Chapter 1

The Codex in the Hand

This chapter begins with a simple physical fact. While Friedrich Nausea, Michael Helding, and Andreas Osiander published catechetical sermons, and the Council of Trent, a catechism for priests, in folios far too heavy to be held in a hand and read, they are the exception. The overwhelming majority of surviving codices are small enough for hands to hold. They are small enough for a particular intimacy between reader and text, reader and object.

In format, the Isagoge is typical of most sixteenth-century catechisms. The copy in Augsburg is roughly ten by fifteen centimeters—though at half a centimeter thick, it is thinner than many. In format, it is octavo, that is, the printer folded the single sheet of paper three times before binding the sheets together. Octavo is one quarter the size of a folio. It is therefore much smaller, smaller even than most modern paperbacks. It was the format of choice for medieval study bibles. More pages to the sheet of paper, octavo lent itself to cheaper print runs. So, too, many sixteenth-century catechisms were printed on coarser paper, with crudely carved letters.

Not all catechisms survived the sixteenth century—for all sorts of reasons, but perhaps foremost, because catechisms were intended to be used, not set on a shelf. Josef Benzing has identified editions of Martin Luther’s catechisms for which there is no surviving copy, as has Friedrich Streicher, for Peter Canisius’s catechisms. Given those uncertainties, some numbers may

---

1 Michael Helding was bishop of Merseburg, when he preached catechetical sermons in Mainz, CATECHISMVS// Christliche Underweißung // und gegruender Bericht… (Mainz: Franciscus Behem bey St. Victor, 1551). Friedrich Nausea was bishop of Vienna, CATHOLICVS CATECHISMVS (Cologne: Quenter, 1543) (For full title, please see Bibliography). Conrad Cling published an exposition also in folio format, CONRADI CLING=//GII THEOLOGI ET ECCLESIASTÆ CELEBER=//rimi (dum uixit)… //CATECHISMVS CATHOLICVS // summan Christianæ institutionis… (Cologne: Hæredes Arnold Byreman, 1562). Andreas Osiander was the only Evangelical to publish a catechism in folio format, Catechismus oder // Kinder predig (Nürnberg: Johannes Petreius, 1533), which was reissued in multiple editions. See Gerhard Müller and Gottfried Seebäß, eds., Andreas Osiander d. Ä. Gesamtausgabe, vol. 5: Schriften und Briefe 1533 bis 1534 (Gütersloh, 1983).

2 Brian Richardson, Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy (Cambridge, 1999), 12–13.

give a sense of the dramatic proliferation of small catechisms in the sixteenth century. According to Benzing, Luther’s *German Catechism* in High German was published in three quarto editions and nineteen octavo editions; in Low German, in nine octavo editions; and in Latin, in four octavo editions. Luther’s *Enchiridion* was first published as a single sheet, and when it was published as a book, it was published in octavo format; subsequent editions in German, Low German, Latin, French, and Dutch were all published in octavo, a total of some sixty-one discrete editions. Johannes Spangenberg’s adaptation of Luther’s *German Catechism*, which appeared in High German (six editions), Low German (one edition), and Latin (three editions), was always published in octavo format. Both Georg Maier’s dual translation (eight editions) and Justus Jonas’s Latin translation of the *Enchiridion* (seven editions) were published in octavo. According to Streicher, 121 discrete editions of Canisius’s Latin catechisms were published during his lifetime; he found bibliographic records for slightly more than half. Of the sixty-nine Latin catechisms Canisius published during his lifetime (1521–97) for which there is some bibliographic record, five were quarto, that is, twice as large as octavo; forty-four—more than eight times as many—were octavo; and twenty, the largest number of any author, were duodecimo, half again as small as octavo, small enough for the boy’s hands for which these were largely intended. Indeed, if size is evidence of intent, more than any other single author Canisius sought to put catechisms directly into the hands of boys. Of the sixteen German catechisms published during his