mind readily and be fixed in the memory.”*



## 7. Preface addressing pastors and preachers

### 7.1. Too many pastors ignore their holy office and others despise and neglect it too!

Too many Pastors are ignoring this their entrusted office and precious doctrine. Some think, they are too clever for such basic wisdom, others are just too lazy and slothful. Although the gospel and precious Christian teaching has been rediscovered by the Lutheran Reformation and despite a flood of good teaching materials, helps and supplements, still too many ignore the saving gospel, neglect the blessed truths and forget the Christian dogmas. They don't take note of helpful research and commentaries. Don't listen to others preach or teach. Don't make use of the endless means at their disposal. So that he has to lament: *"Alas! they are altogether shameful gluttons and servants of their own bellies who ought to be more properly swineherds and dog-tenders than care-takers of souls and pastors."*

We don't have to waste time with worthless rituals and can make use of our time most profitable for reading, contemplation/thinking/study and prayer/petitions. Still, some think the Catechism is not worthwhile learning and contemplating: *"To this there is added the shameful vice and secret infection of security and satiety, that is, that many regard the Catechism as a poor, mean teaching, which they can read through at one time, and then immediately know it, throw the book into a corner, and be ashamed, as it were, to read in it again."*

**Great scandal and crying shame:** Some lords, rich people and those, who should know better even go about proclaiming that *"there is no longer any need either of pastors or preachers; that we have everything in books, and every one can easily learn it by himself; and so they are content to let the parishes decay and become desolate, and pastors and preachers to suffer distress and hunger a plenty, just as it becomes crazy Germans to do. For we Germans have such disgraceful people, and must endure them."*

### 7.2. Dr Luther and his daily catechetical practice

I am also a doctor and preacher, yea, as learned and experienced as all those may be who have such presumption and security; yet I do as a child who is being taught the Catechism, and every morning, and whenever I have time, I read and say, word for word, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Psalms, etc. And I must still read and study daily, and yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the Catechism, and am glad so to remain.

### 7.3. The Holy Spirit and our Lord IX are themselves present in such devotion

So, don't think, that you are finished yet. Rather realize, that there are many more blessings and gains to be won every day still by continuously reading and practicing the Catechism i.e. the main articles of Christian faith like the 10 commandments, the creed and the our father plus the sacraments – like [Psalm 1](#) entreats us and King David does in [Psalm 119](#) too. Remember, the Holy Spirit himself is present and busy in such reading, repetition and meditation. He is the one, who makes these studies profitable and very much worthwhile. Or have you forgotten, where our Lord Jesus Christ promises: *"[Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.](#)"* (Mt.18,20)

#### 7.4. Such devotion is a great help against devil, world, flesh and evil thoughts

It is an exceedingly effectual help against the devil, the world, and the flesh and all evil thoughts to be occupied with the Word of God, and to speak of it, and meditate upon it, so that the First Psalm declares those blessed who meditate upon the Law of God day and night.

There is no stronger incense, holy water or signs against demonic powers, devils, bad spirits and all sorts of hellish ilk than God's most holy and precious word. Dealing with this in reading, meditation, thinking, considering, contemplating, singing, speaking, teaching, writing of it. Blessed are he, who meditates on God's law day and night... (Psalm 1).

Now that alone is already reason enough to deal with God's Word – and Luther's Catechisms, which is nothing but a short summary of God's word, remember? – on a daily basis and like daily food. A man doesn't live from bread alone, but from every word, that comes from God!

“Now, for this reason alone you ought gladly to read, speak, think and treat of these things, if you had no other profit and fruit from them than that by doing so you can drive away the devil and evil thoughts. For he cannot hear or endure God's Word; and God's Word is not like some other silly prattle, as that about Dietrich of Berne, etc., but as St. Paul says, Rom. 1:16, the power of God. Yea, indeed, the power of God which gives the devil burning pain, and strengthens, comforts, and helps us beyond measure.”

#### 7.5. God's command and good example binds us!

Luther continues to sing the praises of God's word. If the devil is a master of 1000 arts, how much more is God a master of 1000x1000 arts? Just like children, who must go hungry, when they don't learn their godly lessons and catechetical basics, so too much pastors “be driven out, being baited with dogs, and pelted with dung” if we don't do our work properly, nor take good care of our godly given office and neglect our divine calling and mission according to Christ's institution “teach them everything I have taught you.”

