

THE GENIUS OF LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM

The year was 1529. Martin Luther couldn't believe the state of the churches and schools. Pastors and entire congregations steeped in superstition and ignorance—they knew nothing of even the most basic Christian doctrine.

**In his
Preface to
the Small
Catechism,
Luther
reflected:**

“The deplorable, miserable conditions which I recently observed when visiting the parishes have constrained and pressed me to put this catechism of Christian doctrine into this brief, plain, and simple form. How pitiable, so help me God, were the things I saw: the common man, especially in the villages, knows practically nothing of Christian doctrine, and many of the pastors are almost entirely incompetent and unable to teach.”

Luther sought to tackle this problem. Sure there would be sermons and writings, but something needed to happen right away.



One common source

Luther knew that parents and pastors needed a common, simple source for learning about the Bible. Drawn from the Scriptures and organized around essential Christian doctrines, his Small Catechism gave parents, pastors, and teachers a rich and deep foundation for teaching their family about the Bible. It was a common resource across home, church, and school—providing a shared vocabulary for learning, thinking, and speaking about the Christian faith.

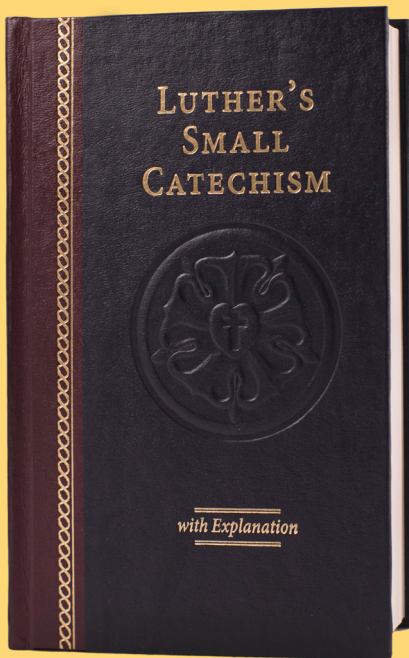
BACK TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

500 years ago, superstition dominated churches, homes, and schools; drawing people into idolatry and unfounded fears, often void of any biblical lens through which to make sense of God, life, human nature, the world, and salvation. We live with similar challenges today.

The Small Catechism served—and still serves—as a way of pointing people back to the Bible. It teaches the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Holy Baptism, Confession and Absolution, and the Sacrament of the Altar.

CHUNK. SCAFFOLD. REPEAT.

Luther intended the Small Catechism as a form of what modern educators might call chunking and scaffolding. He advised teaching one part at a time. Start with one commandment, and once it is learned well, move on to the next. This avoids fragmented knowledge and builds an important foundation.



Timeless truth for every generation

LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM WITH EXPLANATION, 2017 EDITION

Church and state.
Marriage issues. Different
worldviews and religions.
Times change, but the
Word of the Lord endures
forever. Luther's Small
Catechism—now with an
updated Explanation—
guides you to the answers.

cph.org/catechism2017

PERSONALIZED INSTRUCTION

Once the foundations were provided, Luther suggested what we might refer to as personalized instruction in the Christian faith. Still focused upon the common teaching in the Small and Large catechisms, he suggested emphasizing some parts more than others based upon a person's vocations.

Whether you are a parent, teacher, pastor, or combination of these roles; the Small Catechism is vital for nurturing young people and adults in the Christian faith.



By Dr. Bernard Bull

Dr. Bernard Bull is Assistant Vice President of Academics and Associate Professor of Education at Concordia University Wisconsin. He has more than twenty years of experience in Lutheran education ranging from middle school to graduate school and parish education. Bernard's work focuses upon futures in education, educational innovation, and the intersection of education and digital culture.

This article was adapted from Dr. Bernard Bull's blog post, **The Genius of Luther's Small Catechism**, located on education.cph.org.

IN SUMMARY

The Small Catechism offers a shared source of teaching—pointing us to the Scriptures, building a foundation of Christian doctrine that grounds us amid a world of superstition, false teaching, and man-made rules. It gives us a simple and useful structure for teaching Christian doctrine. At the same time, there is ample room for teaching it in a way that is personalized for each person's calling.

As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation this year, it's the perfect time to renew our study and use of this classic in religious education, something that can serve as a shared foundation across home, church, and school; as well as from one congregation and school to the next.

Want to learn more? View sample pages, read the Introduction the 2017 Explanation, learn about the new features, and order at cph.org/catechism2017.