



Historical Introductions

to the
Lutheran Confessions

By F. Bente

Historical Introductions
to the
LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS



As contained in
The Book of Concord of 1580

By F. Bente



2d edition printed 2005

Published by Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
1-800-325-3040 • www.cph.org

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Manufactured in the United States of America

ISBN 0-7586-09213

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05

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Preface to the Reprinting

CHRISTIANS WHO FAIL TO REMEMBER THEIR HISTORY ARE CAST ADRIFT in an increasingly stormy sea of controversy, division, and disregard for our Lord's Word and Sacraments. What is more, they rob themselves of the opportunity to thank and praise the Lord of the Church for His rich and varied blessings through specific persons, events, places, and times.

Professor Friederich Bente knew this better than most as he labored to produce this historical introduction to the various documents contained in the Book of Concord. Even though Bente reflects older scholarship, and may strike some as too strident in the positions he embraces and the manner in which he writes of his subject matter, his unqualified acceptance of the Book of Concord as a true and unadulterated exposition of the Word of God makes his work extremely helpful for our day and age. While more contemporary treatments of this same subject matter supply many helpful insights and perspectives, they do not surpass Bente's passionate commitment to being and remaining truly Lutheran. In fact, modern treatments of the same subjects must be very carefully evaluated since they are produced in part by theologians who have intentionally surrendered key points of Lutheran doctrine for the sake of various ecumenical compromises. Intense commitment to the truth confessed in the Book of Concord reflects itself on each page of Bente's work. He was not interested in creating a novel work to be admired and praised by academia or the guild of scholars. His concern was to provide a resource for those who bear the name Lutheran, and all who wish to understand why the Lutheran church treasures her precious "Concordia."

Genuine Lutherans are those who confess the truths of the Book of Concord because they are absolutely certain that these truths are nothing more, and nothing less, than the teaching of God's Holy Word, the Sacred Scriptures. For in the sacred text of Scripture is revealed the One who is the Lord of History, who came among us to earn for us forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation, even Jesus Christ our Lord, who with the Father and the Spirit, lives and reigns to all eternity.

taught and instructed in what they must believe, do, not do, and know concerning Christianity. Pupils who were accepted for such instruction and learned the faith before being baptized were therefore called catechumens. Nor do I know how to present this instruction, or teaching, in a form more simple than it already has been presented since the beginning of Christianity, and hitherto retained, to wit, the three parts: the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. These three parts contain in simple and brief form everything that a Christian must know. And since as yet we have no special congregation (*weil man noch keine sonderliche Gemeinde hat*), this instruction must proceed in the following manner, by preaching from the pulpit at various times or daily, as necessity demands, and by repeating and reading it to the children and servants at home in the houses morning and evening (if one would make Christians of them). Yet not only so that they memorize the words or recite them, as was done hitherto, but by questioning them part for part, and having them state in their answer what each part means and how they understand it. If all parts cannot be asked at one time, take one, the next day another. For if the parents or guardians are unwilling to take such pains with the young, either personally or through others the Catechism will never be established." (19, 76) German Catechism in German services—such, then, was the slogan which Luther now sounded forth with ever-increasing emphasis.

Luther Illustrating Method of Procedure

According to Luther's *German Worship*, pastors were to preach the Catechism on Mondays and Tuesdays. To insure the desired results (memorizing and understanding the text), the children should be questioned, especially at home by the parents. Exemplifying such catechization, Luther writes: "For so shall they be asked: 'What do you pray?' Answer: 'The Lord's Prayer,' What do you mean by saying: 'Our Father who art in heaven?' Answer: 'That God is not an earthly, but a heavenly Father, who would make us rich and blessed in heaven,' 'What does "Hallowed be Thy name" mean?' Answer: 'That we should honor God's name and not use it in vain, lest it be profaned,' 'How, then, is it profaned and desecrated?' Answer: 'When we who are regarded as His children lead wicked lives, teach and believe what is wrong,' And so forth, what God's kingdom means; how it comes; what God's will is, what daily bread, etc. Likewise also of the Creed: 'What do you believe?' Answer: 'I believe in God the Father,' etc. Thereupon part for part, as

