

# The Smalcald Articles

A Bible Study Course for Adults

by

Geoffrey A. Kieta

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## Note to the Teacher

### The Importance of the Smalcald Articles

In today's ecumenical age, a study of the Smalcald Articles is not as easy nor as pleasant as some other Bible studies might be. Luther lived in a very different world than we do. People wrote and spoke differently, and those differences are reflected in the Smalcald Articles. If your experience is like mine, some participants in your class may even complain about the bluntness of the language. But discovering the truths that Luther laid out in the Smalcald Articles is worth the effort. Here we see the clearest testimony of the work-righteousness that has infected the Church of Rome. At the same time, Luther again and again placed his concern for the spiritual welfare of God's people at the forefront and pointed them ceaselessly to the cross of Christ. The Lutheran church has rightly elevated this writing beyond the status of one man's opinion. It is our confession. Our people deserve to know this confession, to live and breathe its theology, because it shows the gospel set against its greatest opponent. This study is one humble contribution to our church's knowledge of Luther's final confession.

### The Translation

One of the challenges of preparing a study on the Smalcald Articles is the language of the translation. The three most available English translations are by F. Bente (*The Concordia Triglotta*, Concordia Publishing House, 1917), Theodore G. Tappert (*The Book of Concord*, Fortress Press, 1959), Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, editors of a newer translation (*The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Augsburg Press, 2000). While both of the more recent translations use contemporary English, copyright considerations force us to use Bente's older work. While I don't have the time or the expertise to work up a totally new translation, I have revised Bente's work to some extent.

In working on the revision, two principles guided my work. First, I wanted Luther to "speak English" as much as possible. My purpose is not the kind of exact translation necessary for theological discussion. Rather, it is to lead people into their confessional heritage.

Second, I limited myself almost exclusively to Luther's German text. The Latin text in the *Triglotta* was prepared by Nicholas Selnecker (one of the coauthors of the Formula of Concord) for the 1584 edition of *The Book of Concord*. Most Lutheran scholars consider Luther's version, which is the one officially received into *The Book of Concord* in 1580, as more authoritative. Selnecker's translation certainly should not be ignored. But he used what today might be considered the dynamic equivalency method of translation. His Latin is not a literal rendering of the German. Rather, he worked to convey the meaning of the confession. The net effect, however, is that the modern translator often must choose which reading he will incorporate into his work. Bente solved the problem by putting Selnecker's version in brackets (most of the time). I have removed all those brackets and used Selnecker's work only for comparison to preserve Luther's intended line of thought.

Wherever possible, I used the NIV to render Scripture references. If it was necessary to preserve Luther's line of thought, I used his translation. Note that the verse references in the text are from the Latin. Luther didn't use them because the modern system of versification dates from after his time. I kept the verse references in, however, to make it easier for members to look up references that interest them.

### Using the Materials Found in This Course

Class members have a right to ask: "What difference does it make today what the Catholic Church said and did almost five hundred years ago? Things have changed, haven't they?" If it were true that the issues Luther raised in the Smalcald Articles were resolved by the Counter-Reformation and the Vatican II Council, then this study should be relegated to a church history class. But Rome has not essentially changed. To demonstrate that reality, a second course, *Contemporary Catholicism*, has been included. (The leader's guide and students' masters are found in electronic form on the disk.) The lessons in this second course examine modern Catholic teachings from the point of view of the *Catechism of the Catholic*

*Church.* This course demonstrates how the issues Luther raised still divide the Catholic Church from orthodox Lutheran church bodies today. This course can also serve as an overview of contemporary Catholic teachings. The lessons in the course *Contemporary Catholicism* correlate to the lessons in the course *The Smalcald Articles*.

Here are some options for using the two courses:

- Alternate teaching the lessons in *The Smalcald Articles* with the corresponding lessons from *Contemporary Catholicism*. You will need about 26 weeks to cover the material.
- Teach *The Smalcald Articles* by itself. You will need about 13 weeks to cover the material.
- Teach *Contemporary Catholicism* by itself. You will need about 13 weeks to cover the material.

