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Ronald L. Cammenga, Editor (cammenga@prca.org)
Russell J. Dykstra, Book Review Editor (dykstra@prca.org)
Barrett L. Gritters (gritters@prca.org)

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Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary
4949 Ivanrest Avenue
Wyoming, MI 49418
USA

Editor's Notes

This issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* is the first of two special issues. Both issues feature the speeches—three in this issue and three in the April 2014 issue—that were delivered at the conference sponsored by the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary commemorating the 450th anniversary of the publication of the Heidelberg Catechism. The conference was held in the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, Thursday through Saturday, October 17-19, 2013. We had an excellent turnout for the entire conference. What's more, the speeches were "live-streamed," and the indications were that over two-hundred people joined the conference at each session by this means. Besides the three members of the faculty of PRTS, the conference featured two ministers from abroad and one veteran Protestant Reformed pastor. The theme of the conference was "Our Only Comfort: Celebrating the 450th Anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism."

The speech with which the conference began, "The History and Purpose of the Heidelberg Catechism," was delivered by Dr. Jürgen Burkhard Klautke. This was altogether fitting. Dr. Klautke is a native German. He is currently professor in the Academy for Reformed Theology in Marburg, Germany, and a leader of the Confessing Evangelical-Reformed Congregation in Giessen, Germany. In a very thorough and interesting way Dr. Klautke traced the birth, development, acceptance, and dissemination of the Heidelberg Catechism. He called attention to the roles played by the three main contributors to the Catechism: Elector Frederick III (the Pious), Caspar Olevianus, and Zacharias Ursinus. He also sketched the multiple purposes for which the Catechism was written.

The Rev. Angus Stewart was the second of our international speakers. Rev. Stewart hails from the British Isles and is pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland, located in Ballymena, Northern Ireland. Rev. Stewart very ably developed the topic assigned to him: "The Irenic/Polemical Nature of the Heidelberg Catechism." In his presentation he indicated the ways in which the Heidelberg Catechism promoted the peace of the churches of the

Reformation, the real peace of the church in the truth of the Word of God. At the same time, the Heidelberg Catechism was also a declaration of war. From beginning to end the Catechism is characterized by biblical polemics against the errors of Roman Catholicism, the errors of the Anabaptists, and the errors of Lutheranism. The latter is an important part of the Heidelberg Catechism by design, for the Catechism was intended by its authors, and especially by the Elector who commissioned its writing, to be distinctively Reformed. His concern was very much a concern to displace Lutheranism in his realm with the Reformed faith, particularly as regards the doctrine of the sacraments.

The third speech included in this issue is by the undersigned and entitled, "Comfort for Living and Dying—the Heidelberg Catechism's Grand Theme." In the speech attention is called to the theme of comfort that runs through the entire Catechism, beginning with the first Q.A., "What is thy only comfort in life and death?" Why this theme? What is the meaning of this theme? How does this theme serve to distinguish the Reformed churches sharply from the Roman Catholic Church from which they separated? At bottom what does this theme indicate about the Reformed faith? For the answers to these questions, read the article.

Although these lectures were popular lectures, and not intended strictly speaking for an academic and scholarly audience, the faculty is convinced that the speeches, these three and the three yet to come, are of broad interest and are of value for all the readership of *PRTJ.* In addition, some of the books reviewed in this issue belong to the large number of books on the Heidelberg Catechism that were published on the occasion of its 450th anniversary.

We hope that our readers are blessed by this issue, and that reading the articles in this issue makes them eager to receive its companion in the spring of 2014.

Soli Deo Gloria!

—RLC

History and Purpose of the Heidelberg Catechism

Jürgen-Burkhard Klautke

The Catechism, whose 450th anniversary we celebrate this year, is named after the German city of Heidelberg, because it was written and published there. In order to understand its development, we should keep in mind the political context of that time.

1. History of the Heidelberg Catechism

1.1. The Political Context

In 1563 Heidelberg was the capital of the Palatinate. The Palatinate was a territory within the German Empire, or as it was known back then, the Holy Roman Empire. The Heidelberg Catechism was not only created in Heidelberg, it was intended to be the official doctrinal basis of this territory. At that time there was a state church (*literally: Landeskirche*) in the Palatinate. What is a state church (*Landeskirche)*?

The constitution of the United States of America separates the church from the state so that the government is not allowed to interfere with matters that are the responsibility of the church. This was different 450 years ago in Germany. In those times it was usual that secular authorities had a strong influence on the church and educational policy. Since the late classical era we find such examples as Emperor Constantine (306-327), Theodosius (379-394) and Justinian (527-565), who turned church council decisions into political law. Examples for that are the Councils of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).

This interdependence between the secular and the sacred continued in principle into the early Middle Ages, when in Western Europe barbarian tribes were Christianized. For example, at the end of the fifth century, the conversion and baptism of the Frankish ruler Clovis was the starting point for all the members of his tribe to convert to Christianity. This link between faith and politics remained strong in the following centuries. In spite of all the conflicts between emperor

and pope, there was still a close connection between *Imperium* and *Sacerdotium* in the High Middle Ages. For this reason this epoch of history is called the Constantinian Age.

In the Late Middle Ages the powers of the pope and the emperor decreased, which led to a corresponding increase of power for the German princes in their respective territories. These princes now considered themselves authorized to intervene in church matters. The statement of one of the princes who declared about himself that "*The Duke of Kleve is Emperor and Pope of his territory,*"[1] is characteristic of the prevailing sentiment. Although this declaration was very provocative at that time, it captured the political situation at the dawn of the Reformation quite well.

Charles V had been Emperor in Germany since 1519. Next to Germany, Charles V ruled over Austria, Southern Italy and the largest part of modern-day Spain. He also ruled over America, at least over the area recently discovered by Christopher Columbus. He claimed to reign over a kingdom in which the sun was always shining. In Germany however the territorial princes were quite mindful of their own leadership and did not intend to yield any power to the emperor, which led to very strong tension in the relationship between Charles V and the German princes.

This tension was also present in the Electorate Palatinate. The prince of this territory had fought a war against the Bavarian prince in the early 1500s, which is known as the War of Succession of Landshut. In this war, Charles' father, Emperor Maximilian I, had sided with the Bavarians, and the princes of Palatinate were aware of this decades later.

1.2 The Reformation in Germany

God sent the Reformation into this political conflict. Martin Luther published his 95 theses in Wittenberg in the year 1517, for which he was put before the Diet of Worms (1520). It is important to note that Luther had to defend his doctrinal beliefs not in front of church

1 Quoted from: H. Brunotte, *Personalitätsprinzip und landeskirchliches Territorialprinzip,* in *Zeitschrift für evangelisches Kirchenrecht* (ZevKR). Bd. 7 (1959/60), 366.

authorities only, but in front of the Emperor and the princes of the German Empire as well. At this diet church officials were present as well, but the highest authority present was Charles V, who decided the orthodoxy of Luther's theology. Charles V was twenty years old at that time. He spoke very little German, so that everything was translated into Spanish for his benefit.

After the diet Luther was not immediately imprisoned. He was even allowed to flee from Worms. But the Emperor placed him under an imperial ban. This meant that anyone could murder Luther without any legal consequences. It was the emperor's intention to eliminate the Reformation from his realm. Soon after the Diet of Worms however, he was at war with the Turks and the French king Francis I. For this reason, the Reformation was able to spread with little opposition in Germany, as well as in other countries. Charles needed the financial and military support of the princes especially of his Protestant German princes. In light of this he did not want to oppose the Reformation too strongly.

By February 1546 Luther had died. In the same year Charles V had won the war, which gave him time and resources to oppose the Reformation as he had originally intended. In June 1546 the Schmalkaldic War broke out, which was a battle between the emperor and some Catholic princes on the one side and a number of Protestant princes on the other. The war ended the following year with a stunning victory for the emperor and his allies.

The defeat was so disastrous that many people thought that the Reformation had failed completely. One consequence was that many Protestants emigrated, seeking refuge in lands sympathetic to the cause of the Reformation. Among them was Martin Bucer, who had been Calvin's teacher in Strasburg, which at that time was part of the empire. He moved to Cambridge, England in 1549.

After the Schmalkaldic War Charles released the Leipzig Interim, which intended to reestablish religious unity within the empire. This meant that the Protestant churches were to become part of the Roman Catholic Church again. After his victory, as a matter of fact, the emperor was more powerful than he had ever been. But this soon became a problem for the Roman Catholic princes. They realized

that they would lose their own power in the long run. Therefore they pursued alliances with some Protestant princes, who at that time had very little power. Some of the Protestant princes were even in jail at the time.

The alliance between Catholic and Protestant princes was formed behind the back of the emperor. This laid the foundation for the famous Diet of Augsburg (1555). The Diet of Augsburg (or Augsburg Settlement or Peace of Augsburg) stated that not the emperor but every prince should have authority to decide the confession of his subjects. The conclusion was summarized by the famous phrase *cuius regio, eius religio* (whose realm, his religion). Charles V had to give in to the so called Peace of Augsburg. He was so ashamed by his defeat that he abdicated a year later and moved to Spain. He was succeeded by his brother Ferdinand.

