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# THE SCRUTINIES

## THE CATECHISM FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP IN LENT AND EASTER

### 1: The Ten Commandments

In the days immediately after the Second Vatican Council, many Christian denominations became excited by new possibilities for the formation of adults coming to baptism for the first time. The late Twentieth Century seemed to many to bear more resemblance to the first four centuries of Christian history than to the seventeen centuries since Constantine. Living as we do today in a post-Christendom era, it was argued, what the churches need now are ways to cultivate new generations of adult disciples.

This new awareness took a variety of shapes in different churches. In Roman Catholicism, a catechetical program and a Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) was developed. Other churches preferred the term “formation” to “initiation”. But almost every church began to take seriously the needs of an adult catechumenate, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada among them. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* was developed in the early ‘Seventies as a North American Lutheran response to the needs of adult candidates for baptism — among other motives. Today’s *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* enlarges that vision. See *ELWorship*, pages 225-244.

Be certain to note elsewhere in this website material devoted to the Adult Catechumenate.

Among us, Luther’s *Small Catechism* has for generations been the major teaching tool in instructing catechumens, usually assumed to be pre-teens. But many in these days are coming to faith as full adults. ELCIC Pastor Don Johnson provided a marvelous gift to our churches when in 1995 he published *Praying the Catechism*. Don intended his little book as a devotional guide for use in the home, by individuals and families. But I

can envision its use also in corporate worship.

And thirty years ago I adapted for my own campus ministry congregation a similar use of the *Small Catechism* in Sunday worship.

My efforts at that time were inspired by Lutheran liturgical theologian Frank Senn — another mentor of mine whose writing and teaching represent also one of North American Lutheranism's finest gifts to the ecumenical treasury.

Frank noted, in an occasional periodical called *The Circle*, a Medieval practice of providing, within the Sunday Eucharist during Lent, a series of brief catechetical moments called The Rites of the Scrutinies.

So I beg your indulgence, faithful reader, in interrupting my series on *A Customary...* with a kind of mini-series on catechetical instruction within worship. I shamelessly borrow Don's insights for this mini series, and I shamelessly borrow from Frank's presentation of some of the language from the Medieval Scrutinies, with gracious thanks to both of these creative and inspiring mentors and teachers.

I'm aware that my own version of the Scrutinies that follow represents a catechetical approach that's foreign to the Scrutinies of old — and indeed foreign to their current use in the RCIA. These were both precisely not so much catechetical in intent, but more concerned with forming personal and corporate Christian piety. But Lutherans — including this Lutheran! — can barely address piety without reference to the Catechism!

So what follows below is my own adaptation of Frank's work in *The Circle*, which I published, in an alternate form, in *The Paschal Cycle* (1980 Concordia Publishing House, 3558 South Jefferson Avenue, St.Louis, MO 63118, ISBN 0-570-03795-4)

My idea — neither Don nor Frank need endorse what follows, but I hope I'm not too far from the spirit of both — is that the following brief Rites be used during the seasons of Lent and Easter within the context of Sunday morning's worship in a regular parish setting. You could call them "Praying the Catechism"; You could call them "Scrutinies"; You can perhaps suggest a better set of titles.

I'll provide six of them over the coming weeks, incorporating as they do the six parts of Luther's *Small Catechism*. They could be used within worship on each of the Sundays in Lent. An alternative would be to use the first three during Lent, and the last three during Easter, following the ancient custom of post-Easter *mystagogia*, or instruction for the newly-baptized in the meanings of Christian worship.

Two possibilities: We insert the Scrutinies in the Holy Communion just after the Hymn of the Day. And we keep the sermon brief on that day!

Perhaps a better alternative might be to have the Scrutinies conclude the sermon. This

would work especially well if the Scrutinies were to unfold through Lent, including Palm Sunday.

