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## Luther's Small Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism

### The Continuing Struggle: The Catechism's Role as a Confessional Document in Lutheranism

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Before going into details, some fundamental differences between the Book of Concord and the Calvinistic Confessions should be mentioned. There are two definite differences. First, the Book of Concord is the basis for Lutherans all over the world, whereas the Calvinistic Confessions have their validity in certain regions. The other difference is the tendency of Calvinism to address confessions to new situations as they occur. Therefore there is a tendency in Calvinism constantly to formulate new confessions, similar to the Barmen Confession of 1934, which nowadays is published as an appendix to the Heidelberg Catechism in some Calvinistic areas. An example is the small Calvinistic church in Lippe. In Calvinism there is a tendency especially in unionistic German churches also to include the Barmen Confession within the list of confessions.

Some other remarks concerning the history of the Heidelberg Catechism should be mentioned. First, some information about its author. Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583), born as a Lutheran in Breslau, was a Wittenberg student, the first among the disciples of Philip Melanchthon to turn from Lutheranism to Calvinism. But he did this in his own way, therefore the Heidelberg Catechism lacks certain characteristics of Calvinism. This can be shown on three points: a) the covenant is not mentioned; b) its teaching of law is similar to the Lutheran conception, as according to Questions 3 and 4, the knowledge of man's misery comes from the law; and c) double predestination is not mentioned. Therefore to some extent the Heidelberg Catechism is nearer to the Lutheran traditions than the normal type of Calvinistic confessions. Nevertheless the Canons of Dort explicitly approved the Heidelberg Catechism. Therefore the Heidelberg Catechism is to be understood as part of Melanchthonian tradition as a document of a German Calvinism, not of Geneva. It is a link between Wittenberg and Geneva. Later on we shall have to discuss what that means especially in the modern situation.

The Heidelberg Catechism was officially published in 1563 for the former electoral principality of the Palatinate. The catechism was taken over by the Dutch parishes on the lower Rhine and was later accepted by Calvinists in Prussia, Moravia, Hungaria, Transylvania, Poland and South Africa. This was untypical of Calvinism which usually develops a special confession for each region. The Heidelberg Catechism was also accepted in the United States, and the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this occasion has been recently celebrated. The United Church of Christ, which was formed in 1957, also saw this catechism as important.

Here some remarks should be made in respect to unionism in the nineteenth century and the role played by the Calvinists. Calvin himself subscribed to the Augsburg Confession. Documents establishing unionism during the nineteenth century, as a rule, also referred to the Augsburg Confession, i.e. the Variata. The Heidelberg Catechism presented dangers for the Lutherans as it in some respects deviates from the ordinary Calvinistic traditions and therefore could subtly promote the tendency towards unionism between Lutherans and the Reformed. The Heidelberg Catechism

represents the Melanchthonian version of Calvinism and thus bears a Lutheran imprint. From here it was quite easy for Calvinists to offer themselves as true ecumenical Christians of the modern type. In their wake come all sorts of confessional troubles. On the other hand, it is understandable for strict Calvinists to feel uneasy about losing their unique confessional identity. At least in Europe the Calvinists are more frequently in the minority than are the Lutherans except in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Scotland.

At this point, the organization of the Heidelberg Catechism should be mentioned. If you look at Question 2, three headings are mentioned: man's misery (Questions 3-11); man's redemption (Questions 12-85); and finally man's thankfulness (Questions 86-129).

## 1. Law and Gospel

1. As mentioned before, there are some roots leading back to Lutheran traditions. Question 3 states that knowledge of the human misery comes from God's law. This is derived from Mt. 22:37-40, the double commandment to love God and thy neighbor as thyself. Similar to Luther's summary of the Ten Commandments, the wrath of God is mentioned in Question 10. So far both catechisms are the same, but this is not the whole story.

2. As set forth in Luther's Small Catechism, everyone would expect the explanation of the commandments to follow. But there is a difference in the organization of the text as a whole. The explanation of the commandments follows in the concluding third part and is placed under human thankfulness. The sections on the commandments and good works are combined as well as are the sections on the commandments and conversion (Question 88). Here the commandments relate to death and resurrection of the old and new man. This seems to be similar to Luther's statement in the Small Catechism IV (4), the drowning of the old Adam. In fact Luther knows quite well that God's law has the function to kill the old man until we attain the full righteousness on the day of judgment.

