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## The Preparation of Confirmands, or the Instruction of Catechumens

Herm. A. Steege

*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

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## The Preparation of Confirmands, or the Instruction of Catechumens.

From the very earliest time of the Christian era, candidates for admission into membership of the Christian Church were first duly instructed and prepared. In the early days such instruction was to prepare them for baptism; for Baptism is the Sacrament of initiation, and it was natural that this mission-work of those days concentrated on adults. It seems to have exhibited various degrees of thoroughness. Without question such instruction was made a matter of prime importance in the Apostolic Age. The several glimpses which the Book of Acts gives us into this particular activity of the early Church easily convince us that the apostles and their coworkers, the entire Church of that day in fact, were zealous in insisting upon a well-indoctrinated membership of the churches. Philip's work in Samaria, as recorded in Acts 8, followed by the visitation of Peter and John, the same evangelist's indoctrination of the eunuch, Peter's work in the house of Cornelius, that of Aquila and Priscilla in behalf of Apollos, and similar incidents are clear and convincing examples. In all these cases, as in the case of all converts from the Jewish Church, it must be borne in mind that these people possessed a religious consciousness as well as a store of religious knowledge and understanding. What was lacking was the proper coordination of Old Testament truth and prophecy with the New Testament fulfilment in Christ Jesus. And yet, with this comparatively favorable condition of Biblical knowledge, we find such thoroughness of indoctrination that this early activity of the Church must always stand before us as worthy of emulation.

As the Church gradually grew farther away from the pristine purity and conscientious zeal, especially after the fourth century, the preparation of catechumens also became a matter of spiritless formality. True, there were times of reawakening, times when greater stress was laid upon adequate indoctrination. But as the darkness of Popery settled upon the Church in ever greater density, this important phase of church activity experienced the same decadence as involved every other endeavor that had to do with truth and the cause of truth.

At the beginning of the Reformation period there was, quite in keeping with the new spirit, a revival of this particular work such as the Church had perhaps not experienced since apostolic times. There was launched a veritable campaign of indoctrination. And it was not, to begin with, a work that had confirmation as its end and aim. Confirmation was not as general an institution in the Lutheran Church of the sixteenth century as it is to-day. Instruction in the Catechism, however, was. True, again, there was considerable diversity in the method of instruction, in the desired aims, in the

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pensum, in the length of time devoted to the work, etc. But there was nevertheless an appreciable effort towards giving this instruction and a deep appreciation of the vital importance of this duty, laid upon the Church not only by the command of the Lord of the Church, but also by the very nature of the Church's call and work.<sup>1)</sup>

With the subsequent ups and downs in the history of the Protestant Church this work of indoctrination, too, held pace. But since this paper is to be not so much of a historical as of a practical character, we shall now launch upon our subject from that point of view. Our intention is to treat the question under the following headings: The Student; the Teacher; the Subject-matter, or Lesson Material; the Text-books; the Aim; the Method; the Time; with the sequel: Examination and Confirmation Service, Bible Class, Reunion Service, Announcement for Communion.

### The Student.

Under conditions such as they prevail in the Church of to-day, confirmation instruction has to deal with the most varied classes of students. Our candidates for confirmation or for adult baptism (the instruction in the latter case being identical with that of the former) are gained from practically every age and rank, from the child age to the age of senility, from the ranks of the educated and of the uneducated. The confirmands whom we receive for instruction during the age of childhood quite naturally far outnumber the others. But although they are, as a rule, of the same age, there is wide diversity among them as to their previous connection with the Christian doctrine.

We have, first of all, such children as have had the advantage of a Christian home and of the instruction received in a Christian school. At first glance one might be tempted to say that in such cases the preliminary conditions are so ideal that the situation presents no difficulties whatsoever. It goes without saying that the conditions surely are the most advantageous for a fruitful study of a somewhat advanced nature, such as should obtain in the preparation for confirmation. But the very advantages which children have had in a Christian home and in a Christian school beget peculiar difficulties and problems with which the catechist must deal. Some of these children begin their work in the instruction period with the preconceived notion that there is not much left for them to learn, in consequence of which they are apt to treat the whole matter with more or less indifference. Others of them are inclined to be lazy just because of the fact that they are not changing text-books. Some may even display an attitude of satiety.

1) An interesting article on the history and significance of confirmation appeared in Vol. 51 of *Lehre und Wehre*.

But these children come with a fairly exact knowledge of the Small Catechism and of the Synodical Catechism, with quite a store of Bible-stories and a large number of proof-texts thoroughly memorized. These advantages so greatly outweigh the above-named difficulties that the child from the Christian home and Christian school, *ceteris paribus*, naturally makes the best material to work upon in the confirmation instruction.