The outcome was that if a prince was Roman Catholic then his people had to become Roman Catholic or they had to leave the territory. Likewise, if a prince was Lutheran, then his people had to adopt his convictions or they had to immigrate to another territory. That is the origin of the state churches (*Landeskirchen*), territorial churches headed by their particular prince. The creeds, which were adopted within those particular churches, had legal status.

In the American Constitution the basis for religious freedom is the freedom of conscience of every individual. The idea of freedom of conscience was introduced by the Reformation. An example of this can be found in Luther's famous statement before the Diet of Worms: "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot or will not recant, for going against conscience is neither safe nor salutary. I can do no other; here I stand; God help me. Amen."[2] Luther also emphasized this point in his commentary on Romans 13. As far as I know, he was the first to maintain that according to Holy Scripture the government was not allowed to rule over one's conscience or to rule over one's innermost thoughts (inquisition!). Instead the ruler is allowed to control only the visible realm, that is

2 Cited in Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil,* trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart. (New Haven: Yale University, 1982), 203.

the actions of the individual ("the works," as it is stated in Romans 13:3).

But individualism as the basis for religious freedom was not known then. At that time individuals derived their identity from their family and social environment. The idea that you could have different confessions within the same territory seemed inconsistent. The breakthrough for the idea of grounding religious freedom on individualism came a century later under such men as Oliver Cromwell and John Locke in England.

Thus, we can summarize: The Peace of Augsburg allowed religious freedom for the respective territory, although not for the individual. Other countries saw this as a major achievement. The Huguenots in France, for example, fought against their king for the right to live out their faith. In a similar way (in specific territories) the Germans did after 1555.

As in every other German territory, the situation in the Palatinate reflected the Peace of Augsburg: The prince decided the confession of his subjects.

1.3 The Beginning of the Reformation in the Palatinate

The Heidelberg Catechism therefore was not initiated by theologians or pastors. The decision to create a catechism for the churches in the Palatinate was not even made by a synod, but by the prince who was called 'Elector' in the Palatinate. From 1559, the elector was Frederick III.

The historical context for the development of the Heidelberg Catechism is best understood by looking at the decades that preceded the Reformation. In the first half of the fifteenth century the city of Heidelberg was known for its many witch trials. There was hardly another city in which the stake burned so often. Since the second half of the fifteenth century, Heidelberg was influenced by Renaissance thought. The Renaissance came from Italy over the Alps and rooted itself very quickly in the Palatinate. Heidelberg, which had a University since 1386, became a melting pot of humanist education, arts and sciences.

The theology of the Reformation came to Heidelberg relatively early.

A few months after Luther had nailed the 95 theses to the door of the Castle church in Wittenberg (October 1517) he travelled to Heidelberg to hold a disputation in the local monastery of the Augustinians (April 1518). It is interesting to take a look at some of the points that Luther proposed in that center of German humanism: True knowledge is not by philosophy (Aristotle) but by Christ; even the best works are nothing but sin unto death without fear of and love for God; after the fall, free will is nothing but a shell and as long as man follows his so called free will, he sins unto death; the one who thinks he can redeem himself by works will accumulate sin after sin; sin causes the wrath of God, it kills, curses, accuses and damns everything which is not in Christ.

Clearly, Luther's controversy with Rome was no longer only about indulgences, which had been the main point in the Ninety-Five Theses a few months before. Now the controversy was about the complete depravity of man and Christ being the only salvation for sinners.

Naturally, Luther's theses were a provocation of many who taught at Heidelberg University in 1518. There was much opposition to Luther's teaching. Still the disputation caused men like Martin Bucer and Johannes Brenz to embrace Reformation theology. A circle of professors and students was formed that held to Reformation insights, defended them and proclaimed them at the university. In addition many pastors started to confess reformation convictions more or less publicly.[3] Among them was Wenzel Strauss, the pastor of the Church of the Holy Spirit (*Heiliggeistkirche*).

Louis V, who was the elector in those days (1508-1544), had very different interests. His contemporaries called him an Epicurean. He spent most of his time with sports and hunting. He was indifferent towards the Reformation. He called the Protestant preacher Heinrich Stoll as his domestic chaplain and communion was celebrated in both kinds. However, when conflict arose because of theological matters, he always sought a consensus. He believed that one should not argue extensively about theological questions.

3 The following paragraphs are based on the excellent book by W. Henss, *Der Heidelberger Katechismus im konfessionspolitischen Kräftespiel seiner Frühzeit. Historisch-bibliographische Einführung* (Zürich: Fassung, 1983), passim.

His brother Frederick II (1544-1556), who succeeded him, was more willing to embrace the Reformation. Under his rule Lutheran ideas spread through the entire Palatinate. During the Schmalkaldic War Melanchthon's Augsburg Confession was established as the doctrinal standard for the Palatinate. A church order written by Johannes Brenz was adopted.[4] Pastors were allowed to marry and the liturgy of the Lord's Supper was no longer read in Latin but in German, so that the people could understand it.[5] But after the Protestant defeat in the Schmalkaldic War, Elector Frederick II was forced to go back to traditional church standards.

In light of the Peace of Augsburg, Protestantism was legalized in the Palatinate in 1555. Lutheranism was declared the official faith of the Palatinate by Elector Otto Henry, (1556-1559), who was the nephew of Frederick II and had succeeded him.

To understand what happened next, it is important to notice that Lutheranism had developed into two branches. On the one side there were the Gnesio-Lutherans led by Mathias Flacius Illyricus; on the other side were the Philippists led by Philip Melanchthon. The Gnesio-Lutherans strictly emphasized the physical presence of Christ in the Supper. The Philippists were more tolerant towards Calvin's position on the Supper.[6]

4 See also: H. Rott, *Friedrich II. von der Pfalz und die Reformation*. Nendeln [Kraus Reprint] 1976 (Reprint of Heidelberg 1904). Compare with: A. Hasenclever, *Die kurpfälzische Politik in den Zeiten des schmalkaldischen Krieges. Januar 1546 bis Januar 1547*. (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1905).

5 M. Schaab, *Geschichte der Kurpfalz*. 2 vols. (Stuttgart Kohlhammer, 1988, 1992), 25.

6 As it is commonly known, the question of the presence of Christ in the Supper was a point of debate between the Reformed and the Lutherans, ever since the Marburg colloquium (October 1–4, 1529). Luther insisted on the physical presence, Zwingli was convinced of the symbolic presence, Calvin taught the spiritual presence of Christ. The latter position is the position of the Heidelberg Catechism: "to eat the crucified body and drink the shed blood of Christ is…to become more and more united to His sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us…". (P. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom,* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 332.

Concerning this matter Elector Otto Henry was more convinced of Melanchthon's position.[7] But during the reign of Otto Henry some Gnesio-Lutherans came to Heidelberg as, for example, Tilemann Heshusius (1527-1588) who strongly wanted the Augsburg Confession of 1530 (*invariata*) as the confession of faith of the Palatinate. Furthermore theologians from Zurich (Bullinger) were called to the University of Heidelberg.[8] It was a time of theological diversity at the University.

1.4 The origins of the Heidelberg Catechism

In 1559 Frederick III became ruler of the Palatinate. He was a very godly man, who was also very interested in theology. His nickname was "the Pious." The elector took over power in the Palatinate at a time when heated discussions about the nature of the Lord's Supper were taking place at the University, especially between the Gnesio-Lutheran T. Heshusius and the Zwinglian W. Klebitz. The discussions were so intense that the men sometimes engaged in actual fighting.[9] Finally Frederick III had no choice but to dismiss the two opponents from their positions. The controversy motivated Frederick III intensively to engage with the issue himself. In this process he developed Reformed convictions on the matter. After Melanchthon's death (1560) there was another dispute on the Lord's Supper in Heidelberg, which finally convinced Frederick III of the Reformed position on communion. As a consequence Frederick III dismissed more Lutherans from the university and replaced them with men like Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587).

As soon as Olevianus arrived in Heidelberg he was put in charge

7 Melanchthon's birth place Bretten is located in the Palatinate.

8 For the details see: E. Wolgast, *Reformierte Konfession und Politik im 16. Jahrhundert: Studien zur Geschichte der Kurpfalz i*m *Reformationszeitalter.* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1998). See also: A. Schindling; W. Ziegler [ed.], *Kurpfalz, Rheinische Pfalz und Oberpfalz,* in *Die Territorien des Reichs* im *Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung: Land und Konfession 1500-1650.* Vol. 5. Anton Schindling, Walter Ziegler (ed.) *Der Südwesten* 49 (Munster: Aschendorff, 1993).

9 E. Wolgast, *Reformierte Konfession und Politik im 16. Jahrhundert,* 38.

of the pastoral education of future ministers. This education took place in the *Collegium Sapientiae*. Shortly after that he became professor of Dogmatics and was later called to the pastorates of two churches in Heidelberg. In addition Fredrick brought to Heidelberg Wenceslaus Zuleger (1530-1596), who became head of the consistory of the church(es) of Heidelberg, Immanuel Tremellius (1510-1580), who became Professor of Old Testament. And finally, Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) came to Heidelberg. He was the successor of Olevianus at the *Collegium Sapientiae* and soon followed him to the University as a professor of Dogmatics.[10]

The next step in the development of the Heidelberg Catechism was a conference of the princes held in the city of Naumburg (1561). This meeting, which was also attended by Frederick, was held for all the Protestant princes, in order to sign the Augsburg Confession once more and thus draw a sharp line between them and the Roman Catholic princes. At first Frederick hesitated to sign the creed, but in the end he did agree to sign the document.