3. At first it seems that there is hardly a difference between the catechisms. But if you look more carefully there are different presuppositions. Luther begins with the revelation of God according to the First Commandment, including both Law and Gospel. Luther's view is theocentric. The Heidelberg Catechism on the contrary is anthropocentric, as the first question deals with man's misery.

This leads to another fundamental difference between Luther's Small Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism. Luther combines the powers of destruction as law, conscience and death on the one hand and Christ, Gospel and eternal life on the other. Luther deals with law in an extremely negative way. It destroys, leads to death and reveals sin. Luther teaches the predominant use of the Law as a mirror. For Calvin the Third Use of the Law is the pre-eminent one, resulting in a tendency to legalism in Calvinism as a whole. This is responsible for the Puritan way of life. Stemming from this is Calvinism's inability to distinguish Law and Gospel. The consequence is that the Gospel is falsified and turned to a new law.

An example of this within the German context after the war was the upstart of a new sort of fanaticism under the title of what Karl Barth and his disciples called "the royal rule of Christ" instead of Luther's distinction of the two kingdoms.

## II. Christology

1. The first remarkable fact is the Anselmianism in Questions 12-18 as a basis for Christology. These traditions are of course present in Lutheranism, but not exclusively so for Luther himself. There has been a controversy since Gustaf Aulen's investigations on the three main types of the theology of atonement. He pointed out that Luther was much closer to the Greek fathers and their *mirabile duellum* between God and Satan. Aulen saw Luther more in the line of eastern theology of the resurrection, than Anselm and his understanding of the atonement as satisfaction representing the western type, based on Good Friday. Finally the modern view of atonement, i.e., the subjective one, is represented by Schleiermacher and Ritschl. Meanwhile Aulen was corrected by O. Tiilila and H. Alpers. Both pointed out that there was indeed the satisfaction view in eastern theology, which Aulen denied. There can be no doubt that the Anselmian type is present in Luther's theology in his teaching about sin and grace. But Luther differs from Anselm. Cross and resurrection are for Luther always combined. This can be clearly shown in his exegesis of Rom. 4:25 and the Gospel of St. John. The details are discussed in my book, *Gekreuzigt und Auferstanden*. Moreover the combination of cross and resurrection is important in the ecumenical respect. For the Heidelberg Catechism has the Anselmian concept without the victory motif. This is not the case with Luther.

2. The other question is about the two natures in Christ. Here the so-called extra Calvinisticum must be mentioned as it is clearly brought out in Questions 47 and 48. On the one hand the Heidelberg Catechism teaches clearly the two natures in Christ, but with all restrictions coming from the extra Calvinisticum. Question 47 says that 'Christ is both true man and God. According to His human nature He is no longer on earth. Only according to His divine majesty, with His grace and Spirit, He does not move from our side .

Similar is Question 48. According to His divine nature Christ is present everywhere. His divine nature exists outside of the humanity assumed at the incarnation, but it nevertheless exists within the human nature according to personal union. A perfect contradiction! On the one hand the traditional context of the two natures is to be found; but on the other both the natures are not really joined because the logos is not totally in Christ. This is the old question of *finitum capax* and *finitum non capax infiniti*. One modern scholar who has dealt with this question is Wemer Elert. He says that there is Nestorianism not only in Zwingli, as Luther quite clearly saw, but also in Calvin and Calvinism.

If we compare Questions 47 and 48, there is *communicatio idiomatum*, but only in a partial sense.

Therefore, the incarnation is imperfect, because it does not enclose the *vere Deus* as a whole. Calvin tried carefully to avoid the mistakes of Zwingli, but he was unable to extricate himself from the *finitum non capax infiniti*. Therefore I quote here the pertinent section of the *Institutes*: "Another absurdity which they obtrude upon us viz. that if the Word of God became incarnate, it must have been enclosed in the narrow tenement of an earthly body, is sheer petulance. For although the boundless essence of the Word was united with human nature into one person, we have no idea of any enclosing. The Son of God descended miraculously from heaven, yet without abandoning heaven; was pleased to be conceived miraculously in the Virgin's womb, to live on the earth, and hang upon the cross, and yet always filled the world as from the beginning." (11, 13,4). Calvin pretends to keep the Chalcedonian middle road. But he deceives himself by means of the extra Calvinisticum. The Heidelberg Catechism uses the same road. A spiritualized Christology is the result.