In the second place, we have the children who come from a Christian home and have had Sunday-school training. These, too, because of the home-training they have received, have a certain Christian background. And because of their Sunday-school work they have a passable acquaintance with Bible History and the Six Chief Parts of the Catechism. Some have even a limited knowledge of the Synodical Catechism.

The disparity, however, between this and the former class of children is so pronounced that it does not require a keen observer to notice it. Our experience of thirty years has been that one can judge these children as classes despite the often great difference between the individuals of both classes. We have had, and have at this time, some wonderful material among those who have had only home and Sunday-school training. Our experience has taught us also that many of these children turn out to be very good communicant members after confirmation. But we are constrained to say that they almost invariably work under serious handicaps and that the deficiencies of their earlier training are only too evident. In our day especially it is so often stated that the Sunday-school can furnish material for confirmation classes which can in every way hold its own with that trained in the parish-school. On the very face of it this is a specious statement. It is simply a physical, rather, an intellectual, yes, we are tempted to say, a spiritual impossibility. The wide gap between the parish-school work in religion and that found in the very best of Sunday-schools will not be bridged by even the most consecrated effort put forth during the period of instruction for confirmation. In the first place, one has not the time to discuss all the Bible History material which so greatly contributes to a deep understanding of Catechism truth. Then, one must perforce spend more time on the memorizing or reviewing of the Small Catechism. The proof-texts of the Catechism are almost entirely new material to the catechumens coming from the Sunday-school. The Synodical Catechism, except its covers and the first thirty-eight pages, is to them an unknown quantity in almost every respect. And finally, one has at best only two eight- or nine-month periods in which to do the work for which the parish-school has from six to eight entire scholastic years. It would require wizards both among the teachers and the pupils under such conditions to establish equality between

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catechumens that are pupils of the Christian day-school and those whom we get from the Sunday-school. Our verdict is that this equality is not being established, indeed cannot be established. We have had to contend with the inequality throughout our teaching years in the confirmation classes. We have had some of the more serious-minded of our catechumens from the Sunday-school come to us of their own accord to tell us that they feel a lack of knowledge which the other children have acquired earlier. We have made the same experience in Bible classes for the confirmed. We have a case on record where a young girl who had not been privileged to attend the parish-school, but was an earnest student of the Catechism during catechetical instruction exerted her influence upon a young mother of her acquaintance to send her three children to the parish-school lest they be handicapped as she was.

The unprejudiced will readily admit that the Sunday-school pupil is sadly deficient as compared with the parish-school pupil in his work during the instruction period.

Because of his lack in preliminary training the serious-minded Sunday-school pupil will, however, often make an exemplary catechumen. Conscious of his shortcomings, he will apply himself to his studies with such zeal and diligence that he will in some measure overcome the handicap which is so evident. Not having had earlier intimate contact with the Catechism, he will display an eagerness to learn which is truly refreshing. And especially if he is intellectually gifted, he will often react so intelligently as to make others who have had greater advantages in their earlier years "sit up and take notice." The very gratifying results we have had with Sunday-school pupils in our confirmation classes do not, however, lead us to assume that Sunday-school training is sufficient for our requirements. The special advantages which such children may have do by no means outweigh the serious disadvantages.

The two named classes of children, without question, furnish by far the greater portion of our confirmation classes. But we must deal also with children that have had neither a parish-school nor a Sunday-school nor a Christian home-training. Such children, of course, present special problems and must be especially dealt with.

The adults who come to us for instruction may be divided into three classes: such as were baptized in the Lutheran Church and grew up in Lutheran circles without ever receiving a thorough indoctrination, such as were affiliated with some other Church before, and such as never belonged to any Church. The second class, of course, may have a wide range, embracing any one of the sectarian churches, the Roman Church, or even non-Christian denominations.

The adult catechumen, having a more developed and mature intellect, having besides in many cases taken a more or less determined

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attitude toward religion, offers a problem in each individual case according to his previous training, affiliation, or association. More than in the case of children, the catechist will have to reckon with the individuality of the adult student.

All three classes mentioned above, rather, the individuals in each of the three classes, bring with them their own peculiarities, or prejudices, or convictions, or a hundred and one other things that must be considered and dealt with. So the adult student individually becomes a problem for the teacher in a greater measure than the child student. Without reflecting upon the ultimate motive and without harshly judging the absence of a true reason for being enrolled in a class for adult confirmands, we believe we are safe in stating that a majority of such adults have been persuaded either by words or by conditions to take what amounts to an outward step. It devolves upon the pastor therefore to eliminate the outward reason as a deciding influence and by divine assistance to supplant it by the inward urge and desire. We shall attempt to go into this somewhat more deeply when we speak of the aims of instruction.

