

## BENEFITTING FROM *LUTHER'S* SMALL CATECHISM . . . AS A *CALVINIST*

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MARTIN LUTHER (1483–1546) was a hero. His contemporaries depicted him as everything from the angel of Revelation 14, an apostle, Daniel *redivivus*, Ezekiel's good shepherd, one of three Mary's at the tomb of a resurrected Christendom, prophets like Elijah, Enoch, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and even *Hercules Germanicus* complete with lion pelt clothing and a club beating medieval theologians to death.<sup>2</sup> When Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) rejected the claim that Luther was an apostle, this led many of Luther's followers to respond with lengthy refutations in sermons and writings that he in fact was an apostle.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this is to be expected of Luther's fellow "Lutherans" (anachronistically speaking).

What is not so expected is how Protestants of the "Reformed" or "Calvinist" kind (again, another anachronism) spoke of him in heroic terms. As early as 1520, Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) called Luther a contemporary Elijah.<sup>4</sup> As well, after Luther died, the tendency for the Reformed was to focus their criticism on Luther's so-called followers while leaving "the Big Man" alone. An example of this occurred one year after the *Book of Concord* was published (1580), when Christopher Grandmundt published a refutation of Lutheran "ubiquitist" theologians such as Jakob Andreae (1528–1590). Grandmundt said Andreae took extreme statements Luther uttered in the heat of controversy in order to buttress the *Gnesio* ("true") Lutheran position. In contrast, Grandmundt said Luther merely exhibited his weakness in these utterances; it was his followers who were in serious error.<sup>5</sup> Another example of Luther's influential status is in the Palatinate Reformation. There, for example, Luther's early 1522 *On the Abuse of the Mass* was republished along with Heidelberg Catechism and works by its chief author, Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583), one of Philip Melancthon's (1497–1560) greatest students, who was himself Luther's successor.<sup>6</sup> It is in the

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1. A popular version of this paper first appeared in *Credo Magazine* (March 2017) as found at: <http://www.credomag.com/luther-at-500>.

2. See Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, and Hero: Images of the Reformer, 1520–1620*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).

3. Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet*, 50–55.

4. Cited in Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet*, 17.

5. Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet*, 113.

6. On the authorship of the Heidelberg Catechism, see see Lyle D. Bierma with Charles D. Gunnoe Jr., Karin Y. Maag, and Paul W. Fields, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 49–74; Christa Boerke, "The People Behind

Heidelberg Catechism where we see Luther's influence. Lyle Bierma says, "Time and time again, the text and theology of the HC draw from some of the foundational documents of the Lutheran tradition," including Ursinus' borrowing liberally from Luther's *Small Catechism*.<sup>7</sup> In fact, so great was Luther's influence in the Palatinate, of which Heidelberg was capital, that Johann Heinrich Alting (1583–1644) told his students at the *Collegium Sapientiae* that while the Lutherans called Wittenberg mother and the Reformed called Zurich mother, the Palatinate called both mother.<sup>8</sup>

Martin Luther has a big legacy even in *Reformed* churches.<sup>9</sup> One of his largest legacies is his *Small Catechism*. He said in a 1537 letter to the Strasbourg theologian, Wolfgang Capito (1478–1541), that he would not mind all his works being destroyed except his *Bondage of the Will* and *Catechism*.<sup>10</sup> Yet it is hard for us as Reformed Christians *not* to read into the *Small Catechism* the later polemics between Lutheran and Reformed Orthodoxy. One such apt list is found in Bénédict Pictet's (1655–1724) *Brevis Syllabus Controversiarum* of 1711. Yet even into the eighteenth century, Pictet spoke of these differences as being between the Reformed and *De Augustanis*<sup>11</sup> *Fratribus Evangelicis*—"our Augsburg Evangelical Brothers," or colloquially, "our Lutheran brothers."<sup>12</sup> He lists the typical differences concerning the Eucharist,<sup>13</sup>

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the Heidelberg Catechism," in *The Church's Book of Comfort*, ed. Willem Van't Spijker, trans. Gerrit Bilkes (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 62–88.

7. Lyle D. Bierma, *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism: A Refomation Synthesis*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 11. On the sources of the Heidelberg Catechism, see Bierma et al., *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism*, 75–102; Wim Verboom, "The Completion of the Heidelberg Catechism," in *The Church's Book of Comfort*, 27–61.