Therefore the Lutheran rejection of the extra *Calvinisticum* in FC, Ep VIII, 34 should be mentioned:

"That in spite of Christ's express assertion, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,'

and St. Paul's statement, 'In Him dwells the whole fullness of deity bodily' (Col. 2:9), Christ, according to the human nature, is wholly incapable of omnipotence and other properties of the divine nature." As mentioned, Calvin tries to teach the *communicatio idiomatum*, but without ubiquity. He wants to follow Peter Lombard: "Although the whole Christ is everywhere, yet everything which is in Him is not everywhere." (Inst. IV, 17,30). Thus O. Weber (in RGG<sup>3</sup>, 1.1595) states that Calvin is above all interested not in the person of Christ, but in His work. This is one of the roots of modern functionalism especially in the teaching about the Holy Sacraments. Ignored are all ontological statements. Ontological truths dissolve into functionalism.

4. For comparison Luther's Christology should be set forth as far as the Small Catechism is concerned. The "true God, begotten of the Father from all eternity" takes the lead. The line goes from heaven to earth, not from earth to heaven as it is usually put forth in modern Christology. But when Luther deals with Christology in that way, he wants to have Christ as true God everywhere. That is why the line of resurrection can always be found in his theology. Zwingli struggles with the *unio personalis* in context to *unio sacramentalis*. The total union of God and man in Christ can be found in its entirety in the theology of the Lord's Supper. In Luther's theology, God is hidden within the creature. The same motif is in *The Bondage of the Will* especially in the *cooperatio Dei*. God does his work by means of man. Even Luther's concept of the two kingdoms can hardly be understood without holding to the concept that God's will is carried out by men, whether they know it or not. Therefore, the certainty of redemption depends on the simple fact of God's presence in the man Jesus Christ. Here Calvinism fails, because it is unable to formulate what incarnation means. Spiritualism is one of the means, where the validity of faith is lost, especially in modern times. In this Calvinism is a forerunner of modernism.

This leads us to another remarkable observation. According to the traditions especially of the Greek fathers, the "happy exchange" is one of the leading motifs in Luther's theology as a whole. Examine, for instance, those famous parts 12-14 in *The Freedom of the Christian*. Luther describes the mystery of salvation by using the comparison with matrimony. As in matrimony both partners share all, so Christ shares with one who believes in Him. Christ takes our sin and gives us His righteousness. Another comparison is the iron hot with fire, which comes from John of Damascus as well as other Greek fathers. Luther explains here what justification means and why Christian liberty is rooted in justification. This wonderful transaction cannot be found in Calvinism with its *extra Calvinisticum*.

Very instructive is the difference between Calvinism and Lutheranism on the understanding of the Ascension of Christ. In Question 49 the Ascension of Christ is discussed in this way. First, Christ our advocate is in heaven. Secondly, that as we have our flesh in heaven as a security, so He as the head will take us up as His limbs. Thirdly, He will send down His Spirit as a counter-security, by which we seek what is in heaven, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. We are not to seek what is on earth. Here it is clearly shown, all is laid into a sort of spiritual presence.

6. From here we go to the next question. All that is said about the Holy Sacraments corresponds with Christology. Christology is the prelude to the teaching about the Holy Sacraments.

### III The Holy Sacraments

#### A. Baptism

1. If we look at the texts there is a parallel between Baptism and the Lord's Supper. According to Question 69, Baptism has a double function, to remember and to assure the benefits of Christ's sacrifice to every person. This is pointed out in this way. Christ has ordered this external bath. Just as

we are cleansed by water from uncleanness of body, we are simultaneously washed from all sin and impurity with His blood and Spirit.

2. According to Question 69, Question 72 asks whether it is the external bath that brings about the cleansing from all sins. This is denied, because only the blood of Christ and the Holy Spirit can cleanse us from all sins. The same *cum - turn*, the same metaphorical parallelism, i.e., parallel but necessarily connected actions, is repeated in Question 73. There is indeed one addition. The security, the sign or mark (*pignus*) assures us, that as we have been cleansed by water, our sins have been taken away. The parallelism is never clearly defined, which is characteristic of Calvinism. The baptism of the children is in the following question subsumed under the sign of the covenant, Nevertheless Question 74 speaks of the incorporation of the Christian church.

What the Heidelberg Catechism says about the Lord's Supper sheds light on its understanding of Baptism.

The differences with Luther's Small Catechism are especially two points:

a) Luther's words in the beginning of the second question in 4,2 are: "What gifts or benefits does Baptism bestow? It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe, as the Word and promise of God declare." First mentioned is the efficacy of baptism. The forgiveness of sins really happens when water, the Word of God and faith are joined together. In my opinion, it is most important for modern faith to get back sacramental realism. Modern man amidst all sorts of skepticism needs to be made certain in his faith by means of the Holy Sacraments, especially Baptism. The first step in a Christian life comes from God, not from us. As Christ Himself called His disciples to follow Him, so He does this with us by means of Baptism. Therefore as the fathers said, the Holy Trinity baptizes, while the minister is only the instrument.