The Scrutinies, then, would begin with an invitation for the congregation to rise for prayer, the particular section of the Catechism having been introduced in the course of the sermon. The Lenten Gospels, in particular, lend themselves to sermons which would both honour the Lectionary and the particular teaching of Luther's Catechism for that Sunday.

Before we begin, a word of caution. Luther's language is not inclusive. God is a "he" in the *Small Catechism*. As well, Luther participates, understandably enough, in the assumptions of his own era. When he interprets the Ten Commandments, for example, he speaks of the "wrath" of God and God's "punishing" all who disobey: See his language on the bottom of page 1161 in *ELWorship*. Prudent pastors will want to translate and interpret such passages for modern congregations, or perhaps omit these passages altogether in any print piece — as Don does!

With that caveat, I present here the first of six "Scrutinies" for use in your assembly's worship during Lent and Easter. Five others will follow.

Note: in the best circumstances, I'd do without a print piece altogether, since Pastor and Assisting Ministers pray all the prayers, and the people have *ELWorship* for the texts of the *Small Catechism*, pages 1160-1169. You might want to enlist several voices to speak at (A). And could some sort of visual aids be useful in communicating certain of the meanings explored here? I'll leave that possibility to your own imagination...



## The Rite of the Scrutinies ~ 1: The Ten Commandments

P = Pastor A = Assisting Minister(s) Congregational responses in **bold**.

### Prayers

*The people stand.*

P Gracious and everlasting God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you created the human family and restored it as well. Look with mercy on your adopted people. Set the offspring of your new race within your new covenant, so that what we cannot attain by our own efforts, we may joyfully receive by grace, as beloved children of your promise, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

P God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God of Sarah, and Miriam, and Hannah, you

appeared to your servant Moses on the holy mountain and led the children of Israel out of slavery, sending to them the angel of your goodness to guard them by day and by night. We pray, O Lord, send your holy angel to guard your servants who belong to you, and lead us all to complete the promises of our baptism, in our conformation to your will, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*The people sit.*

### The Exposition of the Ten Commandments

- P Beloved, we shall open to you now the Ten Commandments, that is, the precepts and pattern of the godly life. The Word of God contains both Law and Gospel.
- A1 The Gospel is God's gracious promise to us as beloved children, all that God has done for us, in Israel and in Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins, and newness of life in God's Dominion.
- A2 The Law, on the other hand, represents what God expects of us in the response of our lives, lived out in loving service to God's will.
- A1 The Gospel is always first and last; that is, God's love to us in making us God's own, and heirs of the Dominion of Heaven.
- A2 But after we become aware that we are God's own, and before we know the final joy of God's rule, we live out our lives in this wounded world, conscious of our compromises with obedience to God's law, sometimes "sinning boldly", but also trusting more boldly still in God's forgiving love.
- P To be able to tell what is law and what is Gospel is the truest test of teaching in the church.
- A1 The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart; The commandment of the Lord is clear, and gives light to the eyes.
- A2 Jesus says, There are only two great commandments: Love God, and love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. The first three commandments, therefore, concern our relationship to God. The last seven commandments concern our relationship toward each other.

*The people stand.*

- P Dearly beloved: The Holy Spirit spoke to our forbears in faith and delivered to them the saving precepts of the Ten Commandments, of such eloquence and brevity that their truth can neither escape our understanding nor burden our

memory. So let us learn the Ten Commandments with attentive minds and write their truth on the pages of our hearts.

*Pastor and people repeat the Ten Commandments from The Small Catechism, ELWorship, pages 1160-1161, the Pastor taking the role of interlocutor.*

P Beloved, allow this brief abundance so to live in your hearts that at all times you may use the defense of these precepts against all snares of the Enemy. Enjoying the protection of the One whom we confess, let us persevere in the confirmation of our baptism, so that receiving the forgiveness of sins and newness of life, we may have our share in the fulness of God's Dominion, according to God's promises in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Next time: The Four Gospels and Creed...