8. Heinrich Alting, *Historia ecclesiae Palatinae* (1644), in *Monumenta pietatis & literaria virorum in republica & literaria illustrium, selecta*, ed. Ludwig Christian Mieg and Daniel Nebel (Frankfurt: Maximillian, 1701), 130.

9. Another example is Samuel Rutherford, who wrote a work known by the beginning of the title, *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist* (London: J.D. & R.I. for Andrew Croke, and are to be sold at his shop at the Green-dragon in Pauls church-yard, 1648). Embedded within the lengthy title and subtitle is this: *...The minde of Luther a most professed opposer of Antinomians, is cleared...* In this lengthy section of the book he defended Luther against the charge of antinomianism.

10. *Luther's Works*, 50:173.

11. A reference to the Augsburg Confession (Augsburg's Latin name is *Augusta Vindelicorum* while the Latin name of the confession is *Confessio Augustana*).

12. Benedicto Picteto, *Brevis Syllabus Controversiarum* (Genevae: Sumptibus Societatis, 1711), 99.

13. 1. *In, cum sub pane esse corpus Christi in Eucharistia*. "That the body of Christ in the Eucharist is in, with, and under the bread."

2. *Verum corpus Christi ore corporis ab unoquoque sumi*. "That everyone accepts with their mouth the true body of Christ."

election,<sup>14</sup> perseverance,<sup>15</sup> hypostatic union,<sup>16</sup> baptism,<sup>17</sup> and images in churches.<sup>18</sup> Of interest, though, is that in point #4 he contrasts the doctrine of the Lutheran *churches* “that the decree of preterition of certain people is on account of foreseen unbelief” (*Decretum praeteritionis quorundam esse ex praevisa incredulitate*) with Luther: *quod Lutherus nunquam tamen dixit*, “even though Luther never said it.”

All this brings me as one within the Reformed tradition to commend my non-Lutheran brothers and sisters the reading of Luther's *Small* and *Large Catechisms*. In the space that follows, let me focus on just his *Small Catechism* and offer to you a window into how I benefit from reading it.<sup>19</sup>

## 1. Catechesis

The first benefit is the ancient practice of catechesis itself. In the years of the late medieval period leading up to Luther, public catechesis was done four times a year in so-called Ember Weeks: the days of fasting during the seasons of Advent, Lent, Pentecost, and Holy Cross.<sup>20</sup> The material used was the basics of the Ten Commandments, Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Sacraments. As early as his 1526 Preface to the *German Mass*, Luther spoke of the need for a good catechism and

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14. 3. *Decretum electionis esse ex praevisa fide, quod non creditum ab Augustanis fratribus ante Aegidium Hunnium an. 1580 fatente Calixto*. “That the decree of election is according to foreseen faith, which was not believed by [our] Augustinian brothers before Aegidius Hunnian in the year an. 1580 as George Calixt admits.”

4. *Decretum praeteritionis quorundam esse ex praevisa incredulitate, quod Lutherus nunquam tamen dixit*. “That the decree of preterition of certain people is on account of foreseen unbelief, even though Luther never said it.”

15. 5. *Iustos posse excidere totaliter gratia, etsi non finaliter*. “That the just are able to fall from grace altogether, though not finally.”

16. 6. *Uti unionis hypostaticae naturarum in Christo quasdam proprietates, ut omnipraesentiam, omniscientiam, omnipotentiam, et vim vivificam communicatas humanae Christi naturae, asserunt quidam, non omnes*. “That certain ones, not all, claim that certain properties of the hypostatic union of the natures regarding Christ, like omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, and life-giving power were communicated to the human nature of Christ.”

17. 7. *Quotquot infantes aqua baptizantur, interne per Spiritum S. regenerari, et habere fidem actualem ac posse administrari, in casu necessitatis, a Laicis, imo a mulieribus*. “That however many infants are baptized by water are internally by the Holy Spirit regenerated, and have actual faith, and it can be administered, in the case of necessity, by the laity, indeed by mothers.”

9. *Exorcismi ceremoniam in baptismo esse adhibendam, adhibito etiam crucis signo*. “That the ceremony of exorcism is to be employed in baptism, as well, the sign of the cross is employed.”

18. 8. *Usum imaginum sacrarum in Templis esse utilem*. “That the use of holy images in the churches are useful.”

19. Following the text in *The Annotated Luther: Volume 4, Pastoral Writings*, ed. Mary Jane Haemig (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 212–252.

