



Luther's *Small Catechism* is a grammar. In it Luther identifies the "six chief parts" of our confession. In other words, these are for him the six basic constituents of the Christian faith. Mastering them is a threshold to full participation in the one true faith. Grammar is about breaking knowledge down into its fundamental parts, to facilitate learning.

Dialectic establishes a class by means of definition and partition, and operates by identifying contradictions. Consider

how most every clause in the explanations are divided into contrary elements by Luther's interjection of "but." Why? To hold in constructive tension the contrary elements. One finds evidences of classical dialectic throughout *Luther's Small Catechism*.

It is clear that Luther, in keeping with his classical training in the rhetorical arts, employs devices to facilitate learning and memorization. Doing so would come naturally for him. Take, for example, the explanations. The ubiquitous, "What does this mean?" the rhetorical question begins each explanation, and the repetition of "This is most certainly true" acts as a hammer of God, driving the lesson deeper and deeper into the soul of the child. Consider the rhythm of: "He also gives me *clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. . . . For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.*" The couplets aid memorization, to be sure, the rhythm established also helps the lessons penetrate. It is a grammar, it employs rhetorical devices, and it is formed by dialectic.

When our junior high and high school age students learn to engage in dialectical inference, to "parse out" arguments, and to ferret out assumptions, they will be placed in that state of mind where they can think with precision, think quickly on their feet, and follow an argument to its logical conclusion. What is more, they will have "ears to hear," as it were, the credal and sacramental faith we believe, teach, and confess.