Christ works in our life in three ways: first by forgiving our sins; secondly, by redemption from death and Satan and thirdly, by giving us His eternal life. Because modern man is fatalistic, it must be taught that faith rescues from the power of death and Satan. Here some remarks about the German situation should be made. Among modern philosophers, Martin Heidegger plays an important part, especially through the theology of Rudolph Bultmann. His famous book *Sein und Zeit* published in 1927, formulated the modern situation by describing human existence as living for death (*das menschliche Dasein ist ein Sein zum Tode*). Death does not exist only in the medical sense of the word, but expresses itself throughout life as anxiety and guilty conscience. We remember that Luther says that Adam after his fall in paradise, was frightened by a falling leaf. Kierkegaard's book about anxiety should also be mentioned. This means that modern man lives in a world of sorrow and fears. But God has given us His divine remedy, as we were baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. For me there can be no doubt, that Luther's words are more apropos to our own times than Calvinism with its Heidelberg Catechism.

b) Another important theological point should be mentioned here. There is not a single line in the Heidelberg

Catechism about the necessity of Baptism. Thus it has been part of western theology since Saint Augustine and his fight against Pelagianism. From here he constructed his doctrine of original sin. Of course, there can be no connection between this tradition and the Calvinistic tradition which sees no efficacy in Baptism. Baptism is the sign of the new covenant, but it works nothing, All is done by the Holy Spirit. For Calvinism there are in a strict sense no instruments of grace as there is for

Lutheranism. Let us now have a look to the other question.

## B. The Lord's Supper

1. Here we find a similarity to Baptism. Question 75 states that the Holy Sacrament is given to remember and assure communion with Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The question is answered in the following way. "As certainly as I see with my own eyes that the bread is broken and the chalice is given to me, so Christ's body was sacrificed and broken and His blood was shed. As I receive from the hands of the minister the bread and chalice, given to me as certain marks of the body and blood of Christ, so He feeds and gives me drink for eternal life." Here is the same *cum - tum* i.e., unrelated parallel action we mentioned above.

Luther's Small Catechism differs considerably. Nothing is said of the real presence of the body and blood of the Lord in His Holy Sacrament, according to the Heidelberg Catechism there is neither body nor blood, but only their marks. Luther's comments are both short and striking: "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under bread and wine for us Christians to eat and drink as instituted by Christ Himself" The Heidelberg Catechism knows nothing of Christ's real presence in His sacraments, but only marks, signs and hints. There may be the trace of grace, but nobody knows what really happens.

This line-of skepticism of Erasmus contrasts with- the assertive theology of Luther as he says towards the end of the first part of *Bondage of the Will*. The skeptical Erasmian spirit continues in Calvinism as a whole and is not limited to Zwingli. In Calvinism and in the Heidelberg Catechism there may be some progress insofar as both go beyond memory and signification. But there is no real difference between Calvin and the Heidelberg Catechism on the one side and Zwingli on the other, except that there is some interest in the action and the spiritual presence. But Calvin and Luther are as far apart from one another as fire and water, and heaven and earth. It is therefore of no use when so-called compromises like the Leuenberg Concord try to persuade modern readers that the older differences no longer exist. Here theology and politics are confounded.

2. Question 76 asks: "What does eating Christ's crucified body and drinking His shed blood mean?" The

answer is given in two parts. This means not only accepting all of the suffering and dying of Christ with a faith filled heart, and receiving from this forgiveness of all sins and eternal life; but, also obtaining this by the Holy Spirit dwelling in us as in Christ Himself.

Therefore we are increasingly united with His blessed body so that we, although He is in heaven and we are on earth-become flesh of His flesh and bone of His bones, ruled by one Spirit living eternally, just as the limbs of our body are ruled by the soul.