20. On ancient and medieval catechesis, see Mary Jane Haemig, “Catechisms,” in *European History Online (EGO)*, published by the Leibniz Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz 2014-07-28, section 3. As found at: <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/haemigm-2014-en> (Accessed April 18, 2017).

called upon others to write catechisms.<sup>21</sup> This led to an explosion of thirty different catechisms from 1522–1530 by a number of his followers, but none of these achieved a wide and lasting readership.<sup>22</sup> In 1528 one of Luther’s Wittenberg colleagues, Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558), was away and so the responsibility for catechesis fell upon Luther. Then, after his own pastoral visitation of Saxony and Meissen from October 22, 1528–January 9, 1529 what he saw “constrained and compelled” him to write short catechetical works<sup>23</sup> as well as preach three sets of sermons that became his published catechisms.<sup>24</sup> In his “Preface” to his *Large Catechism* he said,

Dear God have mercy, what misery I beheld! The ordinary person, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about the Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are completely unskilled and incompetent teachers...As a result they live like simple cattle or irrational pigs and, despite the fact that the gospel has returned, have masterfully learned how to misuse all their freedom.<sup>25</sup>

Carl Trueman makes the insightful comment that “Luther was the first author of a catechism in the history of the church who came to the task as a father.”<sup>26</sup> And this fact helps understand the simplicity of the *Small Catechism*. Luther’s fatherly touch also is seen in that what he did publicly from the pulpit was intended to be lived out in all of life. While “many regard the catechism<sup>27</sup> as a simple, trifling teaching, which they can absorb and master at one reading and then toss the book into a corner” the great Doctor himself described how *he* of all people continued to read his own catechisms as an example to his people:

I say for myself...each morning, and whenever else I have time, I do as a child who is being taught the catechism and I read and recite word for word the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Psalms, etc. I must still read and study the catechism daily, and yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the catechism.<sup>28</sup>

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21. *The Annotated Luther: Volume 3, Church and Sacraments*, ed. Paul W. Robinson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 142–146.

22. Haemig, “Catechisms,” section 5.

23. On catechesis as a part of Luther’s reforms, see Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 109–115.

24. The final set can be found in *LW*, 51:135–193.

25. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:212.

26. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 111.

27. When Luther speaks of “the catechism,” it is not to his particular catechisms, but to the medieval structure of the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed. See Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 109.

28. *The Annotated Luther: Volume 2*, ed. Kirsi L. Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 2:290.

## 2. Law-Gospel Clarity

Another benefit of the *Small Catechism* is the clear distinguishing of Law and Gospel in structuring it along the lines of the Ten Commandments, Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments.<sup>29</sup> As Luther said at the end of his sermon on the Creed, "The commandments teach what we should do, but the Creed teaches what we have received from God. The Creed, therefore, gives that which you need. This is the Christian faith: to know what you must do and what has been given to you."<sup>30</sup> This echoed thesis 26 in his earlier *Heidelberg Disputation* of April 1518: "The law say, 'Do this,' and it is never done. Grace says, 'Believe in this One,' and everything has already been done."<sup>31</sup>

The influence of Luther's law and gospel clarity is seen again in the Heidelberg Catechism. The Heidelberg is structured with the first part being the law in its first use as summarized in the two great commandments of Matthew 22; the second part is gospel as expressed in the Apostles' Creed and Sacraments; finally, the law in its third use is explained through the Ten Commandments and Lord's Prayer. The aforementioned chief author, Ursinus, in fact, opened his lectures through the Catechism by stating, "The doctrine of the Church is the entire and uncorrupt doctrine of the Law and Gospel touching the true God, and his will, works, and worship."<sup>32</sup>

## 3. The Ten Commandments

Delving into the text of the *Small Catechism*, what is particularly interesting about Luther's exposition of the Ten Commandments is how the first commandment—"you shall have no other gods"—is central to the interpretation of all the other commandments. Its meaning is that "we are to fear, love, and trust God above all things,"<sup>33</sup> which Luther then applied at the beginning of his exposition of all subsequent commandments. For example, "we are to fear and love God" so that we don't curse, don't despise parents, tell lies, etc.<sup>34</sup> This is really a wonderful reminder that loving God is the first and great commandment and the purpose of all the commands.

One caveat for the Reformed reader is Luther's following the enumeration of the commands by Augustine (354–430) and the Roman Catholic Church in contrast to the Septuagint (LXX), Orthodox Church, and Reformed branch of Protestantism. The Lutherans consider the first commandment what the Reformed consider the first *and*

29. On Luther's Law and Gospel dialectic in terms of preaching, see Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 89–97, 128–132.