God commands us to stay in his holy Word. [Dt. 6,6ff.](#) Just because he knows us and our weakness: *“Doubtless He did not so solemnly require and enjoin this without a purpose; but because He knows our danger and need, as well as the constant and furious assaults and temptations of devils, He wishes to warn, equip, and preserve us against them, as with a good armor against their fiery darts and with good medicine against their evil infection and suggestion.”* God's word is that good armor and medicine, which enlightens, sanctifies, keeps and preserves me in the true faith and in Jesus Christ my Lord. We should not be so mad as to neglect these godly gifts. Or are we such *“supercilious, presumptuous saints, who are unwilling to read and study the Catechism daily, doing than esteeming themselves much more learned than God Himself with all His saints, angels, [patriarchs], prophets, apostles, and all Christians?”* No, of course not. We adhere to God's commands gladly and joyfully do as he tells us to do. He teaches us and we willingly learn from him too until the very end – even knowing that we will not finish it ever. It's just too deep, profound and glorious!

Thank God, he doesn't punish us as we full well deserve. Rather: *“He is engaged in teaching it from the beginning to the end of the world, and all prophets, together with all saints, have been occupied with learning it, and have ever remained pupils, and must continue to be such.”* Therefore continue reading, teaching, learning, pondering and meditating until you've taught the devil to death and become more learned than God himself and all his saints. Luther assures us, that this will not be a fruitless endeavour, but God will himself make sure that we become excellent men by this godly exercise i.e. we will despair of ourselves, recognise our maladies, weaknesses and sinfulness, but also God's overwhelming favour, grace, love, mercy, forgiveness,

peace and kindness, which he bestows on us richly and totally undeservedly and unmerited for IX sake. He alone is our Lord and our God. To that may the triune God grant his grace now and always. Amen.

### 7.6. The 10 Commandments contain the entire Word of God

“For it needs must be that whoever knows the Ten Commandments perfectly must know all the Scriptures, so that, in all affairs and cases, he can advise, help, comfort, judge, and decide both spiritual and temporal matters, and is qualified to sit in judgment upon all doctrines, estates, spirits, laws, and whatever else is in the world. And what, indeed, is the entire Psalter but thoughts and exercises upon the First Commandment?”

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and exercises upon the First Commandment?”*  
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### 8. Questions:

- 8.1. What do you think is most important duty as pastor?
- 8.2. What does your daily, weekly, monthly and annual program look like?
- 8.3. Do you practice the Catechism with your family, congregation and fraternal?
- 8.4. What study materials do you use?
- 8.5. In what courses are you enrolled this year to promote your ongoing studies?
- 8.6. What is most helpful in your preaching, teaching and catechising practice?
- 8.7. How do you support young and upcoming pastors, theologians and Seminarians?
- 8.8. Do you help your Seminary?
- 8.9. Do you encourage your pastor to study further and promote his Christian learning?
- 8.10. What programs do you offer in the congregation and diocese for ongoing learning?
- 8.11. Why would you think that you are finished with the Catechism?
- 8.12. When would you be correct in thinking this?
- 8.13. What does Psalm 1, 19 and 119 teach us about God’s word and our dealings with it?
- 8.14. What does Ro1,16 teach us about the power of God’s word?
- 8.15. How does God the Spirit deal with us?
- 8.16. How does IX continue to be amongst us?
- 8.17. How are we enlightened, sanctified, preserved and kept in Jesus Christ?
- 8.18. What does Dr. Luther mean with God’s Word being encompassed in his commandments?
- 8.19. What does dealing with God’s Word do negatively and positively?
- 8.20. What is the special responsibility of pastors and preachers according to the Word of God?

### 9. FURTHER READING

- 9.1. Oswald Bayer, “Theologie” in Handbuch Systematischer Theologie Bd.1. Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh. 1994.
- 9.2. Oswald Bayer, Martin Luthers Theologie. Eine Vergegenwärtigung. 4. durchgesehene Auflage. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen. 2016