This study references J. P. Meyer's book on the Smalcald Articles. At the time of this writing, Meyer's manuscript is being updated and is not in print. Check with Northwestern Publishing House on the availability of this manuscript.

The discussion questions are cross-referenced with the text of the Smalcald Articles. The number of the question appears in the text of the articles in this form: [Q1]. The paragraph of the Smalcald Articles to which a question applies is noted after the question in this form: [Para 1].

Each lesson suggests that class members read ahead the section of the Smalcald Articles that will be covered the next week. The leader should have that material copied and ready to hand out to the class. This is strongly advised considering the nature of the material.

Geoffrey A. Kieta

## The Smalcald Articles

### Lesson One

#### *A Challenge to Unity*

##### *Note to the Student*

When Luther wrote the Smalcald Articles in 1537, he wasn't engaging in idle theological posturing. There was a very real purpose: The Lutheran Church needed a clear and cogent presentation of the basic truths of Scripture for the proposed Council of Mantua (which finally became the Council of Trent). Luther expected that if these articles were presented there, they would be delivered to a hostile audience. So he presented a spirited defense of the truth. He yielded nothing, and he was prepared to die for this confession.

At the same time, Luther still held out hope that some of those present might be "reasonable Catholics," who cared about the Scriptures and the basic question of how a sinner might stand in peace before a holy God. So he prepared a document that focused on the central issues, without getting drawn into minor debates. The entire confession turns on what Luther called "the chief article": justification. He related every point to the question of how a sinner gets right with God. To this day, the Lutheran church still follows this approach.

When Luther wrote this confession (in late 1536), almost 20 years had passed since he nailed the Ninety-five Theses to the castle church door in Wittenberg. Six years had passed since the Lutheran princes had made their confession to the Emperor at Augsburg. Luther had been excommunicated from the Roman church and placed under the ban after the Diet of Worms. Those were difficult years in which Luther suffered many personal and theological attacks.

All of which is to say that Luther knew whom he was talking to. And he didn't mince words. In the 21st century, the Smalcald Articles may seem sharp to us.

That was probably true to some extent even in Luther's day. Throughout this study we must remember that Luther was waging a war against the agents of Satan for the souls of millions of Christians. The time had long passed for soft words and a mild approach. If we keep these facts in mind, we will appreciate the vigorous defense of the gospel offered in the Smalcald Articles.

##### *Preface of Dr. Martin Luther*

1] Last year Pope Paul III convoked a Council to assemble at Mantua around Pentecost Sunday. Then he transferred it from Mantua, so that it is not yet known where he will or can assemble it. And since on our part we either had to expect that we would also be summoned to the Council or fear that we would be condemned without being summoned, I was directed to compile and collect the articles of our doctrine in case it should come under discussion what and how far we would be both willing and able to yield to the Papists, and in what points we intended to persevere and remain to the end. [Q1]

2] Accordingly, I have compiled these articles and presented them to our side. They have also been accepted and unanimously confessed by our adherents.

[Q2] It has been resolved that they be publicly presented in order to produce a confession of our faith (if the Pope with his adherents should ever be so bold as to hold a truly free Christian Council seriously and in good faith without lying and cheating, as, indeed, they should be obligated to do).

3] But the Roman court is so terribly afraid of a free Christian Council and flees from the light so shamefully that it has even taken away from those who are on its side the hope that it will ever even permit a free Council, much less hold one. Justly, they are

almost exasperated and more than a little troubled by this. [Q3] They see by this that the Pope would rather see all Christendom lost and all souls damned before he or his adherents will let themselves be reformed even a little bit and let his tyranny be limited. [Q4] Nevertheless, I have published these articles openly, so that if I should die before there would be a Council (as I fully expect and hope, since these scoundrels who flee the light and shun the day have gone to such miserable lengths to delay and hinder the Council), those who live and remain after me will have my testimony and confession, in addition to the Confession which I issued previously, on which I have stood until now, and, by God's grace, on which I will stand. [Q5]