### The Teacher.

It is quite natural that much of the success of the work of instructing catechumens depends upon the catechist, upon his personal attitude toward the subject-matter, upon his ability properly to work with the material in hand, upon his aptness to teach, upon his love of children and men in general, upon his personal consecration to the task, upon his patience and endurance, upon his understanding of the vast and far-reaching importance of this particular work.

Under our arrangement of church-work the duty of preparing confirmands devolves upon the pastor. Exceptional cases we may here ignore. Next to his public preaching there is hardly an activity of a Lutheran pastor which could be regarded as of greater importance than the instruction of catechumens. It will be worth our while to consider this question with ever-renewed interest and study.

While it is eminently true that the Word of God is inherently "the power of God unto salvation," it is also true that the teacher of the divine Word can frustrate its power in the hearts of men. While no teacher can put saving power into the Word, he can, on the other hand, block such power from being properly exerted upon those who study it. The personal attitude of the catechist toward the subject-matter of his teaching therefore is of great importance.

In the case of the pastor as catechist, too, the text applies: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and *trembleth at My Word,*" Is. 66, 2. There is no room for levity in a class of catechumens, and the pastor should certainly be the last person to introduce it. Rather, his attitude toward the Christian doctrine and toward the teaching of it must influence his class in

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such a manner that it will realize the sacredness of it all. Class-work with its two-part activity will naturally carry with it a freer treatment than is possible elsewhere. But the class through the pastor's attitude toward the lesson must be kept conscious of the singular quality and significance of the lesson in hand. No matter how often we may tell our catechumens that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and that Christian doctrine must be held sacred, if our attitude toward it in the class and our manner of operating with it does not carry the conviction that we actually believe it to be divinely inspired, sacred and inviolable, our statement of fact will be largely vitiated. It is the easiest thing in the world to get a boisterous laugh out of a class; but God forbid that we should ever do it at the expense of His holy Word!

We do not advocate a sanctimonious mien, a drawn face, much less a forbidding facial contortion, a *Kanzelton*, a pedantic manner of teaching, or anything of the kind anywhere, least of all before a class of catechumens. But we do advocate a vivacious, inspiring, compelling treatment of the lesson, one that will ever and again convince our pupils that we ourselves are sure of presenting the Word of Truth and Life.

Coupled with a devout attitude toward the Word there must be on the part of the catechist a definitely developed ability properly to work with the material in hand. The catechist must have at ready command a working knowledge of the entire field of Christian doctrine, with all its interrelations and interdependencies. To illustrate: If, while treating the First Commandment, he should fail to bring into the discussion the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, he would certainly not have treated the matter as exhaustively as it should be treated right then and there. His whole understanding of Christian truth should be available to him at all times, and he should be able wisely to make use of that general knowledge to gain his particular point.

If we should depend merely upon doctrinally investing that capital which we have brought with us from the theological seminary in the catechumen classes, these classes would not receive all that they are entitled to. Diligent and persistent study is required to make a pastor a real catechist—study of doctrine, of Bible History, of exegesis, and, particularly, of the relatively simple doctrinal structure of the Catechism.

Of course, there must, in addition, be either a natural or an acquired aptness to teach, to dispense to others, wisely and profitably, from the storehouse of personal knowledge and understanding. There will naturally always be a wide diversity on this score among the thousands of men who are engaged in the preparation of classes for confirmation. But never should such aptitude be altogether lacking, and since we daily read and study the Word of God, we should

earnestly strive to become ever more proficient in bringing home to others the great truths of salvation which we ourselves have learned and believe. Practise here, too, will help us along on the way to perfection.

Again, every teacher, especially every teacher of religion, is in grave danger of becoming mechanical in his work. Rather than doing the work like a machine, however, we must ever be prompted to perform it by love to our fellow-men, which will effectively keep out of our instruction every appearance of mere mechanical activity. The pastor who never forgets that he is called to serve souls whom Christ has purchased with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death will not be likely to treat the instruction of such souls simply as a job that must be done; on the contrary, he will put his life and soul into the work. He will be consecrated to his great task.

True, that involves also an unlimited measure of patience and endurance. Many of us, perhaps most of us, are forced by circumstances to hold their children's classes after school-hours, when the children have done their day's work and quite naturally are not in a mood to be very tractable. Even an adult class, meeting after the day's work has been done, will because of the inopportune time be more difficult to handle than it would be under more favorable circumstances. The pastor will have to take these factors into consideration in his dealings with the class and will have to let enduring patience rule him in his work.

Not only restlessness and listlessness, however, offer difficulties. We are dealing with the weak and frail, with beginners in Christianity, often with such as have no knowledge at all of the Christian doctrine or have even been antagonistic heretofore to Christ and Christianity. Many of our adult students are handicapped by advanced age, by all kinds of perverted religious notions, by a suspicious attitude, by skepticism, and a hundred and one other obstacles in the way of readily learning and accepting the truths which are presented. Indeed, there is room then for unbounded patience and endurance.