After returning to Heidelberg however, he earnestly pushed Reformed theology. He abolished organ music during the services, and removed pictures of saints, crosses and similar items from the churches. Not only did he consider his actions legal because of the settlement of 1555, but he also thought of himself as a kind of modern Old Testament king such as Hezekiah or Josiah, who brought reformation to Judah during their reigns. To establish Reformed polity in his territory, in 1562 he commanded a church order to be written. The Heidelberg Catechism became part of this new church order.

1.5 The Authorship of the Heidelberg Catechism

As we have seen, it was the elector who initiated the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism. He did not write the Catechism himself, but asked other Heidelberg theologians to assist him. Up until the

10 For the details see: D. Visser, *Zacharias Ursinus, Leven en werk van een Hervormer tegen will en dank*. (Kampen 1991). This is still the best biography in my eyes. For the English translation see: *Zacharius Ursinus: The Reluctant Reformer—His Life and Times,* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1983).

nineteenth century, scholars believed that Zacharias Ursinus was the author of the Heidelberg Catechism and that it was subsequently edited by Caspar Olevianus, who gave it a more pastoral tone. Today, we cannot say with certainty that this is true. Most of the documents that could tell us something about the origins of the Catechism were lost during the wars that Heidelberg fought during the seventeenth century. Very likely the documents were lost during one of the great fires in the city.

Scholars today tend to view Ursinus as the primary author of the Heidelberg Catechism, whose work was critically revised, not only by Olevianus, but by a whole group of theologians and pastors.

This position is mainly supported by one of Frederick's statements in the preface of the first edition of the Heidelberg Catechism (January 19, 1563). In this preface he tells us that he had given the order to write the Catechism to a council that was made up of theologians from Heidelberg University, as well as pastors of the churches in the city.[11]

This seems to suggest that the theological faculty as a whole, together with important men from the church of the Palatinate, took part in writing the Catechism. To strengthen this position one can refer to a few other similar statements in this preface. Therefore the evidence for this position on the origin of the Heidelberg Catechism is rather convincing.[12]

However, we do need to keep in mind that Frederick III and his Reformed friends were very interested in making clear to their con-

11 "With the advice and cooperation of our entire theological faculty in this place, and of all superintendents and distinguished servants [chief ministers] of the Church, we have secured the preparation of a summary course of instruction or catechism of our Christian Religion." For the English speaking world, see G. Richards, *Studies on the Heidelberg Catechism,* (Philadelphia: Publication and Sunday School Board of the Reformed Church in the United States 1913), 193-195.

12 See G. Richards, *Studies on the Heidelberg Catechism,* 51. For this question see also L.D. Bierma, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism. Sources, History and Theology,* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 53-74. There Bierma also gives additional references.

temporaries that the Heidelberg Catechism was authored not by an individual but by a group of scholars and pastors. Most naturally, there was great danger of violating the conditions of the Peace of Augsburg by publishing a creed that was neither Roman Catholic nor genuinely Lutheran, the two bodies that the Peace of Augsburg recognized.

The main argument against the collaborative view of the authorship of the Catechism is experience. Anyone who has worked on a team knows that not everyone on the team works as much as everyone else. In general, there are just a few people (often only one) who take care of the progress of a project. The rest of the team supports the project by giving critical evaluation of the work in progress.

It is striking that Frederick III did not mention a single name in his preface. Nevertheless, there is evidence that Zacharias Ursinus was the main author of the Heidelberg Catechism. He was the author of two earlier catechisms that bear striking resemblance to the Heidelberg Catechism. The first of these two was the so-called *Catechesis Minor* (Smaller Catechism from 1562), which was written for children and young people. It is also written in a question-and-answer-scheme (108 questions and answers) and marked by the same three parts as the Heidelberg Catechism: guilt, grace and gratitude. It starts with the law as the means by which we understand our own sinfulness. After that this catechism deals with the Apostle's Creed, righteousness by faith, election, the sacraments, the Ten Commandments and finally the Lord's Prayer. So the *Catechesis Minor* strongly echoes many of the same themes themes as the Heidelberg Catechism.[13]

Ursinus' second catechism is the *Catechesis Maior* (Larger Catechism or *Summa Theologiae*), which was also published in 1562 in Latin. It consists of 323 questions and answers and it was written as a students' manual for the Dogmatics lectures at the

13 Zacharias Ursinus, *Catechesis, hoc est, rudimenta religionis christianae.* In: *Zachariae Ursini Tractationum theologicarum,*. (Neustadt, Harnisch, 1584), vol. 1, 620-651. The Catechism is also published in A. Lang, *Der Heidelberger Katechismus und* vier weitere *Katechismen.* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1907). For an introduction to and an English translation of Ursinus's *Smaller Catechism* see Bierma, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism* 137-162.

Collegium Sapientiae. Even though it is not structured according to the guilt-grace-gratitude pattern, many of the questions and answers remind us strongly of those included in the Heidelberg Catechism.[14]

When we summarize all the data we have regarding the authorship of the Heidelberg Catechism, it seems that the Catechism was most likely written by a group of men under the leadership of Ursinus.[15] He was supported by a group of theologians, but we cannot discern the influence of any other particular theologian on the final version of the Catechism.[16]

However, we should not underestimate the contribution of Frederick III to the writing and editing of the Catechism. He was not only the initiator of the project, but also required the inclusion of biblical references in the margin of the printed edition. But once again, we need to keep in mind that questions on details of the writing of the Catechism cannot be answered with certainty due to a lack of sources.

1.6 The Publishing of the Heidelberg Catechism

During a meeting lasting from January 13 to 18, 1563, the Catechism was presented to all the superintendents of the Palatinate. Every delegate present signed the document with the exception of

14 Zacharias Ursinus, *Summa Theologiae, per quaestiones et responsiones exposita: sive capita religionis Christianae continens,*" in *Zachariae Ursini Tractationum theologicarum,* (Neustadt: Harnisch, 1584), 1:1-338. For an English translation of Ursinus's *Larger Catechism* see Bierma, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism*, 163-223.

15 See F.H. Klooster, *The Priority of Ursinus in the Composition of the Heidelberg Catechism,* in *Controversy and Conciliation: The Reformation and the Palatinate* 1559-83, ed. D. Visser, (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1986), 73-100.

16 See also: W. Verboom, *De totstandkoming van de Heidelbergse Catechismus,* in W van't Spijker [ed.], *Het troostboek van der Kerk,* (Houten: Den Hertog, 2005), 71-73. The book has been translated into English: W. Verboom, *The Completion of the Heidelberg Catechism,* in W. van 't Spijker, ed., *The Church's Book of Comfort,*. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books), 2009.

the superintendent of Ingelheim.[17] Of course, the adoption of the Catechism would not have been possible without the support of the elector. But its adoption was not only an act which involved the government; representatives of the churches were also involved.

At the beginning of the month of February 1563, the first edition of the little book was printed. It was entitled: *Catechism or Christian Instruction according to the usages of the churches and schools of the Electorate Palatinate (Catechismus oder Christlicher Underricht, wie er in Kirchen und Schulen der Churfürstlichen Pfaltz getrieben wirdt).*

The first edition only had 128 questions and answers. Question and answer 80 were added in the second edition, which was published some time later in the same year. This question was again modified in the third edition, which was also published in 1563, which was also the first printing that divided the Catechism into fifty-two Lord's Days. During these months the Catechism was presented to the congregations of the Palatinate by an introductory sermon series. These sermons were preached in Heidelberg by Ursinus. Beginning in August of 1563 he was officially responsible for the Catechism preaching during the Sunday evening services in the Church of the Holy Spirit. He also started to introduce the Heidelberg Catechism in his lectures, as it became the foundation of his Dogmatics lectures.[18]

The Church Order of the Palatinate, part of which was the Heidelberg Catechism, consisted of thirty-two articles, which governed the church life of the members, as well as their private lives.[19] It included policies for baptism, communion, weddings, funerals, the order of worship, the garments of pastors, public prayers and church discipline ("*christlichen bann oder bußzucht*"[20]). The Church Order also dealt

17 E. Sehling, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts*. Vol XIV. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1969), 41.

18 Ursinus' lectures were later edited and published by some of his students. For the English translation of this book see: Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism,* trans. G.W. Williard 1851; Reprint: (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954).

19 E. Sehling, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI.* 333-408.

20 E. Sehling, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI.* 387-388.

with almsgiving. Because the plague broke out in Heidelberg in the same year the elector signed the Church Order in Mosbach (November 1563). By this signature under the Church Order, the Heidelberg Catechism gained legal status.[21]

1.7 Reactions to the Heidelberg Catechism

From the very beginning the Heidelberg Catechism evoked various reactions. It was received with great enthusiasm and gratitude by many. When the Reformer of Zurich, Heinrich Bullinger, read the Catechism for the first time, he called it the best catechism ever published.[22]

Others, however, were concerned about its content. The first attacks on the Catechism came immediately after its first printing. Some pastors in the Palatinate were critical of the Catechism simply because they did not want to have a binding document. They had enjoyed the theological pluralism that had existed in the Palatinate for decades.