4] For what should I say? How can I complain? I am still living, writing, preaching, and lecturing daily. But you find such spiteful men, not only among our adversaries, but also false brethren who claim to be on our side. They dare to cite my writings and doctrine directly against me, and leave me to watch and listen, although they know very well that I teach something else. They want to decorate their poison with my labor, and mislead the poor people under my name. What will happen when I am dead? [Q6]

5] Certainly, I ought to properly reply to everything while I am still living. But, on the other hand, how can I plug all the mouths of the devil all by myself—especially of those people (they all really are this bitter) who will not listen or pay attention to what we write? Instead they diligently apply themselves to how they may pervert and corrupt every letter of our message in the most shameful way. I let the devil—or at last God's wrath—answer such people just as they deserve. 6] I often think of the good Gerson, who wondered whether anything good should be published. If it is not, many souls are missed who could be saved. But if it is, the devil is right there with countless, venomous, evil jaws that

poison and pervert everything. So the benefit is still prevented. 7] Yet what they gain by that we see every day. For although they have shamefully lied about us and have wished to hold on to the people with lies, God has constantly advanced His work. He has made their following smaller and smaller and ours larger and larger. They and their lies will be continually frustrated. [Q7]

8] I must tell a story. There was a doctor sent here to Wittenberg from France. He openly told us that his king was absolutely certain that there is no church, no government, no estate of marriage among us, but that we all live promiscuously like cattle, and each one does as he pleases. 9] Tell me, how will those people whose writings have presented such gross lies as the pure truth to the king and to other countries even look at us on that day before the judgment-seat of Christ? Christ, the Lord and Judge of us all, knows well that they lie and always have lied. They will have to hear His sentence when their turn comes; that I know for certain. May God convert to repentance those who are to be converted! Regarding the rest it will be said, "Oh! Eternal agony!"

10] But to return to the subject, I would very much like to see a truly Christian Council, in order that many issues might be resolved and people helped. Not that we need it—for our churches are now, through God's grace, so enlightened and equipped with the pure Word and right use of the Sacraments, with knowledge of the various callings and of right works, that on our part we ask for no Council. In matters like these, we know we can expect or hope for nothing better from a Council. [Q8] But we see in the bishoprics everywhere that so many parishes are vacant and desolate that it breaks our heart. Yet neither the bishops nor canons care how the poor people, for whom Christ died, live or die. They are not permitted to hear Him speak with them as the true Shepherd with His sheep. [Q9]

11] This causes me to shudder and fear that

# Contemporary Catholicism

Teachings of Today's Catholic Church

corresponding to the topics covered by Martin Luther in the Smalcald Articles

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## Leader's Guide

- Lesson One—A Challenge to Unity: Fellowship in the Catholic Church
- Lesson Two—The One True God: The Virgin Mary
- Lesson Three—The Church Stands or Falls: Justification
- Lesson Four—Sacrifice or Sacrament? The Mass
- Lesson Five—The Dragon's Tale: Purgatory and the Saints
- Lesson Six—The Antichrist: The Papacy
- Lesson Seven—Sin and the Law: Original Sin
- Lesson Eight—What Is True Repentance? Penance
- Lesson Nine—A False Hope: Indulgences
- Lesson Ten—Forms of the Gospel: Baptism
- Lesson Eleven—God's Spirit Comes to Our Hearts: The Source of Doctrine
- Lesson Twelve—The Powers of the Church: The Ministry
- Lesson Thirteen—Life in the Church: Monasticism

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## Note to the Leader

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Class members have a right to ask: “What difference does it make today what the Catholic Church said and did almost five hundred years ago? Things have changed, haven’t they?” If it were true that the issues Luther raised in the Smalcald Articles were resolved by the Counter-Reformation and the Vatican II Council, then this study should be relegated to a church history class. But Rome has not essentially changed. To demonstrate that reality, this course, *Contemporary Catholicism*, has been included. It is meant to accompany the course on the Smalcald Articles. The lessons in this course examine today’s Catholic teachings from the point of view of the 1997 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This course demonstrates how the issues Luther raised still divide the Catholic Church from orthodox Lutheran church bodies today. This course can also serve as an overview of contemporary Catholic teachings. The lessons in this course correlate to the lessons in the course *The Smalcald Articles*.