30. *LW*, 51:169.

31. *The Annotated Luther: Volume 1, The Roots of Reform*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 84.

32. *The Summe of Christian Religion, Delivered by Zacharias Ursinus in his Lectures Upon the Catechisme, authorized by the Noble Prince Frederick throughout his Dominions*, trans. D. Hénrie Parrie (London, 1617), 1.

33. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:217.

34. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:218–222; see also his sermons on the Commandments, *LW* 51:137–161.

second commandments. This enumeration necessitates the Lutherans dividing what the Reformed consider the tenth commandment into the ninth *and* tenth.<sup>35</sup> The theological caveat for the Reformed is that this means there is a total omission of expositing the words, “you shall not make for yourself a carved image.”<sup>36</sup> The practical caveat is the amount of images of Father,<sup>37</sup> Son,<sup>38</sup> and Holy Spirit<sup>39</sup> in the woodcuts that were originally included with the *Small Catechism*, a move the Reformed consider *verboden*, to use a good Dutch Reformed word!<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, later explanations of the *Small Catechism* such as that by Erick Pontoppidan (1698–1764) do go on to draw out the meaning of the missing words on idolatry, but still do not touch the issue of images.<sup>41</sup>

#### 4. The Creed

On the Apostles’ Creed, Luther intentionally structured his exposition in a Trinitarian way rather than the medieval mythology of each of the twelve apostles writings one article.<sup>42</sup> Those familiar with the Heidelberg Catechism will immediately recognize familiar phrases in each of the three sections on Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Of note is Heidelberg Q&A 1, “What is your only comfort in life and in death,” and its answer, which is reflected in Luther’s explanation of “I believe in Jesus Christ”: “He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.”<sup>43</sup>

#### 5. The Lord’s Prayer

All throughout the *Small Catechism* you get a feel for Luther the pastor. One particular example of how he applied his theology to questions from the pew is in his explanation of the Lord’s Prayer. Luther dealt head-on with the common misconception that since God does not need our prayers we do not need to pray. Only a pastor would tackle this head-on. Luther turned this on its head in the first through fourth requests to say that the hallowing of God’s name, the coming of his kingdom, his will being done, and the providing of our daily bread *do* come about without our prayers but that God wants us

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35. *Quaestionum in Heptateuchum, Libri VII: Liber II, Quaestio LXXI.*

36. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:218. For a Lutheran critique of this enumeration, see Paul L. Maier, “Enumerating the Decalogue: Do We Number the Ten Commandments Correctly?” *Concordia Journal* 16, no. 1 (January 1990): 18–26.

37. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:217, 223,

38. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:224, 227, 228, 229, 230, 235.

39. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:225, 227.

40. See Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 96–98. For a Reformed view of images, see Daniel R. Hyde, *In Living Color: Images of Christ and the Means of Grace* (Grandville: Reformed Fellowship, 2009).

41. *Explanation of Luther’s Small Catechism. Based on Dr. Erick Pontoppidan.* By H.U. Sverdrup, trans. E.G. Lund (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 1900), 26–31.

42. *LW* 51:162.

43. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:224.

to pray that they would come about in our lives in personal ways: "To be sure, God's name is holy in itself, but we ask in this prayer that it may also become holy in and among us."<sup>44</sup> In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, "Help us to direct all our living—what we think, say, and do—so that your name will never be blasphemed because of us but always honored and praised" (Q&A 122).

## 6. The Sacraments

Finally, in coming to the sacraments, as I mentioned before, it is hard for us Reformed Christians *not* to read into the *Small Catechism* later polemics between Lutheran and Reformed Orthodox theologians.<sup>45</sup> What I would remind you of is that Luther preached his catechetical sermons in May, September, and December 1528 and then published his catechisms in January (*Small*) and April (*Large*) 1529 *before* the Marburg Colloquy with Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) in October 1–4, 1529. Let us try to read the *Small Catechism*, therefore, without 20/20 hindsight.