The strongest opposition came from the Roman Catholic side. For instance, the Dutch Roman Catholic theologian Engelbertus Kenniphovius (died c. 1650) wrote "A Refutation of the Heidelberg Catechism."

The Gnesio-Lutherans also authored many polemics against the Heidelberg Catechism. The most prominent opponents were Matthias Flacius Illyricus[23] and Tilemann Heshusius.[24] Some of the Lutheran

21 E. Sehling, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI.* 333-335.

22 The letter is published in: Carl Pestalozzi, *Heinrich Bullinger: Leben und ausgewählte Schriften.* In: *Leben und ausgewählte Schriften der Väter und Begründer der reformirten Kirche*. (Elberfeld: Friderichs, 1858). 415.

23 M. Flacius Illyricus, *Widerlegung/ Eines Kleinen Deutschen/ Caluinischen Catechismi/ so in disem M.D.Lxiij. Jar/ sampt etlichen andern jrrigen Tractetlin ausgangen. Jtem/ Beweisung/ Das auch die vnwirdigen den waren Leib vnd Blut Jesu Christi im Abendmal empfahen/ Wider ein Schwenckfeldisch Büchlein/ so newlich on namen durch den Druck ausgestrewet worden.* 1563.

24 Tilemann Heshusius, *Trewe Warnung, Für den Heidelbergischen Calvinischen Catechismum: sampt wiederlegung etlicher jrthumen desselben.* 1585.

princes from other German territories even sent messengers to convince Frederick III to abolish the Heidelberg Catechism. Many of those messengers had writings of their local theologians against the Catechism that they handed over to the Elector. In 1564 there was even a meeting held on the topic of the Heidelberg Catechism in the Monastery of Maulbronn, which included delegates from the Palatinate (Reformed) as well as delegates from Wurttemberg (Lutheran). The gathering ended in controversy.

During the Diet of Augsburg (1566), two Lutherans, the Duke of Wurttemberg and the Count of Palatinate-Zweibrücken, accused the elector of the Palatinate of not holding to the Augsburg Confession. Emperor Maximilian II demanded that the new church order together with the Heidelberg Catechism be abolished immediately. Otherwise the Palatinate would be forced to stand outside of the Peace of Augsburg and the elector would be subject to the Imperial ban.

1.8 The fight for the Heidelberg Catechism in the Palatinate

An overwhelming majority of the Princes at the Diet of Augsburg (1566) turned against Frederick III because of the Heidelberg Catechism. Yet we know from some reports that Frederick defended the Catechism in such a wise and humble manner that it was finally tolerated by Imperial law. In spite of these positive developments the Palatinate became increasingly an isolated territory within the German Empire in the following years. In addition, Frederick became increasingly exhausted largely due to the many letters that he wrote in defense of the Catechism.

The same was true for Ursinus, who authored three additional writings in the year 1564, in which he defended the Heidelberg Catechism against Gnesio-Lutheran and Roman Catholic attacks.[25] But the work was too much for him to bear alone. In addition to his position at the University, he had to preach on the Catechism every Lord's day. In 1566 his health was so bad that he stopped writing

25 The most influential of these writings is: *Antwort auff etlicher Theologen Censur uber die am rand dess Heydelbergischen Catechismi auss heiliger Schrifft angezogene Zeugnuss. Gestelt durch D. Zachariam Ursinum,* published in 1564.

books. For two years he also laid down his position as a Professor of Theology. He was succeeded by the Italian Jerome Zanchius, whose work on predestination is still read today.

Not only was the pressure from the outside difficult to endure, but there were also internal conflicts that caused intense struggles within the Palatinate. The main point of debate concerned the doctrine of church discipline: Who was in charge of the discipline of those who refused to repent of their sinful behavior—the government or the church? Ursinus tried to avoid being drawn into the conflict. And yet, when Frederick urged him to give his opinion on the matter, his intervention led to the solution of the problem. As a result consistories were instituted in an effort to put church discipline under control of the church.

In 1576 Frederick III died. His son Louis VI (1576-1583) took over the rule of the Palatinate. From the very beginning of his reign he did everything to move the Palatinate back into Lutheranism. He did this by replacing the Reformed church order with a Lutheran church order and Lutheran creeds. Thus the Heidelberg Catechism was basically abolished in the Palatinate.

More than 600 teachers and pastors were forced to leave the Palatinate. The entire Reformed faculty at the University, including Ursinus, was dismissed from their positions. Ursinus was called by another son of Frederick, John Casimir, to serve as a professor at the recently founded Reformed seminary, the *Collegium Casimirianum* in Neustadt an der Haardt.[26] Ursinus kept this position until he died there at the age of 49 (March 6, 1583). He was buried in the local *Stiftskirche*.

When Louis died in 1583, after having reigned for only seven years, John Casimir became administrative ruler over the Palatinate. Once again he changed the church order of the territory by reestablishing the Reformed faith of his father. And, Lutheran teachers, pastors and officers were replaced by those of Reformed persuasion. Many of the theologians who had left Heidelberg to teach at the *Collegium Casimirianum*, now returned to the University. In 1585 the Heidelberg Catechism as well as a Reformed church order were

26 Today: Neustadt an der Weinstraße.

reinstituted, the latter being largely identical with the church order of 1563.

When the Palatinate was occupied during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) and Reformed services were forbidden, the Catechism was so rooted in the minds of the people that they held to it in spite of persecution. Or rather, in the midst of all of their suffering, they found encouragement in the doctrine of the gospel contained in the Heidelberg Catechism.

During the age of the Enlightenment many people began thinking they could believe only those biblical doctrines that also appeal to human reason. Thus the Christian faith was reduced to a general faith in God, to a belief in the immortality of the soul and some rules for a life marked by virtue. Since then, the Heidelberg Catechism was increasingly seen as outdated and was gradually forgotten in the Palatinate.

1.9. Acceptance and Spread of the Heidelberg Catechism

In spite of the ups and downs of the Heidelberg Catechism throughout its history in the Palatinate, it was widely distributed and accepted in territories other than the Palatinate. In the last decades of the sixteenth century, many German territories changed their confession from a Lutheran to a Reformed position. Most of them accepted the Church Order of the Palatinate and the Heidelberg Catechism.[27]

The Heidelberg Catechism was also widely accepted outside of

27 The territories that accepted the Catechism as a confessional standard were: Nassau-Dillenburg (1578), Sayn Wittgenstein, Solms-Braunfels, Wied, Isenburg-Büdingen, Hanau-Münzenburg, Moers, Palatinate-Zweibrücken, Simmern and Anhalt (1581). On the first general synod of the united territories of Julich, Berg, Kleve and Mark in Duisburg (1610) a resolution was passed, which declared: "that the holy Word of God may be the only rule and standard for Faith and Doctrine and that the Summary of the religion contained in the Word of God is well put in the Heidelberg Catechism." Furthermore it was stated "that this Catechism is to be held and taught in the schools and the churches of the respective territories" (Translation mine). In Lippe-Detmold the Heidelberg Catechism was introduced in 1623, in Hesse-Kassel in 1655. In 1713 it became the binding standard for the German Reformed congregations in the territory of Brandenburg-Prussia.

Germany. The Reformed church of Hungary adopted it in 1567. The Swiss started to integrate it into their Zurich Catechism in 1609; St. Gallen followed in 1615, Schaffhausen in 1643 and Bern during the course of the eighteenth century.

Since the Palatinate was the first Reformed territory within Germany, it became a shelter for many religiously persecuted Reformed Christians, especially the Huguenots. More refugees came from the Netherlands, which was attacked by Spain at the time. In the Palatinate these Dutch people got to know and appreciate the Heidelberg Catechism and brought it back to their country. The pastor of a Dutch immigrant church in Frankenthal, Petrus Datheen (1531-1588), was very influential in this process. Much Reformed literature was published in Dutch and sent back to the Netherlands from this town. In Frankenthal the Heidelberg Catechism was also translated and printed into Dutch shortly after its publication.[28] Another translated version of the Catechism was crafted in Emden. It was at the Synod of Dordt (1618/1619) that the Heidelberg Catechism was unanimously declared to be the accepted creed of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. When the English delegates arrived home from the synod, they reported: "Our continental brothers have a booklet, whose pages could not be paid with tons of gold."

The first English translation appeared in 1572. It is likely that immigrants brought it to North America in the sixteenth century. In 1628 the first Reformed pastor arrived in New Amsterdam. In 1656 the governor at the time, Peter Stuyvesant, who himself was the son of a Reformed pastor, ordered that the Word of God should be preached according to the Reformed confessions and the church order of the Synod of Dordt. This early edict brought the Heidelberg Catechism officially to America. The Heidelberg Catechism continued to spread in the following years, even though the Westminster Standards had more significance for America's cultural development. Still, the Heidelberg Catechism continues to have public influence

28 For the details see: W. Verboom, *De Heidelbergse Catechismus in Nederland,* in W van't Spijker [ed.], *Het troostboek van der Kerk.* (Houten: Den Hertog, 2005). 151-168. For an English translation of this article see: W. van 't Spijker [Ed.] *The Church's Book of Comfort,* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009).

through the founding of Dutch Reformed denominations by immigrants in the nineteenth century, under the leadership of men like Van Raalte and Scholte.[29]

2. Purpose of the Heidelberg Catechism

What is the purpose of the Heidelberg Catechism? This question is answered by Prince Frederick III in his preface to the Heidelberg Catechism. There he gives two purposes: The Heidelberg Catechism was to serve the temporal well-being and the eternal salvation of his people.