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### The Catechism of the Catholic Church

This catechism presents what might be termed “confessional Catholicism.” It is very strict and traditional in its presentation. Many Catholics today do not accept the theology of this catechism in its entirety. In fact, it would be fair to say that at the end of this study, your class members may have a clearer idea of what the Catholic Church teaches than many Catholics do. Even very active members of the Catholic Church often are more imbued with a spirit of “popular piety” than with the confessionalism of the Catholic catechism.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle the catechism presents is its language. Luther would have called the style of writing sophistic. I was once asked about the authors, “Are these guys all lawyers, or what?” Understanding the authors’ points requires very careful reading. You may want to read more than just the paragraphs offered in the study.

On a practical level, it’s useful to know that the Catholic catechism is not set up in the question-and-answer format that we Lutherans are accustomed to. Nor is it intended to be an instructional document for confirmation. Rather, it is a reference work that explains the basic teachings of the Catholic Church. It is meticulously organized. But more important, each paragraph is numbered. With the many different editions that are in print, it is easiest to reference a special quote by its paragraph number.

None of the *Contemporary Catholicism* sections presents everything the catechism has to say on the topic under discussion, to say nothing of the mountain of other Catholic writings. Indeed, many topics are never touched in this study simply because there isn’t time. There is no lesson on each of the seven sacraments or even on Catholicism’s general view of sacraments, a shortcoming I deeply regret. The studies offered are intended to show the validity of the Smalcald Articles today.

May the Holy Spirit fill your hearts and minds and give you insight into the Scriptures and discernment into the spirit of our age and the sophistry of our opponents. May he equip you to speak the Word of truth to his glory.

Geoffrey A. Kieta

**Editor's Note**

The study Pastor Kieta submitted to Northwestern Publishing House includes the full text of each Catechism section he cited. This allows students to read in context what the Catholic Church says about various points of teaching.

Copyright laws keep Northwestern Publishing House from including those quotations in their entirety because the offered material is for sale. Yet such quotations are indispensable to this study. So instead of the full quotation, the paragraph heading found in the catechism is provided with the beginning and ending words of each quotation. Class leaders are encouraged to purchase the catechism and insert the material themselves. (Alternatively, teachers may want to photocopy the appropriate pages and highlight the sections under study, and some class members may wish to purchase their own copy of the catechism.) Copyright laws allow teachers to provide their classes with this material as long as it is not for sale and is intended for personal use by teachers and their classes.

Full quotations are provided in the first lesson. NPH feels this is within the parameters of fair use as defined by copyright law. This accomplishes two things. First, it gives teachers a pattern to follow for entering text into subsequent lessons. Second, it gives teachers some time to order a copy of the catechism if they do not have a copy.

Where does one find a copy of the Catholic catechism? A softcover edition is available for about \$9.00. Many bookstores carry this work, and all bookstores can order it. The catechism can be ordered through various online bookstores. Also, many libraries have this work. Look for *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Includes modifications from the Editio Typica* (New York: Doubleday, An Image Book, 1997). At the time this study was published, online editions could be found on the internet. Go to "[www.christusrex.com/www1/CDHN/cc.html](http://www.christusrex.com/www1/CDHN/cc.html)" or "[www.scborromeo.org/cc.html](http://www.scborromeo.org/cc.html)." Using the material from these sites can save typing time. Also, the catechism is available in Logos format. Go to "[www.logos.com](http://www.logos.com)" for a list of publications.

Again, we regret not being able to supply the text as Pastor Kieta intended in this study. The silver lining, however, is that teachers have access to the wider context. They can become more familiar with the catechism and can insert additional material if desired.



# Contemporary Catholicism

## Lesson One—A Challenge to Unity

### *Fellowship in the Catholic Church*

In the introduction to the Smalcald Articles, Luther's strong position regarding the Catholic Church provokes a discussion of fellowship principles. Luther was arguing for a clear confession and a clear separation from falsehood. Most of us are familiar with our synod's teaching on fellowship. But where does the Roman Catholic Church stand on that issue? Using the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997), we will let the Catholic Church speak for itself.

