



# Lutheran Education and Luther's Catechisms

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Luther's Lasting Impact

**INTERACTIVE FAITH**  
AN ONLINE BIBLE STUDY SERIES



## **Introduction**

In general, why is education important?

## **The State of Education in the Medieval Church**

Education in the monasteries

Education in the universities: the "Old" vs the "New"

Education of the clergy

City schools

Catechisms

## **Luther's Emphasis on Education**

What doctrinal emphases do you think drove Luther to emphasize education?

Read the following quotes from the Small Catechism (next page). How do you reconcile Luther's apparent contradictory attitude toward human reason?

*"I believe that God has made me and all that exists, and that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears and all my members, my mind and all my abilities."*

*"I believe that I cannot, by my own thinking of choosing, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him."*

Read the following quotes from several of Luther's writings (and one from Melanchthon). Describe his attitude toward the education of children. Consider who he says is responsible, who should be educated, what the curriculum should include, and the purpose of education. What doctrinal emphases are on his mind?

*"And would to God that every town had a girls' school as well, where the girls would be taught the gospel for an hour every day either in German or in Latin."*

*"To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation"*

Luther's Works 44:206

*"Now if (as we have assumed) there were no souls, and there were no need at all of schools and languages for the sake of the Scriptures and of God, this one consideration alone would be sufficient to justify the establishment everywhere of the very best schools for both boys and girls, namely, that in order to maintain its temporal estate outwardly the world must have good and capable men and women, men able to rule well over land and people, women able to manage the household and train children and servants aright. Now such men must come from our boys, and such women from our girls. Therefore, it is a matter of properly educating and training our boys and girls to that end."*

*"To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools"*

Luther's Works 45:368

*"Furthermore, in connection with this commandment, we must mention the sort of obedience due to superiors, persons whose duty it is to command and to govern. For all other authority is derived and developed out of the authority of parents. Where a father is unable by himself to bring up his child, he calls upon a schoolmaster to teach him; if he is too weak, he seeks the help of his friends and neighbors; if he dies, he confers and delegates his responsibility and authority to others appointed for the purpose. In addition, he has to have servants—menservants and maidservants—under him in order to manage the household. Thus all who are called masters stand in the place of parents and must derive from them their power and authority to govern. They are all called fathers in the Scriptures because in their sphere of authority they have been commissioned as fathers and ought to have fatherly hearts toward their people."*

Large Catechism I:141-142

*“Therefore let all people know that it is their chief duty—at the risk of losing divine grace—first to bring up their children in the fear and knowledge of God, and, then, if they are so gifted, also to have them engage in formal study and learn so that they may be of service wherever they are needed.”*

Large Catechism I:174

*“‘All right,’ you say again, ‘suppose we do have to have schools; what is the use of teaching Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and the other liberal arts? We could just as well use German for teaching the Bible and God’s word, which is enough for our salvation.’ I reply: Alas! I am only too well aware that we Germans must always be and remain brutes and stupid beasts, as the neighboring nations call us, epithets which we richly deserve. But I wonder why we never ask, ‘What is the use of silks, wine, spices, and other strange foreign wares when we ourselves have in Germany wine, grain, wool, flax, wood, and stone not only in quantities sufficient for our needs, but also of the best and choicest quality for our glory and ornament?’ Languages and the arts, which can do us no harm, but are actually a greater ornament, profit, glory, and benefit, both for the understanding of Holy Scripture and the conduct of temporal government—these we despise. But foreign wares, which are neither necessary nor useful, and in addition strip us down to a mere skeleton—these we cannot do without. Are not we Germans justly dubbed fools and beasts?”*

*“To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools”  
Luther’s Works 45:357-358*

*“Regarding theology, it is of utmost importance how they equip themselves for their study. For more than all other areas of study, theology really demands the highest possible capacity for thinking, for intensive concentration, and for precision in analysis. The fragrance of the incense of the Lord is sweeter than the aromatic spices of human fields of learning. Led by the Holy Spirit, accompanied by our education in the arts and sciences, it is possible for us to find access to that which is sacred... Since the writings that form the basis of theology are written some in Hebrew, some in Greek, we must learn the foreign languages, so that we do not have to meet the theologians like ‘masks unable to speak.’ First, with the original text we will have access to the words with their luster and their true significance, and, to use a figure of speech, the true and real meaning of the letters, which we are seeking, will reveal itself to us in the glorious light of the midday sun.”*

Melanchthon’s Inaugural Address, 28 August 1518

## **The Story of Luther’s Catechisms**

1526 Diet of Speyer

1528 Saxon Visitation

Large Catechism

## Small Catechism

### Teaching methodology

*First, he must know what to do and what to leave undone. Second, when he realizes that he cannot measure up to what he should do or leave undone, he needs to know where to go to find the strength he requires. Third, he must know how to seek and obtain that strength.*

“Personal Prayer Book”  
Luther’s Works 43:13

Impact of Luther’s catechism in the immediate decades after Luther’s death.

## **The Lasting Impact of Luther’s Educational Developments**

As you consider what you know of the history of WELS and of your own congregation, how would you say Luther’s educational developments have had a lasting impact?

As you consider your personal history, what is the greatest impact of Luther’s educational developments on you? Why?