Such patience and endurance, however, will be forthcoming if we ever keep before our mind's eye the vast and far-reaching importance of this particular work. Thorough indoctrination is our goal, as we shall consider more in detail later on. But even at this point we ask, What could be more important in our entire work with confirmands than such thorough indoctrination as aims at an intelligent and consecrated Christianity?

The pastor as catechist indeed has a task to perform and a responsibility to bear which exceed mere human faculties. All along in his work he needs sustaining strength, wisdom, and guidance from the never-failing source of supply — the life-giving Gospel of a merciful God and Savior.



### The Subject-Matter, or Lesson Material.

Having considered the student and the teacher, it will now be in order to give some thought to the lesson material, or the subject-matter, with which both must occupy themselves in a class of confirmands.

In our catechetical instruction we operate exclusively with Christian doctrine. Christian doctrine is a definitely fixed quantity and therefore admits of no revision, no change or alteration, and no augmentation. Year after year, decade after decade, century after century, the Church has had one and the same material to work with, namely, the divinely revealed and sealed truth. Whenever the Church has included in her teaching curriculum such things as are not revealed in Scripture or not based upon the doctrine of Scripture, she has ceased to function according to the will of her Master.

But while Christian doctrine as a whole is a definitely fixed quantity, and while all of God's counsel unto salvation shall be taught and proclaimed by the Church, wisdom and experience certainly teach us to make a selection from the vast and comprehensive material for our catechetical classes. Luther's Catechism is such a selection. Our Bible histories are such a selection. The idea is not that there should be a determination to ignore or set aside any one doctrine, but rather the desire to offer to our classes that material which will best serve to lay the necessary foundation for an intelligent and methodical growth in the Christian faith and life. This is in keeping with the apostle's word: "As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby," 1 Pet. 2, 2.

But from the selection of teaching material made by the Church the catechist will be more or less inclined to make his own selection, and that is the point which needs to be considered here. How much or how little of the Synodical Catechism, how many or how few of the Bible-stories, should we embody in our lesson program for our classes of confirmands?

The first answer that comes to mind is old Quenstedt's dictum: *Distinguendum est*. It certainly depends in a large measure upon what kind of classes we have to deal with, what their preliminary training has been, etc. But we should not allow ourselves too much leeway. The tendency of our day is to reduce the Catechism pensus to almost a minimum. The excuse for such action is that it is preferable to offer only a little and offer that in a thoroughgoing way to handling much material only in a cursory manner. The parish-school pupil, who has had a comparatively long time of just such work and who therefore has a considerable number of proof-texts at his command will naturally be required to recite a larger number of such texts from memory than the other child. Likewise in the matter of Bible-stories we will expect vastly more from the parish-school children than from the rest. Even the other material of the

Catechism should be handled more easily and more comprehensively by the parish-school child.

But we hold that each child, irrespective of previous training, must be brought into a conscious contact with the entire Synodical Catechism. That must be the rule. (Naturally we are not talking about the very poorly gifted child here.) Each and every question and answer, and each proof-text, too, must be adequately studied. Our experience teaches us that the Catechism is neither too long nor too comprehensive.

In the matter of memorizing the Six Chief Parts we would make no distinction at all between children. Every normal confirmand must be able to recite the entire Small Catechism, including pertinent selections from the Table of Duties, the prayers, and the Christian Questions and Answers. In assigning proof-texts, we believe that the pensum as adopted for our schools should be largely adhered to. Personally we add a text here and there for those who have fairly mastered the school pensum. And we add a few psalms for all the confirmands. The Sunday-school pupil must be given a select list of texts for memory work. There are some Sunday-school pupils ambitious enough to memorize at least a portion of the excess lesson. But we do not encourage that as much as we insist on thorough work with the limited number of texts assigned.

What about memorizing answers from the Synodical Catechism? We have found that it pays to have a certain class of such answers memorized, a very limited number indeed. Clear-cut definitions such as the answers to the questions: What are the Ten Commandments? or, What is the Gospel? or, What is sin? etc., certainly are good stock in trade, and we have all the children acquire them.

Now as to the lesson material for the adult catechumen. Here the difficulties multiply because of a number of considerations, such as age, mentality, unreceptiveness, lack of time, disinclination to spend sufficient time, and the like.

Right at the start we wish to say that no essential difference should be made between the lesson material handled in an adult class or with even one adult student and that which is studied in the children's class. Most of our children come with a more detailed knowledge of the Catechism than most of the adult students have at the beginning of the instruction period. It would seem, then, that the subject-matter should be treated even more exhaustively in the adult class.