leisure permits, one or two at a time. Thus: ‘What does it mean to believe in God the Father Almighty?’ Answer: ‘It means that the heart trusts Him entirely, and confidently looks to Him for all grace, favor, help, and comfort, here and hereafter,’ ‘What does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ, His Son?’ Answer: ‘It means that the heart believes we should all be lost eternally if Christ had not died for us,’ etc. In like manner one must also question on the Ten Commandments, what the first, the second, the third and other commandments mean. Such questions you may take from our Prayer-Booklet, where the three parts are briefly explained, or you may formulate others yourself, until they comprehend with their hearts the entire sum of Christian knowledge in two parts, as in two sacks, which are faith and love. Let faith’s sack have two pockets; into the one pocket put the part according to which we believe that we are altogether corrupted by Adam’s sin, are sinners and condemned, Rom. 5:12 and Ps. 51:7. Into the other pocket put the part telling us that by Jesus Christ we have all been redeemed from such corrupt, sinful, condemned condition, Rom. 5:18 and John 3:16. Let love’s sack also have two pockets. Into the one put this part, that we should serve, and do good to, every one, even as Christ did unto us, Rom. 13. Into the other put the part that we should gladly suffer and endure all manner of evil.” (19, 76)

In like manner passages of Scripture were also to be made the child’s property, as it were; for it was not Luther’s idea that instruction should cease at the lowest indispensably necessary goal (the understanding of the text of the chief parts). In his *German Order of Worship* he goes on to say: “When the child begins to comprehend this [the text of the Catechism], accustom it to carry home passages of Scripture from the sermons and to recite them to the parents at the table, at meal-time, as it was formerly customary to recite Latin, and thereupon to store the passages into the sacks and pockets, as one puts *pfennige*, and *groschen*, or *gulden* into his pocket. Let the sack of faith be, as it were, the *gulden* sack. Into the first pocket let this passage be put, Rom. 5: ‘By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners’; and Ps. 51: ‘Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me,’ Those are two Rheinisch gulden in the pocket. The other pocket is for the Hungarian gulden, such as this passage, Rom. 5: ‘Christ was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification’; again, John 1: ‘Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’ That would be two good Hungarian gulden in the pocket. Let love’s sack be the silver sack. Into the first pocket belong the

passages of well-doing, such as Gal. 5: 'By love serve one another'; Matt. 25: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.' That would be two silver groschen in the pocket. Into the other pocket this passage belongs, Matt. 5: 'Blessed are ye when men shall persecute you for My sake'; Heb. 12: 'For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth: He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.' Those are two Schreckenbergers [a coin made of silver mined from Schreckenbergr] in the pocket." (19, 77f.)

Believing that understanding, not mere mechanical memorizing, of the Catechism is of paramount import, Luther insisted that the instruction must be popular throughout. Preachers and fathers are urged to come down to the level of the children and to prattle with them, in order to bring the Christian fundamentals home even to the weakest and simplest. In his *German Mass* Luther concludes the chapter on instruction as follows: "And let no one consider himself too wise and despise such child's play. When Christ desired to train men He had to become a man. If we are to train children, we also must become children with them. Would to God that such child's play were carried on well; then we should in a short time see a great wealth of Christian people, and souls growing rich in the Scriptures and the knowledge of God until they themselves would give more heed to these pockets as *locos communes* and comprehend in them the entire Scriptures; otherwise they come daily to hear the preaching and leave again as they came. For they believe that the object is merely to spend the time in hearing, no one intending to learn or retain anything. Thus many a man will hear preaching for three, four years and still not learn enough to be able to give account of his faith in one particular, as I indeed experience every day. Enough has been written in books. True, but not all of it has been impressed on the hearts." (19, 78)

Value Placed on Memorizing

Modern pedagogs have contended that Luther's method of teaching the Catechism unduly multiplies the material to be memorized, and does not sufficiently stress the understanding. Both charges, however, are without any foundation. As to the first, it is true that Luther did not put a low estimate on the memorizing of the Catechism. In the Large Catechism he says: "Therefore we must have the young learn the parts which belong to the Catechism or instruction for children well, and fluently and diligently exercise themselves in them and keep them occupied with them. Hence it