

OF THE CATECHISM

CCLXIV.

I believe the words of the apostles creed to be the work of the Holy Ghost; the Holy Spirit alone could have enunciated things so grand, in terms so precise, so expressive, so powerful. No human creature could have done it, nor all the human creatures of ten thousand worlds. This creed, then, should be the constant object of our most serious attention. For myself, I cannot too highly admire or venerate it.

CCLXV.

The catechism must govern the church, and remain lord and ruler; that is, the ten commandments, the creed, the Lord's Prayer, the sacraments, etc. And although there may be many that set themselves against it, yet it shall stand fast, and keep the pre-eminence, through him of whom it is written, "Thou art a priest for ever:" for he will be a priest, and will also have priests, despite the devil and all his instruments on earth.

CCLXVI.

Sermons very little edify children, who learn little thereby; it is more needful they be taught and well instructed in schools, and at home, and that they be heard and examined what they have learned; this way profits much; `tis very wearisome, but very necessary. The papists avoid such pains, so that their children are neglected and forsaken.

CCLXVII.

In the catechism, we have a very exact, direct, and short way to the whole Christian religion. For God himself gave the ten commandments, Christ himself penned and taught the Lord's Prayer, the Holy Ghost brought together the articles of faith. These three pieces are set down so excellently, that never could any thing have been better; but they are slighted and condemned by us as things of small value, because the little children daily say them.

The catechism is the most complete and best doctrine, and therefore should continually be preached; all public sermons should be grounded and built thereupon. I could wish we preached it daily, and distinctly read it out of the book. But our preachers and hearers have it at their fingers ends; they have already swallowed it all up; they are ashamed of this slight and simple doctrine, as they hold it, and will be thought of higher learning. The parishioners say: Our preachers fiddle always one tune; they preach nothing but the catechism, the ten commandments, the creed, the Lord's prayer, baptism, and the Lord's supper; all which we know well enough already; but the catechism, I insist, is the right Bible of the laity, wherein is

contained the whole sum of Christian doctrine necessary to be known by every Christian for salvation.

First, there are the ten commandments of God, *Doctrina Doctrinarum*, the doctrine of all doctrines, by which God's will is known, what God will have of us, and what is wanting in us. Secondly, there is the confession of faith in God and in our Lord Jesus Christ; *Historia Historiarum*, the history of histories, or highest history, wherein are delivered unto us the wonderful works of the divine Majesty from the beginning to all eternity; how we and all creatures are created by God; how we are delivered by the Son of God through his humanity, his passion, death, and resurrection; and also how we are renewed and collected together, the one people of God, and have remission of sins and everlasting life.

Thirdly, there is the Lord's prayer, *Oratio Orationum*, the prayer above all prayers, a prayer which the most high Master taught us, wherein are comprehended all spiritual and temporal blessings, and the strongest comforts in all trials, temptations, and troubles, even in the hour of death.

Fourthly, there are the blessed sacraments, *Cerimoniae Cerimoniarum*, the highest ceremonies, which God himself has instituted and ordained, and therein assured us of his grace. We should esteem and love the catechism, for therein is the ancient, pure, divine doctrine of the Christian church. And whatsoever is contrary thereunto is new and false doctrine, though it have ever so glorious a show and lustre, and we must take good heed how we meddle therewith. In all my youth I never heard any preaching, either of the ten commandments, or of the Lord's prayer.

Future heresies will darken this light, but now we have the catechism, God be praised, purer in the pulpits, than has been for the last thousand years. So much could not be collected out of all the books of the Fathers, as, by God's grace, is now taught out of the little catechism. I only read in the Bible at Erfurt, in the monastery; and God then wonderfully wrought, contrary to all human expectation, so that I was constrained to depart from Erfurt, and was called to Wittenberg, where, under God, I gave the devil, the pope of Rome, such a blow, as no emperor, king, or potentate, could have given him; yet it was not I, but God by me, his poor, weak, and unworthy instrument.

The Decalogue - that is, the ten commandments of God, are a looking-glass and brief sum of all virtues and doctrines, both how we ought to behave towards God and also our neighbour; that is, towards all mankind.

There never was at any time written a more excellent, complete, or compendious book of virtues.

CCLXIX.

God says: "I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God." Now, God is jealous two manner of ways; first, God is angry as one that is jealous of them that fall from him, and become false and treacherous, that prefer the creature before the Creator; that build upon the favors of the great;

that depend upon their friends, upon their own power - riches, arts, wisdom, etc.; that forsake the righteousness of faith, and condemn it, and will be justified and saved by and through their own good works. God is also vehemently angry with those that boast and brag of their power and strength; as we see in Sennacherib, king of Assyria, who boasted of his great power, and thought utterly to destroy Jerusalem. Likewise in king Saul, who also thought to defend and keep the kingdom through his strength and power, and to pass it on to his children when he had suppressed David and rooted him out.