As mentioned above there is no sort of real presence of Christ. There is moreover no necessity for sacramental presence when all happens by means of the Holy Spirit. The *extra Calvinisticum* can be found quite easily in this question. There is a marked difference between heaven and earth. One could question whether Christ is really present or not. Of course a Calvinist ascribes this to the Holy Spirit, thus there is no necessity of the sacraments, to say nothing of Christ's own words. The presence of Christ evaporates. Christ is in heaven and we are on earth. His body and blood are not the connection between Him and us, but the Holy Spirit is the connection. The presence of Christ in the Spirit is of course held by the Calvinists and Lutherans. Speaking about the Holy Spirit instead of the Sacrament

of the Altar makes the difference. It is at the root of the continuing struggle as well. Long before the Leuenberg Concord and Amoldshain Theses were published, the Evangelical Church in Germany established a special commission on this subject. Some scholars were of the opinion that the progress of modern exegesis could be helpful in overcoming the trouble. But this became increasingly delusive because they were not willing to listen to the clear words of the Lord. Modern hermeneutics based on Rudolph Bultmann made the Word of God more insecure. It was more the spirit of the scholar, not the Holy Spirit that was working here.

We may be too severe in our judging the texts, however Question 78 shows quite clearly that we are not wrong in our interpretation. The question is: do the body and blood of Christ really come from the bread and wine? Like Baptism the elements have only the quality of assurance and marks. The text states explicitly that in the sacrament bread and wine are not the body and blood of Christ itself. It is only custom when the phrase of "the body of Christ" is used. This sort of presence can only be a spiritual one, not a real one.

3. The same theme runs through Question 79. The terms are always the same: visible signs, pledge, mark.

All of these are the assurance of what Christ has done for our salvation. The Lutheran "IS" is always missing. The parallelism of sign and Christ is dominant, as there is no real interest in the elements, except in their function as signs. The action of the sacrament and not the elements are center stage. In the same way modern confessions such as Amoldshain and Leuenberg accent the functionalistic side, just as Melancthon did in the Variata Edition of the Augsburg Confession X.

4. Even today Calvinism and modern unionism do not shy away from calling Lutherans sacramentalists' and 'confessionalists'. Seldom noticed is the Heidelberg Catechism's not so subtle criticism of the Lutherans in Question 80. This question deals with the differences between the Lord's Supper and the papistic mass. The Papists' daily sacrifice the mass, is called "eine vermaledeite Abgötterei", i.e., blatant paganism. But the Roman Catholics are rejected, as are the Lutherans. The text explicitly denies that Christ is under the form of bread and wine. The choice of words clearly refer to the classic Lutheran designation of "under" in Small Catechism V,1.

Question 81 seems to come closer to the Lutheran position, because it is said that the impenitent are eating in preparation for their final judgment. But there is no reference to Christ's real presence in the altar's sacrament. The Biblical designation of the body of-Christ is not even mentioned.

In summarizing, something must be said as to how Calvinists view the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the sacraments. Calvinists like to say that Lutherans with their understanding of the real presence of the Lord in both sacraments are referring to what Calvinism designates with the Holy Spirit. If this is true, it seems that everything depends on the effect. The Holy Spirit is actually doing for Calvinists what the Lutherans attribute to the sacraments. But this interpretation is not correct. There is a contradiction in Calvinistic thinking. Why does the Heidelberg Catechism deal with the sacraments if they are in fact not necessary to salvation? The answer can easily be given by the Biblical traditions. However if spiritualism is predominant as in Calvinism, the sacraments have no real meaning.

Calvinism leads to another very important consequence. I refer to the road from Calvinism and spiritualism to intellectualism, much the same as from Erasmus and early humanism to the Age of Enlightenment. No less than Wilhelm Dilthey, son of a Protestant parson, endeavors to show the line from the left wing of Reformation towards the philosophy of German idealism. In some respect this may

be true. Calvinists have always been very proud of their modernism in comparison with the Lutherans whom they regarded as secret Papists. This tendency runs through all types of modern unionism because there is always an embarrassment about the real presence of Christ in the sacrament. The phenomenon of Protestantism moreover blurs the clear and distinct lines. In some ways the Lutherans from their traditions are closer to Roman Catholicism than to the Calvinists.

In conclusion a few generalizations are necessary to characterize the differences between both the Lutheran and Calvinist catechisms. The Small Catechism has its place in the Book of Concord. There is no parallel to the Heidelberg Catechism and the traditions of the Calvinistic confessions. Therefore, the Heidelberg Catechism must be considered as an isolated document.