2.1 For Temporal Well-Being

In the 1560s the Palatinate was the only territory whose prince was decidedly Reformed. Frederick knew that every written document that came out of his territory would be received skeptically by the other Roman Catholic and Lutheran princes. Therefore, he considered it to be of great importance to declare to the other German territories what the Reformed actually believed. The Heidelberg Catechism was supposed to be that confession.[30]

However it also had an inner function for the Palatinate. Frederick III was convinced that ambiguity in the doctrinal beliefs of his people would lead to chaos and the downfall of his territory. The church order, to which the Heidelberg Catechism belonged, included the following passage: "The primary purpose is to prevent that church and society will decay by sinful human nature." Since the Heidelberg Catechism functioned as the basis for faith and teaching in the Palatinate, it was intended to be the unifying bond that stabilized the Reformation in the Palatinate.[31]

29 For the details see: D.G. Hart, "The Heidelberg Catechism in the United States," in J.D. Payne; S. Heck. *A Faith Worth Teaching*: *The Heidelberg Catechism's Enduring Heritage,* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), 16-32.

30 See also T. Latzel, *Theologische Grundzüge des Heidelberger Katechismus: Eine fundamentaltheologische Untersuchung seines Ansatzes zur Glaubenskommunikation.* (Marburg: Elwert, 2004), 183.

31 See the letter of Frederick III to his son John Frederick of Saxony

2.2. For Eternal Salvation

As important as the temporal purpose of the Heidelberg Catechism was, the main purpose of the Heidelberg Catechism was and is the eternal salvation of man. The term "catechism" is Greek. The original meaning of the Greek verb κατηχέω signifies resounding or echoing.

The risen Son of God commanded his disciples on a mount in Galilee to go and to "teach them to keep everything that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). It was this command that the Christians thought of when they heard the term catechism. They thought of the process of instruction rather than of a single book. This instruction was about the communication of truth—the truth that is indispensable for the eternal salvation of the person instructed (the catechumen). The idea was that the student himself would answer. These answers were meant to be verbal. The student was supposed to give a testimony and live according to it. The student's walk was to be marked by thankfulness for God's work in His Son Jesus Christ at Calvary.

In the Middle Ages there was hardly any Christian instruction for lay people. Since 1215 (the Fourth Lateran Council) it was ordered that every adult had to confess his sins at least once a year; confession guidelines were created for this purpose. These guidelines were inspired by the Ten Commandments.

In the fifteenth century the Bohemian Brethren, who were the peaceful successors of John Huss, created a form of Christian youth education that was designed to prepare for participation in Holy Communion. After the invention of the printing press the first textbooks were written for this purpose. Despite all their differences, these textbooks usually included the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. Occasionally these textbooks were referred to as catechisms.

(March 30, 1563): "It is not without good reason that I have called together all my superintendents, foremost Church officers (ministers) and theologians, who agreed upon a uniform catechism, which is adapted to the youth, as well as to the Church officers (ministers) themselves, since I have found in my electorate a great lack of uniformity and many irregularities in the catechetical work, and in many places no catechism at all." Translation by L. Bierma, see D. Visser, *Zacharias Ursinus,*

The Reformers were able to use what had been done and continue where their predecessors had left off. They did not want people to be taught by pictures and images, but directly by God's Word. This meant that people had to learn to read. In trying to achieve this goal, many catechisms were created. From the Lutheran side, especially Luther's Smaller Catechism and Larger Catechism should be noted. They treat the Ten Commandments, the Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the basics about the sacraments.

There were also some catechisms in use in Heidelberg in the 1550s. In 1558 *"Eine Kurze Ordenliche Summa"* was introduced, a Lutheran teaching booklet consisting of three parts. The first part teaches about the Law and its function, that it shows man his sinfulness. The second part teaches about the gospel, that is, the faith one needs in order to be saved and about baptism, confession, and the Lord's Supper. The third part teaches about good works as a fruit of true faith. This booklet was intended for family worship and instruction so that children could give a testimony before the church and be admitted to the Lord's table.[32]

The Heidelberg Catechism had exactly that same goal. For the sake of their own salvation people should learn the truth of the gospel so that they believe and give testimony to the truth of the gospel. The Heidelberg Catechism had a bridging function. Within the Church Order of the Palatinate the Heidelberg Catechism was placed between the statements about Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which signifies its bridging function from sacrament to sacrament: baptism—catechism—communion. The instruction was about God's covenant. Frederick III wrote in the church order of the Palatinate: "As the children of Israel were circumcised and, when they were old enough to understand, were taught the covenant of God and the signs of that covenant, so our children should be taught in the true Christian faith and repentance, after they have received baptism."[33]

32 "That [the youth] would confess their faith in front of the whole congregation before they are admitted to the Lord's Table," in J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, *De Nederlandse Belijdenisgeschriften: In authentieke teksten met inleiding en tekstvergelijkingen.* (Amsterdam: Bolland, 1976),153.

33 Translation mine

There are three different but closely related purposes that the Heidelberg Catechism has concerning this covenant of God: the educational (didactic) purpose, the apologetic purpose and the doxological purpose.

2.2.1. The Educational (didactic) Purpose

In the Heidelberg Catechism's preface Frederick III writes that "our youth may be taught from early on foremost in the pure and strong doctrine of the holy Gospel and be trained in the real and true knowledge of God."

He continues by saying that the Heidelberg Catechism was written to serve this purpose. Thus the Heidelberg Catechism has an educational function. In referring to Exodus 12-13 and Deuteronomy 4, 6 and 11 he reminds us that God has given the clear order to teach our children. Frederick III saw the huge lack of knowledge of God's Word and the lack of upright Christian living. In the Heidelberg Catechism's preface the prince expresses his distress about the superficiality with which young people are admitted to the Lord's table.[34]

In the morning service there was a reading from the Heidelberg Catechism and at the afternoon service it was the basis for the sermon. The latter was something entirely unique at the time. The fact that the Heidelberg Catechism was used for preaching, was the reason for dividing it into fifty-two sections ("Lord's Days") in its third edition.

Unique, too,are the Catechism's rich and abundant Scripture quotes. This feature shows that the Catechism is rooted in Scripture and is best understood as a means to understand God's Word and to live according to it.[35] As Q.A. 98 states: "God wants to teach his people by the proclamation of His Word." This instruction should take place not only in churches but also in schools. Please remember the exact title of the Heidelberg Catechism is: *Catechism or Christian Instruction for churches and schools* [! emphasis mine] *of the Palatinate*.

34 See Bakhuizen van den Brink, *De Nederlandse Belijdenisgeschriften*, 153.

35 See the preface of the Heidelberg Catechism: "*Die jugendt anfangs im wort Gottes also mit ernst underwiesen und aufferzogen*."

It is, of course, primarily the parents' duty to teach their children the content of the gospel with the help of the Heidelberg Catechism. As stated in the preface, the Heidelberg Catechism is also intended as a teaching pattern for teachers. Less able teachers were supposed to use it as a guide. Frederick knew that not all teachers and pastors were excellent communicators, but that some had a hard time teaching. The Heidelberg Catechism was supposed to enable less gifted teachers and pastors to teach with an acceptable quality.

The Heidelberg Catechism is intended to teach healthy doctrine that heals its hearers. The apostle Paul writes "ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom. 6:17). The Heidelberg Catechism serves as this standard. The Christian does not live by separate Bible verses, but by the whole biblical system. The Catechism serves this very purpose. The didactic intention of the Heidelberg Catechism is not merely the transfer of information; it is about being gripped personally by the gospel and its mighty truths. This is why the Heidelberg Catechism uses personal forms such as "thy" and "thine," "I" and "mine": "What is *thy* only comfort in life and death? That *I* belong to *my* Savior with body and soul." Another example is the answer to Q. 26: "*I* believe that the eternal Father is *my* God and *my* Father." The church's purpose in teaching the confessions is that their content will become a *personal* confession. It must become *my* confession.

It is also important to note that as much as the Heidelberg Catechism keeps the simple reader in mind, it is not solely a children's book. One never grows out of it. The Heidelberg Catechism is a book for the church that, as the Bible, is meant for lifelong and active use.

2.2.2 The Apologetic Purpose

The educational purpose of the Heidelberg Catechism is very closely connected to the apologetic purpose. The Heidelberg Catechism is about teaching what is right—and what is not right. It shows that the Christian must test the spirits and that one must say 'no' to false teaching. From the beginning of church history the purpose of dogmas, confessions, and catechisms was always rejection of false teachings.

This is true of the Heidelberg Catechism. Due to the historical context we find that it draws lines against Roman Catholicism. From 1545 onwards (with interruptions) the Roman Catholic Church held a council in Trent, which aimed to attack Reformation doctrine. As a reaction many reformed confessions were written between 1560 and 1570. For example: The Scots Confession (1560), the Belgic Confession (1561), the Second Helvetic Confession (1561/1564) and the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church (1563/1571). These confessions were all written within one decade because their authors thought it to be crucial to oppose Roman Catholic counter-reformation expressions.

