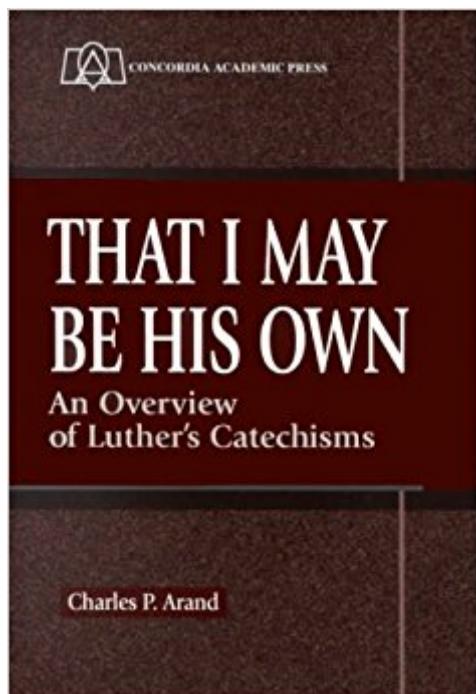


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That I May Be His Own: An Overview Of Luther's Catechisms



Synopsis

This volume acquaints readers with the historical setting in which Luther composed his catechisms. This carefully crafted survey of the context of medieval instruction and piety brings to life the habits of mind that Luther inherited as a member of the church and a student of theology, as well as the concerns for the spiritual welfare of his people which moved him to prepare a course of instruction for them. The book presents a solid introduction to the history, theology, and significance of Luther's catechisms. Arand explores critical issues on the church's catechetical tradition, the purpose and setting of Luther's Small and Large Catechism, the heart of the Catechism's content, and the ways the Catechism shapes God's people in faith and life.

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Customer Reviews

If you want to go deeper in your understanding of Luther's catechisms, of how they came about or what each section means then this is the book for you. It is easy to understand and edifies the teaching treasures of Martin Luther. The Lutheran church can only benefit from recovering the depth of meaning in the Small Catechism and passing it on to confirmation students and adults alike.

To this day, Lutherans often view Luther's Small Catechism as a means to an end: confirmation. Therefore, we see the catechism as a book for children, not for all Christians, as if it were like most other schoolbooks: something to tolerate until graduation and then discard as refuse. To this Arand writes a scholarly, refuting tour de force. Instead, Arand shows us through his well-researched book

that we should see the catechism as an "owner's manual," for it contains more than information on what to know, but how to live. In chapter two, Arand shows that not until the 16th century did the term "catechism" become linked with only a formal instruction in the faith for confirmation. Throughout the history of the Church, catechetical instruction has taken place in sermons, confessional manuals, prayer books--besides formal instruction. Even preaching incorporated the catechism, for sermons and the catechism both go to the heart of the Christian faith. In chapter three, Arand really shines. There he shows that Luther wrote his catechisms to be with the Christian from baptismal font to grave. That the Small Catechism remain with a Christian, Luther designed that it be internalized at three levels. First, Luther wanted the catechism to be learned. For this to happen, he specified three tiers where children would be taught: Parents took the primary role, with pastors and government taking on auxiliary functions. Luther wrote the catechism for memorization (in the German) for a largely illiterate culture; thus, he used alliteration, assonance, repetition, strong verbs, and concrete nouns. Second, Luther wanted the Catechism to be understood. To aid this level of knowledge, he employed a series of questions and explanations, the most common being, "What is this?" Third, Luther wanted the Catechism to take root in a person through meditation and continual relearning of the Catechism. Such a third level of learning would keep the Christian centered amid the travails of life. In Chapter four, we learn that even the arrangement of Luther's Small Catechism carries meaning! The Small Catechism's order has a dynamic that is theologically significant, because each chief part of the Catechism must be read and interpreted in light of the whole. Luther's ordering of the Catechism is the Law-Gospel rhythm of Christian life--and part of catechesis itself. The Catechism's shape is the shape of the Christian life. First, we are brought to repentance by knowing our inadequacy to meet God's demands (Ten Commandments). Yet, through the life-creating Word (the Creed), faith is worked. Next is our response to God: Prayer (the Our Father). The Catechism presents the doctrine of the Gospel in its fullness with its chief article--justification--at its center. The life of the Christian shaped by the Catechism is one that uplifts God's gifts, not human works. In the structure of the Catechism, we see Law and Gospel correctly ordered and treated, and the response of faith, prayer, taught is a way that is rooted in God's word. By learning the shape of the Catechism, we learn the shape of the Christian life: one of continual repentance and yearning for God's life-giving Word and Sacraments. Finally, Arand brings to light how Luther's Small Catechism can help Christians live the life of faith. For faith is no mere adjunct of Christian living; it touches and influences every aspect of life. Luther's Small Catechism concentrates our attention on faith and then shapes our living with a worldview flowing from faith. The first section (the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer) shows a Christian life

as it is lived out in faith. Only by relying on God can one use his possessions properly; thus, the Creed and the Our Father help the Christian keep the Ten Commandments! The second section (baptism, absolution, and the Lord's Supper) hones in on three foci of worship and how they nourish faith-life. For the Word of God works through various forms and effects what it says--it is not mere information. The final section (Daily Prayers and Table of Callings) establishes how Christians live out their faith in their daily lives, for the doctrine of faith centers the Christian on God's gifts in every sphere of life. When we see the catechism as an "owners manual," it helps shape and inform our lives--also making us a better "second text" from which to interpret all aspects of faith-life: how to interpret the written Word, how to serve our neighbor out of faith. The Catechism's brevity makes it easily meditated over, helping open an entire world where faith informs and shapes all that we do. I cannot recommend this book highly enough.

Dr. Arand's basic premise is that Lutherans desperately need to return to Luther's Small Catechism so the reformer's understanding of Scripture (what I would argue as the correct understanding) doesn't get lost in the midst of pop American evangelicalism (not bashing them, but their understanding of God is like low fat ice cream ... you get the idea but it lacks the richness). However, before this can be done, we need to rediscover the catechism, the purpose behind its structure, and how it shapes the Christian's worldview. This leads to catechesis that is far superior to the standard overview of the different segments and memorization of Luther's meanings. While no section of the book disappoints, chapter 5 alone is worth double the book's price as it identifies how the chief parts interrelate and flow together to create a complete and unified worldview. If pastors, DCE's, and teachers used Arand's book to train themselves in how to teach the catechism, there would be no desire for "The Purpose Driven Life" in Lutheran circles because people would have a far superior "Catechism Driven Life."

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