But the tendency seems to be just the other way. The tendency seems to be to choose only a very small portion of the material usually handled in the children's class. We have never been able to see the fairness of it. According to our conviction the entire Catechism should be studied also by the adult class. When baptizing or confirming an adult, the pastor should be able to testify to the fact

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and in the preliminary examination should as much as possible establish the fact that the entire field of Christian doctrine as presented in the Catechism has been covered. We say covered. What we mean is that each page of the Catechism shall have received such attention as its particular lesson merits or as time will permit.

Memory work, of course, presents a different story. There the adult and the children's class are so far apart that there can be no comparison at all. But even this work may not be altogether slighted or dispensed with. Also most of the adults can manage to memorize at least the text of the Small Catechism. Some of them can and do manage more. All of them should be held to memorize as a minimum requirement the text of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the words of institution of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We believe that that is not requiring too much. Rather, we believe that it lies in the very nature of the whole work of adult instruction that the student carry away with him the ability to recite these parts besides his general understanding of the doctrine presented in the Catechism.

#### Text-Books.

The question of text-books is closely related to this matter. In the children's class all of us without exception no doubt employ the same books, *viz.*, the Synodical Catechism and perhaps some edition of the Bible History, in some cases the Bible itself. There is, as far as we know, no varied practise in our circles in this respect.

In the adult class, however, the matter has a different aspect. Some use the Synodical Catechism together with the Bible; others use abridged forms of the Catechism; still others prepare their own lectures or use the lectures which some one else has prepared. Our purpose here is not to belittle the efforts of any well-meaning brother; we merely wish to set forth what we believe to be the best text-book for adult instruction. After trying the Synodical Catechism, we turned to the one or the other abridged form and gave them a try-out. We went back to the Synodical Catechism and shall continue to use it until something decidedly better is offered. In our opinion the abridged forms do not meet the requirements. If one would use them and feel the constant urge to supply all kinds of deficiencies, it would be much better to use the more comprehensive form offered in our regular Catechism and make one's adjustments according to the time at one's disposal or according to the caliber of the class.

We have repeatedly heard it said that in the case of adults who come from other churches, especially the Roman Church, it would be rather unnecessary to go through all the Christian doctrine presented in our Catechism. We are frank to say that we have found the opposite to be true; and even in the case of confirmed Lutherans the use and study of our Synodical Catechism affords one of the best means of reindoctrination.

### The Aim.

Much of what has thus far been said gets its real significance only when we consider the aim of our catechetical instruction.

Briefly stated, our aim is by the help of God's Spirit, who exercises His power in the Word, to bring men to the Christian faith or to indoctrinate them so as to make them intelligent church-members, able to examine themselves and to be of service to their Savior, their Church, and their fellow-men. It may be stated in various ways, but that surely is the outstanding aim of our catechetical work with confirmands. And this aim must ever be borne in mind while we are engaged in our catechetical work; it must, in fact, put its imprint indelibly upon the entire work, must give the proper direction to this work.

The instruction of confirmands has become an established institution in our Church and is nearly always associated with the rite of confirmation. Even such as are outside of our Church are aware of the work that we are doing and understand that any one wishing to become a communicant member of the Lutheran Church must be confirmed. Our own members largely have the mistaken notion, too, that the chief aim of the instruction is confirmation.

We must disabuse our people's minds with regard to this wrong conception. We must bring it home in particular to our catechumens that confirmation is merely a human rite, which could be dispensed with, while the catechetical instruction is divinely enjoined. If we do not counteract these erroneous notions, our own people, and, again, especially our confirmands, will be in danger of underestimating the importance of the instruction. Indeed, let us pastors get it firmly and definitely fixed in our own minds that confirmation is by no means the chief aim of our catechetical instruction.

Further, our aim is not merely to prepare converts to the Church, but to prepare converts to, or members of, the *Lutheran Church*. We hold that our instruction must achieve a Lutheran consciousness in our confirmands. That may be a big order, but it surely is the order that must be filled. Let us face this issue squarely. If there is anything that has served more than other factors to undermine the doctrinal position of any Church, it surely has been the indifference toward a clear-cut and uncompromising doctrinal stand and position. Unionism is the logical result of such an attitude. Indifference toward doctrinal purity is quite prevalent among our own people as it is. But if we pastors become indifferent, the downfall of our Church cannot be far distant. In our instruction of confirmands, be they children or adults, we must therefore emphasize Lutheran doctrine as Scriptural in its totality. We must not fear to denounce the antithesis at every occasion presented in the course of our instruction. Of course, it must be done with charity toward the adherents

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of false doctrine; but at the same time it must be done with an uncompromising stand in opposition to false doctrine.