When Roman Catholic pamphlets made their way to the Palatinate, it became a pastoral necessity to address the situation. In late 1562 the Council of Trent resolved the doctrine of the papal Mass. The leadership in the Palatinate reacted by inserting the famous Q. A. 80 into the second edition of the Heidelberg Catechism, which states that the papal mass is an "accursed idolatry." This is probably the best known anti-Roman Catholic statement, but it is not the only one. The Catechism speaks out against the veneration of saints (Q. A. 30), against justification by works (Q.A. 62-64), against baptismal regeneration (Q.A. 72), against prayer to the saints (Q.A. 94), and against iconodulism (Q. A. 97, 98)[36]. Some questions are put as if they were Roman Catholic objections (e.g. Q.A. 63, 64 & 98). Indeed, the Heidelberg Catechism often expresses the content of Reformed doctrine as opposed to Roman Catholic theology.

Furthermore, it also shows the differences between the Reformed Faith and the beliefs of the Anabaptists. The most prominent issue that the Catechism addresses in this context is the question of infant baptism (Q.A. 74). Another difference between the Catechism and the Anabaptist theology is the permission to take an oath in certain situations (Q.A. 101) and the emphasis on submitting to the government, which the Heidelberg Catechism derives from the fifth commandment

36 In addition to that the Heidelberg Catechism also refers (less explicitly) to the Roman Catholic doctrines in Q.A. 1; 8; 13; 18; 29; 34; 40; 44; 60; 61; 66-68; 83-85; 91; 102; 110; 126. Cf. L.D. Bierma, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism.* 79.

(Q.A. 104). During the explanation of the sixth commandment the Catechism points to the right of the government to use the sword against evildoers "to prevent murder" (Q.A. 105).

Finally, the Catechism opposes Gnesio-Lutheranism. This mainly concerns the denial of the Lutheran doctrine of the ubiquity of the human nature of Christ. This doctrine in turn formed the basis for the Lutheran understanding of the Lord's Supper. For this reason four questions deal with the ascension of Christ (Q.A. 46-49), whereas only one question deals with his resurrection (Q.A. 45). In dealing with the matter of Christ's ascension the Heidelberg Catechism rejects the Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity. The problem was that the Lutherans objected to the Reformed position by claiming that the Reformed teach a type of Nestorianism, which would separate the human and divine nature of Christ. This claim is dealt with in Q.A. 48.[37]

2.2.3 The Doxological Purpose

One of the main callings of the church of Jesus Christ is true worship of the triune God. Therefore, the confessions have also a doxological function. As a model, the New Testament gives us confessions which are formulated as hymns. When the apostle Paul addresses the church in Philippi, he shows them the need for humility by referring to a confession of Jesus Christ that is articulated as a hymn (Phil. 2:6-11). The same doxological purpose is reflected in the Heidelberg Catechism. Next to the didactic and apologetic purposes of the Heidelberg Catechism, this creed aims at giving formulas that help the church to praise and worship the triune God. Recall the last Q.A. of the Heidelberg Catechism: "... my prayer is more assuredly heard of God, than I feel in my heart that I desire these things of Him." If we can say this, we truly praise God, who has become our Father through Jesus Christ. ●

37 See F. Winter. *Confessio Augustana und Heidelberger Katechismus* in *vergleichender Betrachtung.* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1954), especially 70-71.

The Irenic/Polemical Nature of the Heidelberg Catechism
or War and Peace in the Heidelberg Catechism

Angus Stewart

Two words in our title require some explanation. The English words, irenic and polemical, are both derived from Greek, with both appearing (in various forms) in the New Testament. Polemics is concerned with war and irenics with peace. This accounts for the article's subtitle: "War and Peace in the Heidelberg Catechism." Unlike Leo Tolstoy's famous, epic novel *War and Peace* (1867), we are dealing here not with a physical war (such as, the invasion of Russia by the French under Napoleon) but with a holy war and peace, the spiritual war and peace of the biblical and Reformed gospel of our Heidelberg Catechism (1563).[1]

Five Major Reformers

The city of Heidelberg is connected with at least five of the major Reformers (three Lutherans and two Reformed) by way of polemics and irenics.

Born in Bretten in the Electoral Palatinate, the peace-loving Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) gained his BA from the University of Heidelberg (1509-1511). Twice he received a call to a theological chair at his alma mater (1546, 1557). He influenced the provisional church order introduced by Elector Frederick II (r. 1544-1556), and advised Elector Otto Henry (r. 1556-1559) in the reorganization of the

1 All quotations from the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession are from *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005).

university (1557-1558) and the appointment of the bellicose Tilemann Hesshus (1527-1588) as dean of the theological faculty, general superintendent of the churches and minister of Heidelberg's prestigious Church of the Holy Spirit (1557). Some six months before his death, the irenic Melanchthon helped put out some of the fire which had been fueled by his flawed staff recommendation.

Seven years after Melanchthon's graduation from Heidelberg, his great friend Martin Luther (1483-1546) came to town. In defense of his twenty-eight theological theses at the Heidelberg Disputation (1518), Luther sharply contrasted his Christocentric theology of the cross with Rome's theology of glory. As a good Augustinian, Luther attacked the notion that man has a free will. Man is justified not by good works but by faith alone in the crucified One![2]

Luther's superb polemics were used by God to convert some of his audience on that momentous day in the lecture hall of the Augustinian monastery, including John Brenz (1499-1570), who became the third most significant first-generation Lutheran theologian, behind only Luther and Melanchthon. By the time of the Heidelberg Disputation, Brenz had already gained his master's degree and was giving theological lectures. Because of the evangelical views he had gained from Luther, he was forced to cease his university teaching on Matthew. As a canon of the Church of the Holy Spirit, he was able to continue his lectures there until when threatened with a heresy trial, he fled in 1522. Later it will be demonstrated that part of the Heidelberg Catechism is a response to Brenz who became "the leading opponent of the Calvinistic developments in the Palatinate during the 1560's."[3]

Martin Bucer (1491-1551) was also won to the gospel of grace through Martin Luther. His subsequent evangelical public teaching at Heidelberg resulted in his being stoned almost to death by his Dominican brethren. After the annulment of his monastic vows (1521),

2 For an excellent discussion of this, see Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

3 Fred Klooster, *The Heidelberg Catechism: Origin and History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1987/1988), 35.

Bucer served for a time at the court of Elector Louis V (r. 1508-1544), as chaplain to Louis' younger brother, the future Elector Frederick II, before engaging in his main work as the leading Reformer of Strasbourg. Bucers' irenicism led to ecumenical compromises that were lamented by both Luther and Calvin.[4]

Among Calvin's (admittedly weaker) connections with Heidelberg as regards polemics or irenics, we note his controversy on the Lord's Supper with the fiery Lutheran, Tilemann Hesshus, who taught at Heidelberg University. In response to Hesshus' (Heshusius') 1560 diatribe, Calvin penned his *Clear Explanation of Sound Doctrine Concerning the True Partaking of the Flesh and Blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, in Order to Dissipate the Mists of Tilemann Heshusius* (1561).[5]

Lord's Supper Controversies at Heidelberg

Hesshus was also in the thick of heated strict Lutheran-Reformed polemics on the Lord's Supper, with adversaries within Heidelberg itself.[6]

Round one concerned a Frisian theology student from Leeuwarden, Stephan Silvius, involving the choice of his theses on the second sacrament, his gaining his doctorate and academic liberty at the university (1559). "Not only did Heshusius lose the immediate decision, he was

4 A third significant convert through Luther's Heidelberg Disputation was Martin Frecht, who labored with Brenz and Bucer in reforming the free imperial city of Ulm in southern Germany. Later Frecht became a theological professor and rector in Heidelberg.

5 Cf. Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide,* trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 193.

6 The strict Lutherans, also called Gnesio-Lutherans (genuine Lutherans), high Lutherans, ultra Lutherans, hyper-Lutherans, ubiquitarians, etc., were a theological party in Lutheranism, after the death of Luther (1546) and before the Formula of Concord (1577), in opposition to the Philippists or Melanchthonians, named after Philip Melanchthon. Though the strict Lutherans and the more irenic Philippists differed on several doctrines, the main issue dealt with in this article is the Lord's Supper. Whereas the Philippists approached the Reformed doctrine, the strict Lutherans denounced this as a treacherous and fatal compromise of Luther's teaching.

also barred from attending future university senate meetings due to his highhanded conduct."[7]

In round two, Hesshus attacked Wilhelm Klebitz, a deacon at Heidelberg's Church of the Holy Spirit. Again this controversy started at the university with theses on the Lord's Supper defended by a Reformed man pursuant of a theological degree (this time a bachelor's). However, on this occasion, it was more acrimonious and public, spilling over into the church. Hesshus and other strict Lutherans in Heidelberg preached against Klebitz who, in turn, responded from his own pulpit. Hesshus excommunicated Klebitz and threatened to excommunicate the Elector's deputy, who had told both sides to stop quarreling. Frederick III (r. 1559-1576) commanded that the censure be lifted and eventually dismissed both men, but Klebitz was given a letter of recommendation, while Hesshus was not.[8]

Frederick III asked for counsel in this affair from Melanchthon, who duly obliged with his *Responsio* (1 November, 1559), one of his most Reformed statements on the Lord's Supper, thus making a very positive contribution to peace in Heidelberg. After Melanchthon's death (19 April, 1560), Frederick published his *Responsio*. Both the Elector and Heidelberg were moving from Lutheran views in a more Reformed direction.