First, on both sacraments Luther makes his classic connection between the elemental signs of water, bread, and wine and the Word or promise of God. In his *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* the worst captivity of all was turning the Mass into a sacrifice, which is something Christians do for God.<sup>46</sup> Instead, the sacraments were promises from God. Of baptism he said, "Clearly the water does not [forgive], but the Word of God... for without the Word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism, but with the Word of God it is a baptism."<sup>47</sup> And of the Supper he said, "Eating and drinking certainly do not do it, but rather the words that are recorded: "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."<sup>48</sup> Luther states this again and again in various ways in his writings. One summary is in his catechetical sermons: "The primary thing in the sacrament is the Word."<sup>49</sup> Another is in his 1520 *Treatise on the New Testament, That Is, the Holy Mass*: "Without the words nothing is derived from the mass."<sup>50</sup>

Second, he also emphasized the role of faith.<sup>51</sup> Despite his very objective meaning

44. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:226.

45. Just as I said the Reformed typically read back into the *Small Catechism* later polemics, so in the same way Lutherans do the same with the Heidelberg Catechism. See Gaylin R. Schmeling, "450th Anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism." (Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary). As found at <http://www.blts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/GRS-Heidelberg-450.pdf> (Accessed April 18, 2017). It is interesting that in his critique of the Heidelberg Catechism's doctrine of the sacraments and baptism and communion in particular, Schmeling never cites the *Small Catechism* as contradicting it.

46. *LW* 36:35.

47. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:231. On Luther's theology of baptism, see Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 353–374; Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 138–144.

48. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:236. On Luther's theology of the Lord's Supper, see Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 375–403; Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 144–156.

49. *LW*, 51:188.

50. *LW* 35:82.

51. See *LW*, 51:182–193; Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 348–352.

of baptism—“It brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and give eternal salvation”—he emphasized the promise and the reception of its benefits by faith. After saying the above, he said, “to all who believe it.”<sup>52</sup> Paul Althaus pointed out that in his early phase, Luther was revising medieval Eucharistic theology. Here in the *Small Catechism* as well as in his earlier 1519 *The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism* and 1520 *The Babylonian Captivity* Luther spoke in contrast to Roman *ex opere operato* sacramentalism. Rome said that so long as a worshipper put no obstacle in the way, the sacraments were efficacious. Luther called this a “heresy.”<sup>53</sup> He said, “to seek the efficacy of the sacrament apart from the promise and without faith is to labor in vain and to find condemnation.”<sup>54</sup> It was in his later debates with the Anabaptists that Luther focused more attention on the objectivity of the outward signs and in debates with the Reformed that he focused on the real presence. Before these flare-ups, though, he could say in *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and the Brotherhoods* that the significance of communion was fellowship with Christ.<sup>55</sup> This gets muted after the Marburg Colloquy.<sup>56</sup>

Third, believing the promises of the sacraments, especially in baptism, was a daily believing. As early as his first of *The Ninety-Five Theses* said, “Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying, ‘Do penance...,’ wanted the entire life of the faithful to be one of penance.”<sup>57</sup> While Althaus said Luther’s “doctrine of baptism is basically nothing else than his doctrine of justification in concrete form,” he also pointed out the main differences between Paul’s teaching in Romans 6 with Luther: for Paul, baptism was the decisive moment; for Luther, it was the beginning of a lifetime.<sup>58</sup> For Luther, the focus is that while we are baptized once, we must be daily baptized into the death of our old man and the rising of the new man.<sup>59</sup> To use later verbiage, I read this to mean that the benefits of baptism are not necessarily tied to the moment of administration. Hence Althaus said: “Dying with Christ is thus not identified with the act of baptism as such but with faith. Faith actualizes that which the act of baptism signifies: dying and rising with Christ.”<sup>60</sup> As Luther said his 1520 *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, “you have been once baptized in the sacrament, *but you need continually to be baptized by faith*, continually to die and continually to live...Indeed, we need continually to be baptized more and more, until we fulfill the sign perfectly at the last day.”<sup>61</sup> This means that baptism for Luther has an eschatological aspect, since after it we sin, leading us to necessarily recall baptism every day—dying and rising—until

52. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:231.

53. LW 31:106. See Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 348.

54. LW 36:67.

55. LW 35:45–73.

56. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 145–146.

57. *The Annotated Luther*, 1:34.

58. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 353–359. From our later Reformed perspective, “...Luther’s notion of the Supper seems to stand, like Luther’s view of baptism, in considerable tension with his understanding of justification by faith.” Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 150.

59. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:232.

60. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 358.