Before admitting any one to communicant membership in the Lutheran Church, a pastor should assure himself of the individual's attitude toward Scriptural doctrine. That is the reason why, as stated earlier, the catechist must bring his catechumens into conscious contact with the doctrines presented in the Catechism. If only a meager excerpt of the Catechism is used, this will hardly be accomplished. The result of such instruction would be that the confirmand would make his first speaking acquaintance with a number of teachings of our Church only after confirmation, if at all. That would surely create a rather unwholesome condition in our congregations. We do not of course expect that every one or that even one of our confirmands would be enabled by our catechetical instruction to set up a complete roster of Lutheran doctrines and place over against them the fallacies of other churches. We do not want to be idealistic in this manner. No, we want to remain sanely practical. And moved and prompted by this desire, we want to achieve a certain measure of Lutheran consciousness in all our confirmands. We do not want to receive them into our membership merely as Christians, but as Lutheran Christians. If this latter demand is not upheld, what are you going to do about the Baptist, or Methodist, or Presbyterian, or Roman Catholic Christian who comes to you with the request to join your Church?

The ultimate aim of our indoctrination is directed, not at a class, not at numbers, but in every case at the individual. The individual's soul is to be saved, the individual's faith is to be purified and strengthened, the individual is to be provided with the necessary doctrinal equipment, so that there may be a tolerably intelligent understanding of Christian truth and an ability to meet the apostolic demand: "Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup."

Some, in answer to the above contention, have the courage to advance Scripture incidents as proof to the contrary. They will refer to Philip's statement addressed to the Ethiopian: "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest," and to the baptism immediately following the eunuch's confession. Or they mention Cornelius and his family as examples contradicting the claims voiced above.

In the light of what Scripture directly tells us and implies relatively to these incidents, the examples certainly are unhappily chosen. For if anything is clear about these cases, it surely is this, that those persons were thoroughly conversant with, and immensely interested in, the Scriptures of the Old Testament and that the New Testament fulfilment was convincingly brought home to them. We restate as our conviction this: A Lutheran confirmand through the

process of indoctrination as it should obtain in our catechetical classes ought to be brought to an appreciable measure of Lutheran consciousness and should be given an opportunity to learn as much as possible of the eternal verities of the divine Word for the salvation of his soul. That should be our aim in our classes for catechumens, both young and old.

### The Method.

When we speak of methods here, we have in mind especially such practical questions as these: How may we best coordinate the parish-school children with the others? Or is it preferable to keep both as separate classes? How may we deal most successfully with the convert from the Roman or any other Church? What about written examinations? Should the catechist follow a written or memorized catechization? All of these and perhaps other questions besides confront us all along in our work, and we all have our convictions about these things. Here opinions will differ. We shall attempt to set down our own answers to the questions mentioned in the order above.

Now, as to the coordination of parish-school and Sunday-school pupils in a class of catechumens, should they be coordinated at all, or is it preferable to work with two separate classes? Both methods are in vogue in our circles. In answering the double question from our point of view, we leave out of consideration any physical features which may obtain here or there and which might make the one or the other solution more desirable. We approach the question from the angle of spiritual profit or loss. We hold that the two groups should be combined in one class for these reasons:—

1. Each group may learn from the other and no doubt does so. The Sunday-school group will very soon sense the advantages which were had by the parish-school group and will be goaded on by the experience to supply a lack. The parish-school group will soon recognize the great desire to learn displayed by the others and thus will profit by this. Then, of course, the more advanced standing of the parish-school group in itself will afford advantages to the Sunday-school group which it could not gain under the other arrangement.

2. If the two groups are kept separate, the catechist himself is apt to slight the Sunday-school group. Always conscious of the fact that they have had no or only little preliminary training, he is likely to offer them only a modicum of the Catechism material. If, on the other hand, the groups are combined, better still, if they lose their group identity, the Sunday-school pupils will be led along just as far as the rest; we mean to say, the entire subject-matter will be treated with them also.

3. Holding the two groups separate will tend to create a gulf or an aloofness between them which they may never bridge. We should, for obvious reasons, do everything we can to bind the confirmands of the same year together rather than to foster clannishness.

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In dealing with adults who come to us from other churches, it is extremely important for the proper handling of them to understand the motives which prompt them to take steps to join our Church. This will facilitate the work and frequently obviate unnecessary embarrassing situations. We have no call ever to become guilty of mud-slinging at other church denominations, least of all in the presence of such as have just come from other churches and still may have relatives or friends there. Such tactless behavior would serve no good purpose at all. On the other hand, we may not ignore the former affiliations of adult confirmands. There must be an exchange of views and beliefs, and there must be a positive and definite presentation of the truth of Scripture in opposition to the false doctrines heretofore held by the confirmand. There is no need of pussy-footing.