So far we have spoken of polemics in Heidelberg, which took place in several places: the Augustinian monastery, the university and the Church of the Holy Spirit. These battles took the form of disputations, lectures, sermons and books, involving church and state, town and gown, and the loss of position and excommunication. Next we turn to a formal debate on the Lord's Supper in Latin, which took place in Heidelberg between the Palatinate's Reformed and Saxony's strict Lutheran theologians in connection with summer wedding festivities!

7 Charles D. Gunnoe Jr., "The Reformation of the Palatinate and the Origins of the Heidelberg Catechism, 1500-1562," in Lyle D. Bierma, Charles D. Gunnoe Jr., Karin Y. Maag and Paul W. Fields, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 38.

8 Klooster, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, 86-9.

Frederick's third daughter Dorothea Susanne's union to strict Lutheran Johann Wilhelm of Saxe-Weimar might seem to have presented an occasion for irenics but instead people were invited to five days of polemics, the famous "Wedding Debates" (3-7 June, 1560). These debates at his daughter's nuptials indicate how serious the second sacrament was for Frederick not only spiritually, ecclesiastically, and politically, but also within his own family. So far as we know, no one changed sides as a result of the arguments and counter arguments, but the elector, more clearly than before, saw the errors of the strict Lutheran view, despite the arguments of and pressure from his Lutheran wife and in-laws.

Reasons for the Catechism's Irenicism

After all this, one might think that the Heidelberg Catechism would major on polemics, but such is not the case. Of the many authorities that could be cited to make this point, we quote only three. The Catechism is "remarkably free," writes Philip Schaff from "polemic zeal."[9] Willem van 't Spijker's assessment is similar: "it addressed a number of complicated theological issues without resorting to polemics. The positive tone of the Catechism contributed significantly to the readiness with which it was accepted."[10] I. John Hesselink reckons that the Heidelberger is "the most irenic and catholic expression of the Christian faith to come out of the Reformation."[11]

Hendrikus Berkhof states that Frederick III "was of an irenic nature sharing that spirit with Melanchthon."[12] The argument then

9 Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1931), 1:542.

10 Willem van 't Spijker, "The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism," in Willem van 't Spijker (ed.), *The Church's Book of Comfort* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 89.

11 Quoted in Lyle D. Bierma, "The Sources and Theological Orientation of the Heidelberg Catechism," in *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism*, 78.

12 Hendrikus Berkhof, "The Catechism in Historical Context," in Bard Thompson, Hendrikus Berkhof, Eduard Schweizer and Howard G. Hageman, *Essays on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Philadelphia, PA: United Church Press, 1963), 77.

would be that the Elector requested a catechism from his theologians (who knew that he wanted one with an irenic spirit), and that he wrote its moving preface and repeatedly defended it with love and courage because he received exactly what he had wanted. But Frederick was also a man interested in the truth, as his calling for a lengthy theological debate at his daughter's wedding shows, and as does his later insertion into his catechism of the highly polemical Q.A. 80.

Furthermore, Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583), the principal author of the Heidelberg Catechism, is often referred to as a peace-loving man, influenced by Philip Melanchthon, his honored teacher at the University of Wittenberg and his esteemed advisor.[13] Ursinus actually boarded at Melanchthon's house for seven years. Yet in his famous commentary on the Catechism, copied down from his class lectures by students and brought to the press by David Pareus, Ursinus does not shy away from controversy.[14] "The overall polemical context of the work," writes Karin Maag, "was unmistakable."[15]

What about the historical circumstances, both theologically and politically, in which the Catechism was prepared? The overall irenic tone could be due in part to some doctrinal differences in the Palatinate and Heidelberg, and even among the churchmen responsible for its production. Moreover, politically, the elector was in a precarious position with the Lutheran and Roman Catholic princes of the Holy Roman Empire.

Undoubtedly, there was an apologetic purpose to the Heidelberger, for it sought to gain people to the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. This winsomeness is to be ascribed to spiritual wisdom (cf. Matt. 10:16; I Cor. 9:19-23), not dishonesty or compromise of the truth (II Cor. 2:17). Also lending itself to irenics is the pedagogical intent of the

13 Klooster, for example, writes of "the mild mannered, irenic Ursinus," *Heidelberg Catechism*, 208.

14 Zacharius Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharius Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956).

15 Karin Y. Maag, "Early Editions and Translations of the Heidelberg Catechism," in *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism*, 111.

Catechism, so frequently and eloquently stated by the Elector in the preface he wrote for it.[16]

One should also think here of the Catechism's beautiful motif of comfort, introduced in Lord's Day 1 and developed through the three parts of the Heidelberger (cf. Q.A. 2). No document beginning with this lovely (and sustained) theme could be overly polemical.

Doubtless, the largely irenic tone of the Catechism is to be explained, at least in part, by the various factors mentioned above: the personalities of its great sponsor (Frederick III) and its chief author (Zacharias Ursinus); its historical circumstances (both religiously and politically); its apologetic and pedagogical purposes; and its much loved theme of comfort.

However, as we shall see later, the irenicism of the Heidelberger is often overstated, especially by those seeking to downplay or remove its polemical parts, or smooth the sharp edges of the biblical and Reformed faith (cf. Is. 30:10). Moreover, one very significant element in explaining the Catechism's apparent lack of militancy is often overlooked entirely.

Different Genres of Creedal Documents

Our Three Forms of Unity, the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) and the Canons of Dordt (1618-1619), consist of three different genres. Each begins with the letter "c": confessions, canons and catechisms.

First, there are confessions. Reformed confessions, like our Belgic Confession, typically have about thirty or so articles or chapters. Though covering fewer subjects than catechisms, they ordinarily treat these topics at greater length. Confessions are more doctrinal than catechisms and are often arranged (more or less) according to the six loci of theology, covering the truth concerning God, man, Christ, salvation, the church and the last things in that order. Thus confessions

16 Eight times Frederick refers to the "youth" or "young people" or those of "younger years" as those who are to be taught the Catechism "at school and in church" in this important document, which is quoted in full in Christa Boerke, "The People Behind the Heidelberg Catechism," in *The Church's Book of Comfort*, 63-65.

are less practical and more polemical, often labeling false views as "errors" or "heresies," which we "reject," "abhor" or "detest," and even naming certain heretical groups or persons.

Second, there are canons, the most famous being the Reformed Canons of Dordt and the Romanist Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent (1563). Unlike confessions, canons do not propose to cover all the major doctrines of Christianity. Instead, they address only those topics which have been especially and recently controverted. Thus Dordt responded to the Remonstrants/Arminians with an in-depth treatment of the doctrines of grace, and Trent replied to the Protestants regarding their doctrines of Scripture, original sin, justification, and the sacraments especially. This negative aspect is heightened in that Canons have sections specifically rejecting (what they deem to be) errors.

Third, there are catechisms. From what we have seen of the other two genres of creedal documents, we would expect the Heidelberg Catechism to be less polemical and more irenic than the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt. Such is indeed the case.

Moving from comparisons between catechisms on the one hand, and confessions and canons on the other, what are some of the features that stand out in comparing the various Reformed catechisms?

In general, the more questions in a catechism and the longer the answers, the more opportunity for polemics, as is the case with John Calvin's Geneva Catechism (1545). But this also makes it more difficult for the catechumens (ordinarily young people) to memorize and so counters a principal purpose of catechisms.

Another factor is the approach of the catechism. Some catechisms, like the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647), are objective, stating the truth as a matter of fact. Other catechisms, like the Heidelberg Catechism, are subjective and personal, speaking in the first person: "I" or "we."

The two most influential catechisms in the Reformed and Presbyterian world, the Heidelberger and the Westminster Shorter, bear out the above. The Heidelberg Catechism is both more polemical than the Shorter Catechism and more irenical, because it is more personal and develops the theme of comfort.

Polemics Against the Catechism

Whatever the extent of, and reasons for, the Heidelberg Catechism's irenicism, all are agreed that this did not placate the enemies of Reformed doctrine. John Nevin even argues that its (holy) peaceableness actually provoked its adversaries to (unholy) war!

> Had there been more of the lion or tiger in its mien, and less of the lamb, its presence might have proved possibly less irritating to the polemical humor of the times. As it was, there was felt to be provocation in its very meekness. Its outward carriage was held to be deceitful and treacherous: and its heresy was counted all the worse, for being hard to find, and shy of coming to the light.[17]

Three things are striking about the attacks on the Heidelberger. First, it was denounced even more by the strict Lutherans, than by the Roman Catholics, such as Francis Baldwin, a former law professor at Heidelberg who returned to Romanism, and the splendidly named Engelbertus Kenniphovius. Second, it was castigated in print so swiftly, for, as Karin Maag notes, "In most instances, [the responses] appeared already in 1563 and 1564, only weeks or months after the Catechism itself."[18] Third, it was lambasted so virulently.[19] "Poison" is the word most historians use when summarizing the strict Lutheran condemnation of the Catechism.