61. *The Annotated Luther*, 3:72.



the end.<sup>62</sup>

As I read it as a Reformed believer, therefore, the *Small Catechism* does not teach baptismal regeneration.<sup>63</sup> Again, the *Small Catechism* says baptism “brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the words and promise of God declare.”<sup>64</sup> As well, as I read it, the *Small Catechism* simply says Christ's body and blood are “under the bread and wine” while later Lutheran theology adds a something more when the 1530 Augsburg Confession says it is “really present...under the form of bread and wine” (art. 10) while the Book of Concord distinguishes the threefold mode of Christ's presence in terms of Aristotelian categories.<sup>65</sup> Trueman says this was done “presumably so as to close any linguistic loopholes the earlier language might have left.”<sup>66</sup>

So while Luther does call the Lord's Supper “the sacrament of the altar” and that it was “the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine,”<sup>67</sup> his emphasis on faith precludes anything resembling *ex opere operato* or later difficulties of the *communicatio idiomatum* between Christ's divine nature to his post-resurrection human nature in relation to the elements of communion. Instead, Luther simply explained the benefits of “given for you” and “shed for you”: “forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words.”<sup>68</sup> It is not the “bodily eating and drinking” that does “such a great thing,” but “the words that are recorded.”<sup>69</sup> Thus “whoever believes these very words has what they declare and state, namely, “*forgiveness of sins*,”<sup>70</sup> to receive communion worthily is a matter of faith: “a person who has faith in these words, “*given for you*” and “*shed for you for the forgiveness of sins*,” is really worthy and well prepared...the words “*for you*” require truly believing hearts.”<sup>71</sup>

In his concluding section on the sacraments, on thing that may trip up the Reformed believer in reading the *Small Catechism* is the insertion between baptism and communion of private confession. In a 1519 series of sermons on the sacraments, Luther included penance as a means of calm for disturbed consciences.<sup>72</sup> Then in his 1520 *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* he said near beginning that baptism, Mass, and penance are sacraments; yet, towards the end he said that since sacraments were promises attached to signs, strictly speaking, penance was not a sacrament.<sup>73</sup> Then in 1522, after returning to restore Wittenberg, he preached a series of sermons and in the

62. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 140.

63. Cf. J.V. Fesko, *Word, Water, and Spirit*, 41–56.

64. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:231. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 141–142.

65. *Solid Declaration*, Article 7: Holy Supper, 98–103 in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, Press, 2000), 609–611.

66. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 152.

67. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:235.

68. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:236.

69. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:236.

70. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:236.

71. *The Annotated Luther*, 4:236.

72. LW 35.

73. LW 36:18, 124. See Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 345–346.

eighth on March 16 he spoke of penance.<sup>74</sup> In the first edition of the *Small Catechism* there was no confession, but it was added a year later.<sup>75</sup> Luther's earlier catechetical sermons do not mention confession nor does the *Large Catechism*. In fact, in the *Large Catechism* Luther says baptism "comprehends also the third sacrament, formerly called penance, which is really nothing else than baptism."<sup>76</sup> Trueman argues there are polemical as well as pastoral issues at play: the rejection of Roman penance as rooted in the power of the priest that led to abuses of withholding absolution but as well Luther was motivated by the pastoral. In evaluating this, the Reformed believer should keep in mind John Calvin's (1509–1564) thoughts on private confession. There are two kinds approved by Scripture: one for our own benefit to "help one another with mutual counsel and consolation," and this can be done to any believer or pastor (Jas. 5) and another for the benefit of our neighbor "to appease him and to reconcile him to us if through fault of ours he has been in any way injured" (Matt. 5).<sup>77</sup>

### Conclusion

Martin Luther continues to be "the Big Man" on many of our theological campuses five hundred years after his *Ninety-Five Theses*. Despite long-standing disagreements between Lutherans and Calvinists, his *Small Catechism* is an enduring treasure—even for us Calvinists. As one of my Th.M. seminar professors, Robert Kolb, has recently written, while "some Lutherans like to make a proprietary claim on Martin Luther as their own possession. ...the Reformer from Wittenberg belongs to the whole church of Jesus Christ."<sup>78</sup>

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74. LW 51:99.

75. Haemig, "Catechisms," section 6.

76. *The Annotated Luther*, 2:400. On Luther's doctrine of penance, see Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*, 104–109.

77. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 3.4.12. On absolution in the Reformed tradition, see Daniel R. Hyde, "Lost Keys: The Absolution in Reformed Liturgy." *Calvin Theological Journal* 46, no. 1 (April 2011): 140–166.

78. Robert Kolb, "Foreword," in Carl R. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 13.