#### **Who belongs to the Catholic Church?**

**836** "All men are called to this catholic unity of the People of God. . . . And to it, in different ways, belong or are ordered: the Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally all mankind, called by God's grace to salvation." [*Lumen gentium* 13]

**837** "Fully incorporated into the society of the Church are those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization, and who—by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government, and communion—are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. Even though incorporated into the Church, one who does not however persevere in charity is not saved. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but 'in body' not 'in heart.'" [*Lumen gentium* 14]

**838** "The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but do not profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter." [*Lumen gentium* 15] Those "who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church." [*Unitatis redintegratio* 3] *With the Orthodox Churches*, this communion is so profound "that it lacks little to attain the fullness that would permit a common celebration of the Lord's Eucharist." [Paul VI, Discourse, cf. *Unitatis redintegratio* 13-18]

1. What three categories of people does the Roman Catholic Church recognize?

Those who belong to the Catholic Church, those who are non-Catholic Christians, and everybody else.

2. What do you think it means that all three "in different ways, belong or are ordered" to the Catholic Church?

The Catholic Church teaches that non-Catholic Christians are saved by the remnant of Catholicism in their churches. Non-Christians are saved by the remnant of Christianity in their search for God and righteous lives. In the end, the Catholic Church teaches that it is the one means of salvation, even for those who are not Catholics.

3. What is the difference, in the view of the Catholic Church, between a Catholic and a Lutheran?

Catholics are "fully incorporated into the society of the Church." Lutherans are "in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church." They recognize both as Christians, but the Catholic has an advantage in their view. They believe that in some sense, Lutherans are still connected to the Catholic Church.

**816** “The sole Church of Christ [is that] which our Savior, after his Resurrection, entrusted to Peter’s pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it. . . . This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in (*subsistit in*) the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him.” [*Lumen gentium* 8§2]

The Second Vatican Council’s *Decree on Ecumenism* explains: “For it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help toward salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe that our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ into which all those should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the People of God.” [*Unitatis redintegratio* 3§5]

4. How many Christian churches does the Catholic Church recognize?

Just one: the Catholic Church. The church claims that it alone is “the universal help toward salvation.” It claims that Christ gave “all the blessings of the New Covenant” only to the Roman Catholic Church.

**832** “The Church of Christ is really present in all legitimately organized local groups of the faithful, which, in so far as they are united to their pastors, are also quite appropriately called Churches in the New Testament. . . . In them the faithful are gathered together through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord’s Supper is celebrated. . . . In these communities, though they may often be small and poor, or existing in the diaspora, Christ is present, through whose power and influence the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church is constituted.” [*Lumen gentium* 26]

**834** Particular Churches are fully catholic through their communion with one of them, the Church of Rome “which presides in charity.” [St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Romanii* 1:1; cf. *Lumen gentium* 13] “For with this church, by reason of its pre-eminence, the whole Church, that is the faithful everywhere, must necessarily be in accord.” [St. Irenaeus *Adv. haeres.* 3,3,2 . . . ] Indeed, “from the incarnate Word’s descent to us, all Christian churches everywhere have held and hold the great Church that is here [at Rome] to be their only basis and foundation since, according to the Savior’s promise, the gates of hell have never prevailed against her.” [St. Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula theo.*]

5. What two things are necessary for the Church of Christ to be really present according to these paragraphs?

Union with pastors (the Catholic Church believes it is united to the church through its bishops—see paragraph 833) and union with the Church of Rome, which presides over the whole church, according to Catholic belief.

**817** In fact, “in this one and only Church of God from its very beginnings there arose certain rifts, which the Apostle strongly censures as damnable. But in subsequent centuries much more serious dissensions appeared and large communities became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church—for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame.” [*Unitatis redintegratio* 3§1] The ruptures that wound the unity of Christ’s Body—here we must distinguish heresy, apostasy, and schism [cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, canon 751]—do not occur without human sin.

**818** “However, one cannot charge with the sin of the separation those who at present are born into these communities [that resulted from such separation] and in them are brought up in the faith of Christ, and the Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers. . . .