Our chief work with adults, however, should be of a positive nature. A clear and definite teaching, an uncompromising presentation of Scripture truth, as truth absolute and inviolable, must characterize our work, so that the confirmand will realize from the very start that we have but one rule of faith and life and that we as a Church will not deviate from that for any consideration.

Another practical question which was raised above is, What about written examinations? We have tried out this practise in the children's class for a number of years, and we believe it is of value to the child and to the pastor. In a written test every child has the same chance to answer the question, and thus we establish an equality on this score which is not possible otherwise. The pastor often may learn that a certain child, if given the opportunity calmly to write down its answer, will show a much better comprehension than had been evident before. We manage to get in a number of written tests a year on relatively long review lessons, and we should not like to dispense with the practise.

There is no doubt about the value of writing catechizations. We believe there is nothing like it to equip the catechist with the ability to instruct profitably by the method of questions and answers. We believe therefore that every pastor should become an adept at writing out exact, logical, and comprehensive catechizations. But we do not believe that the catechist is doing the best work possible in his class if he is forever bound to a written catechization. We believe that such a catechist is in grave danger of becoming pedantic, if he has not long ago become so. Let the catechist write out as many catechizations as his time will permit; but when he enters his class, let him forget the written work and let him act as a free agent in the presence of plastic, receptive, oftentimes eager human minds and souls. That does not give him the privilege to proceed aimlessly or in a confused and confusing way or in a manner that would in any way slight any point of the lesson in hand. It does, however,

give him the privilege to remember that he is dealing with living facts and truths and is permitted to impress these upon the minds and souls of living children. As the man in the pew is disturbed or disappointed when he realizes that the preacher can see nothing but his manuscript while preaching, whether the manuscript is in the pulpit or in the study, so the child in catechetical instruction is keen enough to realize that he is being led on a very narrow ledge of thought by the catechist who is bound hand and foot by his manuscript.

### The Time.

When speaking of the time in this connection, we mean the length of time that should be devoted to the work of preparing a class of confirmands.

In order to get through the Synodical Catechism unhurriedly, one should have from ninety to a hundred instruction hours. Less than that will involve the necessity of assigning lessons that are too long. The result will be less thoroughness than the material warrants.

While we can hardly expect the pupils from the parish-school to attend the catechetical class more than one year, we should insist upon the Sunday-school pupils' attending at least two years. Even that length of time is hardly sufficient to accomplish the work that should be done. But our experience of at least fifteen years has taught us how urgent a necessity the second year for the confirmands from the Sunday-school is. The achievement of the second year, or the progress over against the sum total of results of the first year's work, is so convincing that in the light of it one is forced to the conclusion that it would be highly neglectful to be satisfied with only one year's work. At least two years' work for the confirmands from the Sunday-school should be the rule to which all of us should adhere. If there is no uniformity of practise on this score, additional difficulties will arise.

How much time are we to spend on adult instruction? If what we have established as a requirement above is to stand, namely, that the Synodical Catechism should be gone through also in the case of the adult confirmand, then, of course, we need more time than is frequently allotted to this work. Too little time is often taken for this important work. We readily grant that it is difficult to get adults to come for an extended period of time. But in view of the vital importance of the work that is to be done, we believe it is necessary to insist on ample time. What is ample time? There can be no hard and fast answer to this question. Experience, however, shows us that we need from fifteen to twenty lesson periods in order to finish the Catechism in a fairly adequate way. Where it was possible, we have kept adults at it for every week of six months and found that it was not too long. There will be no great prospect of



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ever getting uniformity of practise in this matter, but every one of us pastors certainly ought to be alive to the great responsibility resting upon him and to the fact that also for this work he is answerable to his Master, Jesus Christ.

**The Language.**

The majority of our confirmands to-day are instructed through the medium of the English language. It is the language which they speak and in which they think. This must be the deciding factor in determining which language shall be used in our instruction. The language in which our thought-life moves is the one by which we should be instructed in the vital things that pertain to our soul. The welfare of the individual decides the issue. Remembering that, we shall not make the mistake of insisting upon the English language when the German or any other language would be more serviceable. Our task is to save souls and to build the glorious kingdom of Christ particularly also by instructing catechumens in the chief doctrines of the Bible. May we therefore always have the wisdom and courage and aspiration to choose such means and methods as will most effectively answer the purpose!

**The Sequel.**

Our entire catechetical instruction reaches a certain climax in the public examination and confirmation services. These exercises are vividly before us in our entire work with the confirmands. They are by no means our first consideration, but they are a consideration nevertheless. Since the congregation is to be held responsible for the proper administration of the means of grace in its midst, it must be given a fair opportunity to safeguard its interests also in the matter of receiving communicant members into its circle. The public examination of confirmands therefore is important. Naturally, then, we should not make a farce of the examination. It must be honest and straightforward. The drilling of a certain answer into a certain confirmand is not an honest procedure. The audience will not be favorably impressed by anything that even smacks of a recitation by rote. And the audience is not to be faulted for it.