This is not the only difference. In formal respect there are variations that render more difficult the comparison between both of the texts. The Heidelberg Catechism, not in its format of questions and answers, but in its length is comparable to the Augsburg Confession. The Small Catechism in its form is far more popular than the Heidelberg Catechism. In former times the Small Catechism was learned by heart by every Lutheran child at school. This would be quite impossible in the case of the Heidelberg Catechism. Therefore only parts of the text are really familiar to the Calvinist laity. The popularity of the Small Catechism is also deeper rooted. What I mean can be illustrated by a letter I received from Propst Hukka from Helsinki in Finland, the director of the Finnish Lutheran Mission, where he was traveling through Africa on a journey to the missionary stations in Pakistan. He wrote that he once found Luther's Small Catechism in a Roman Catholic missionary station in Africa. When he asked one of the fathers what they were doing with it, he was told that they were using it for their own missionary purposes to teach people. After an astonished question by Propst Hukka, he added they did so because Hans and Grete, i.e. everybody, could understand the text. This cannot be said of the Heidelberg Catechism.

However, there are still other differences. The Small Catechism is often recited in services, sometimes Part Five, as a preparation before the Sacrament of the Altar. The Heidelberg Catechism does not have this quasi-liturgical function. The same can be said in respect to the care of souls. For instance, I have often recited the explanation of the second article of the creed with sick persons to help them in the fight against death: "Who has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature, ..." Here is a spiritual intensity that is far above that of the Heidelberg Catechism, even considering the impressive overture in the first question. As a whole the Heidelberg Catechism is a typical product of a scholar. Luther speaks with the authority of his charisma. Therefore his words are striking and classical far beyond comparison. Here is a mastery of language rarely reached. Only the stupidity of modern scholars could produce such a miserable linguistic confusion as the so-called "Luther New Testament-1977" in Germany, destroying Luther's incomparable language. Even Bert Brecht did not feel embarrassed to declare that his only linguistic model was Luther's Bible. In the early twentieth century when one of our Berlin newspapers asked whose literary style he followed, he answered by postcard: "Probably you may laugh -Luther's Bible". However some Lutherans in our country know better.

I mention this because there is a direct connection between Luther's Bible and the Small Catechism. Lutherans have an incomparable introduction to the Scriptures through the catechism, as the catechism marks the main roads in the Bible. Contemporary alienation from the Bible comes partly from neglect of the catechism. Even Thomas Mann's famous novel *Buddenbrooks* begins with the recital of Luther's explanation of the first article of the creed. Everyone was familiar with this text. The connection of Bible and catechism should be intensified in our own times. Luther's Small Catechism has by no means exhausted its value.

There is another question we should finally discuss. Theological modernism is literarily productive, not only in theological essays, books or tracts, but even in the form of homemade confessions substituted for the Apostles' Creed. These are born not from spiritual experience, but are being manufactured on typewriters. Some of them look nice and chic, suited for modern man, as they are styled in a sort of streamlined design. At first glance most of the words seem to be correct, however under closer scrutiny much is missing causing confusion. If you compare these contemporary texts with Luther's clear and impressive words, you can do what the Scriptures call 'discerning the spirits'. This is what we need everywhere. Because of its spiritual vitality, Luther's Small Catechism is very necessary and helpful.

Finally there is the ecumenical aspect. Since the last war especially, Roman Catholic scholars have discovered Luther. There is continual progress in this direction, with Joseph Lortz and his disciples in Germany leading the way. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger from Munich has proposed that the Augsburg Confession be acknowledged by the Roman Catholic Church. Another step in this direction was the dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics in the United States. No one knows how things will progress and what the concrete results will be. Luther's Small Catechism belongs, of course, to the ecumenical texts of highest rank, because what is intended by the Augsburg Confession could in the same way be said about the Small Catechism. The ecumenical value of the Small Catechism is demonstrated by the word "Christendom" in the explanation of the third article of the creed. Christendom shows quite clearly that the program of Luther's Reformation was intended not only for one of the churches, but for the Church as a whole. Everyone knows that Luther by no means proposed establishing a new church. The Small Catechism brings out that his was a responsibility for the Church as a whole.

Often mentioned is that the term 'justification' is missing from the Small Catechism. Though this is the center of Luther's teaching, he never thought it was a special doctrine only for Lutherans. However, if the word "justification" is not mentioned, the concept is always present, from the explanation of the First Commandment to the doctrine about the Lord's Supper. Moreover, in the explanation of the second article, Christology is explained in terms of justification. Justification gives the key for understanding the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. *Sola gratia* runs through the first article as well as through the third. Since this is true, as it can be shown from the text itself, the center of Luther's theology is enclosed in the few pages of the Small Catechism. This is a true gift from God to His church. It is our task to translate the catechism in the context of modern life. I am sure that the same cannot be said about the Heidelberg Catechism. Here then is the difference and the continuing struggle.