Secondly, God is jealous for them that love him and highly esteem his Word; such God loves again, defends, and keeps as the apple of his eye, and resists their adversaries, beating them back, that they are not able to perform what they intended. Therefore, this word jealous comprehends both hatred and love, revenge and protection; for which cause it requires both fear and faith; fear, that we provoke not God to anger, or work his displeasure; faith, that in trouble we believe he will help, nourish, and defend us in this life, and will pardon and forgive us our sins, and for Christ's sake preserve us to life everlasting. For faith must rule and govern, in and over all things, both spiritual and temporal; the heart must believe most certainly that God looks upon us, loves, helps, and will not forsake us, as the Psalm says: "Call upon me in the time of trouble, so will I deliver thee, and thou shalt praise me," etc. Also "The Lord is nigh unto all those that call upon him; yea, all that call upon him faithfully." And, "He that calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Further, the Lord says: "And will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation," etc. This is a terrible word of threatening, which justly affrights our hearts, and stirs up fears in us. It is quite contrary to our reason, for we conceive it to be a very unjust proceeding, that the children and posterity should be punished for their fathers and forefathers offences. But forasmuch as God has so decreed, and is pleased so to proceed, therefore our duty is to know and acknowledge that he is a just God, and that he wrongs none. Seeing that these fearful threatenings are contrary to our understanding, therefore flesh and blood regard them not, but cast them in the wind, as though they signified no more than the hissing of a goose. But we that are true Christians believe the same to be certain, when the Holy Ghost touches our hearts, and that this proceeding is just and right, and thereby we stand in the fear of God. Here again we may see what man's free-will can do, in that it understands and fears nothing. If we did but feel and know how earnest a threatening this is, we should for fear instantly fall down dead; and we have examples, as where God said: that for the sins of Manasseh he will cast the people into miserable captivity.

But some may argue: Then I see well that the posterity have no hope of grace when their parents sin. I answer: Those that repent, from them is the law taken away and abolished, so that their parents sins do not hurt them; as the prophet Ezekiel says: "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father;" yet God permits the external and corporal punishment to go on, yea, sometimes over the penitent children also for examples, to the end that others may fly from sin and lead a godly life.

"But he will do good and be merciful unto thousands," etc. This is a great, a glorious, and comfortable promise, far surpassing all human reason and understanding, that, for the sake of one godly person, so many should be partakers of undeserved blessings and mercies. For we find many examples, that a multitude of people have enjoyed mercies and benefits for the sake of one godly man; as for Abraham's sake, many people were preserved and blessed, and also for Isaac's sake; and for the sake of Naaman the whole kingdom of Assyria was blessed of God.

To love God is, that we certainly hold and believe that God is gracious unto us, that he helps, assists, and does us good. Therefore, love proceeds from faith, and God requires faith, to believe that he promises all good unto us.

CCLXX.

The first commandment will stand and remain, that God is our God; this will not be accomplished in the present, but in the life everlasting. All the other commandments will cease and end; for, in the life to come, the world will cease and end together with all external worship of God, all world policy and government; only God and the first commandment will remain everlastingly, both here and there.

We ought well to mark with what great diligence and ability Moses handles the first commandment, and explains it. He was doubtless an excellent doctor. David afterwards was a gate or a door out of Moses. For he had well studied in Moses, and so he became a fine poet and orator; the Psalms are altogether *sylogisms*, or concluding sentences out of the first commandment. *Major*, the first, is God's Word itself; *Minor*, the second, faith. The conclusion is the act, work, and execution, so that it is done as we believe. As, *Major: Misericors Deus, respicit miseros: Minor: Ego sum miser; Conclusio; Ergo Deus me quoque respicit.*

When we believe the first commandment, and so please God, then all our actions are pleasing unto him. If thou hearest his Word, if thou prayest, mortifiest thyself, then says God unto thee: I am well pleased with what thou doest. Moreover, when we observe the first commandment, then that *placet* goes through all the other commandments and works. Art thou a Christian? wilt thou marry a wife? wilt thou buy and sell? wilt thou labor in the works of thy vocation? wilt thou punish and condemn wicked and ungodly wretches? wilt thou eat, drink, sleep? etc. God says continually: *Placet.*

But if thou keepest not the first commandment, then says God to all thy works and actions, *Non placent*, they please me not. Christ takes the first commandment upon himself, where he says: "He that honoreth me, honoreth the Father; he that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father."