Our examination should preferably cover, at least in a fair measure, the entire Catechism material. The questions and answers must be made to serve the whole audience. To achieve this, we have followed the following method, which to some may seem just a trifle lacking in church decorum, but which has proved helpful nevertheless. We have the class face the audience and then remove ourselves far enough away to be sure that the children's answers actually reach the audience. This, in the very nature of things, will keep the congregation alert and interested.

In order to have time for a comprehensive examination, the confirmation service should not be held during the same hour as the examination.<sup>2)</sup> Personally we like to reserve the examination on the Sixth Chief Part for the day of confirmation. We then have only the first five parts to deal with in the examination service proper, and at the same time we bring the truths of the holy Sacrament right up to the public reception of the confirmands into the communicant membership.

Since the good old *Christenlehre* has come largely into disuse in our churches, we should make provision for junior Bible classes, and we should have the parents and the congregation behind us in this work. We cannot go into a detailed discussion of the question of Bible classes. That is a large topic in itself. But we are sure that this work or something like it should follow the catechetical instruction. And in these classes every opportunity should be improved to resort to the Catechism.

Another measure which may be used to very good advantage is the annual reunion service. We have tried this out for more than twenty years and have never thought of discontinuing it. In order to facilitate a check-up on the respective classes, it has been our custom to have each class choose two secretaries, a boy and a girl. This is always done before confirmation. The secretary is not merely to see to it that every member of his or her class is notified when the reunion service is to take place, but is made to feel a little more responsibility by being asked to keep an eye on his or her classmates during the year.

We have always included the last eight classes of confirmands in this special service and have slowly succeeded in arousing a general interest among the rest of the congregation for this work among the youth of the church. In our opinion there should be a public roll-call in the service. This serves not only to give a check on the various classes, but makes the individual realize his or her responsibility a little better. The very fact that the young folks will write to, or call up, the pastor to excuse themselves for failing to attend this service proves that they appreciate this effort for them and their classmates. Our conviction is that the reunion service offers wonderful opportunities which no one should pass by.

Finally we wish to add a word about announcements for Communion. There again we have a fine opportunity to perform a solemn duty, especially on behalf of the youth of the Church. We do not ad-

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2) This will depend upon circumstances. Since the entire Catechism cannot be treated in any event, an examination of about forty-five minutes ought to suffice to prove to the congregation that the catechumens are ready for adult membership. — EDITORIAL STAFF.

vocate any iron-clad rules or stereotyped forms which should be observed in this matter. We are willing to confine our preaching to the pulpit, but the announcement hour offers the chance of many an informal heart-to-heart talk with the young, too, and we should not let this chance slip by. But let us be careful to get down to the level of our people in these talks or discussions on the one or the other question of Christian faith or life. Let us not tolerate even a semblance of formalism in ourselves or our work; thus we shall very effectively combat and discourage it also in our people.

In brief, let us pray God to give us wisdom and strength ever more to shape our entire endeavor so that we may helpfully serve our people and our fellow-men and by such service enhance the glory of His great name.

Milwaukee, Wis.

HERM. A. STEEGE.

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### Essay or Sermon? Recitation or Preaching?

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Some preachers write religious essays, learn them by heart, and then recite them in the pulpit. They have not learned to distinguish between the essay style and the oral style. An essay is not a sermon; a recitation is not preaching.

The difference between the essay style and the oral style is more easily demonstrated practically than defined. The essential difference is this, that the essayist writes for the *eye*, while the preacher writes for the *ear*. The reader for whom the essay has been written can take his time in reading it; if necessary, he can reread a sentence or a paragraph or even an entire chapter; he can linger and ponder at will over a word or over a sentence until he understands it. The hearer can do none of these things; he is at the mercy of the speaker and must therefore hear and think as fast as the speaker speaks. Since the preacher preaches to a mixed audience of varying intelligence and education and mental ability, and since the average hearer is not a trained thinker and often not even of quick mental perception, the preacher must speak accordingly; he must, even more than the essayist, cultivate a clear style, using plain words, simple constructions, and short sentences. He must, either in the same or in different words, frequently make use of repetition and must go to greater lengths than the essayist in developing a thought. He must clearly enunciate and put the emphasis where it belongs. He must make judicious use of the pause. He must speak with his eyes, with the expression of his entire face, and with his hands. Because of this difference between the essay style and the oral style the *best* sermons cannot be printed. Even the radio speaker is at a great disadvantage because he cannot get the reaction of his audience which tells him