The names of two of the fiercest strict Lutherans to go into print against the Catechism have already been mentioned. First, out of his lively interest in the Palatinate, John Brenz, it is generally agreed, wrote *An Inventory of Errors* in the spring of 1563. He later co-authored *Censures* with Jacob Andreae (1528-1590). Second, Hesshus waded in with his *True Warning* (February, 1564), a broadside fired against the Catechism, hoping to inflict some damage on Frederick III, who had dismissed him, and his various enemies in Heidelberg.

The name of a third strict Lutheran to dip his pen in venom against

17 John W. Nevin, *History and Genius of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Chambersburg, PA: German Reformed Churches, 1847), 60.

18 Maag, "Early Editions and Translations," 112.

19 Klooster characterizes the "attack by strict-Lutherans" on the Catechism as "frenzied" (*The Heidelberg Catechism)*, 209.

the Heidelberger has not yet been mentioned, but, for those who are acquainted with him, it would not be unexpected. Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520-1575) is identified by church historian Owen Chadwick as "the most learned, militant, and quarrelsome churchman of the sixteenth century"—some accolade![20] Flacius launched his *A Refutation of a Small Calvinistic Catechism* in late 1563 or early 1564.

The burden of the defense of the Catechism fell to Ursinus, it chief author. In several works in the name of the Heidelberg theological faculty, he responded to the writings of Brenz, Andreae and Flacius. He did not deem Hesshus worthy of rebuttal.

Besides these fierce literary exchanges, there was also an oral debate arranged at the insistent requests of several Lutheran princes. Despite Frederick's misgivings, he gave way, journeying to the monastery of Maulbronn, where his Heidelberg theologians, including Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587), held a disputation with the strict Lutherans, Brenz, Andreae and others (10-15 April, 1564).

Like the five-day "Wedding Debates" before the publication of the Catechism, the six-day Maulbronn Colloquy, held after its printing, focused on the Lord's Supper. In that small town, a little south of Bretten, the birthplace of the irenic Melanchthon, little was achieved as regards peace. Nevin explains more fully,

> As usual, in cases of this sort, the whole occasion served only to add new fuel to the flame of controversy, as it raged before. Both parties of course claimed the victory. On both sides were published "true and full reports" of the debate; in the case of which, each side charged the other with grievous misrepresentation. The colloquy itself became a subject of war.[21]

Question and Answer 80

Moving from more historical concerns relating to the Heidelberg Catechism's polemical nature, we come to war and peace in the Heidelberg Catechism itself. The logical place to start is with

20 Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 143.

21 Nevin, *History and Genius of the Heidelberg Catechism*, 62.

the famous Q.A. 80, which is its most polemical Q.A. for several reasons.

First, Q. 80 actually mentions the name of the theological adversary, which is somewhat unusual in catechisms. For instance, not only the Westminster Shorter Catechism but also the Westminster Larger Catechism, despite consisting of 196 questions and containing lengthy answers, do not actually specify the proponents of errors they oppose. Moreover, Question 80 does not speak of the "*Roman Catholic* mass," using a neutral or descriptive term; it refers to the "*popish* mass," a critical or deprecatory epithet, though one that is accurate, for the Mass is defined, defended and practiced by the pope and his minions.

Second, after naming (and explaining) the "popish mass," A. 80 criticizes it very sharply, as, one, "a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ" and, two, not only "idolatry" but "accursed idolatry," adding the adjective for good measure.[22] In his commentary, after examining the Mass in the light of Scripture, Ursinus concludes, "From what has now been said, it is evident that the mass is an idol, formed by Anti-Christ out of various accursed errors and blasphemies, and substituted in the place of the Lord's supper, which, for this reason, is properly and necessarily abolished."[23]

Third, the whole (and not just part) of the lengthy Q.A. 80 is occupied with the polemic against the Mass. Lengthy is correct for A. 80 is the longest answer in the Catechism, excepting those which contain the Apostles' Creed (A. 27), the institution of the Lord's Supper (A. 77) and the Decalogue (A. 92).

While Arminians in the seventeenth century wanted a revision of many parts of the Heidelberg Catechism, false ecumenists in the

22 Herman Hoeksema agrees: "It is on the basis of this twofold Roman Catholic teaching concerning the mass that the Heidelberg Catechism pronounces the severe, but nevertheless perfectly true judgment, that 'the mass, at bottom, is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry'" (*The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* [Grand Rapids, MI: RFPA, 1988], vol. 2, 638).

23 Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharius Ursinus*, 423.

twenty-first century have especially the section on the Mass in their sights. There are four arguments that are made—even by those who go by the name Reformed—which are designed to undermine or neutralize, and so to attack, Q.A. 80.

First, there is the textual issue. What we now refer to as Q.A. 80 was not in the first (German) edition of the Catechism (February, 1563). What amounts to about half of it was included in the second (German) edition (March, 1563). In the third (German) edition, "published sometime between March and November" of 1563, Q.A. 80 "received its definite form."[24] From these facts, some argue or imply that this makes Q.A. 80 somewhat dubious or suspect.

However, the second edition states that a section on the mass had been "overlooked in the first impression" so Frederick III ordered its addition at Olevianus' insistence, as the latter explained to Calvin in a letter.[25] There is no indication of any dissenting voice or resistance on the part of any of the parties involved. Ursinus' exposition of Q. A.80 betrays no misgivings regarding it.[26] He even begins by stating, "This Question is *necessary* on account of the errors, and horrid abuses which the Mass has introduced into the Church."[27] Frederick III included Q.A. 80 knowing the criticism it would incur, especially from his Roman Catholic political adversaries, and that it would threaten, even jeopardize his electoral office. It was not in his (worldly) self interests to insert it, and he courageously kept it in despite much Romanist opposition.

Thus the textual criticism of Q.A. 80 can be turned on its head. One can easily argue that so important was the addition of a critique of the Roman Mass that it was included in the second edition, just one month after the first edition, and it was then lengthened and strengthened shortly thereafter in the third edition which "became the definitive version on which both later

24 Klooster, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, 187-8.

25 Klooster, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, 186.

26 Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharius Ursinus*, 416-24.

27 Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharius Ursinus*, 417; italics mine.

German editions and translations in other languages were usually based."[28]

Second, it is stated or implied by some that Q.A. 80 was a knee-jerk and/or sinful reaction to the Roman Catholic Council of Trent and especially Session XXII (17 September, 1562), which declared the Mass a propitiatory sacrifice and cursed those who deny it. Philip Schaff characterizes this question and answer "as a Protestant counter-blast to the Romish anathemas of the Council of Trent," which "returns evil for evil."[29]

The obvious rejoinder is that the Catechism's polemic against the Mass originated not out of personal petulance but out of the biblical truth of Jesus Christ and His one and only sacrifice on the cross. In Q. 80 the elector and the Heidelberg theologians are showing themselves to be up to date with current developments in the Roman church and refuting "errors and heresies of the old, but especially of the new day."[30]

Third, some deny or doubt whether the Catechism's condemnation of the Mass is theologically accurate, especially given modern developments in Rome's sacramental theology. Hendrikus Berkhof asks,

> Can we still say that the Mass is one of the main points of contradiction with the Roman Catholic Church? Is it really "a complete denial of the once-for-all sacrifice and passion of Jesus Christ and as such an idolatry to be condemned"? The answer depends on how we estimate the recent Eucharistic theories propounded in the Roman Catholic Church and the corresponding reinterpretation of the Tridentine expressions.[31]

In the history of the Christian church, there has never been such intense study on the Lord's Supper as in the sixteenth century, espe-

28 Maag, "Early Editions and Translations," 105.

29 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 1:536.

30 To quote the "Form for the Installation of Professors of Theology," in *Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA*, 297.

31 Berkhof, "The Catechism in Historical Context," 114.

cially because of the controversies between Romanists, Lutherans and Reformed. There were some discussions even within the Reformed camp, particularly in the earlier days because of Zwingli's weaker views. This issue loomed as large in Heidelberg as anywhere, not only because of the Palatinate's movement from Roman Catholicism to Lutheranism and then (under Frederick III) to the Reformed faith, but also because of the literary and oral debates on the Lord's Supper, both before and after the production of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Are we really to think that after all this debate, plus the extremely high stakes, that the Elector and the Heidelberg churchmen (who had been Roman Catholics) really did not know what the mass was? Or the other sixteenth-century Reformers who approved the Catechism? Or the various churches and the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619), which officially adopted the Catechism? Or the faithful Reformed Christians, ministers and theologians who have maintained Q.A. 80 for centuries?

This is what Trent said about the Mass:

> This sacrifice is truly propitiatory, and that by means thereof this is effected, that we obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid…. For the Lord, appeased by the oblation thereof, and granting the grace and gift of penitence, forgives even heinous crimes and sin…. Wherefore, not only for the sins, punishments, satisfactions, and other necessities of the faithful who are living, but also for those who are departed in Christ, and who are not as yet fully purified, is it rightly offered, agreeably to a tradition of the apostles.[32]

Therefore, "If any one saith, that in the mass a true and proper sacrifice is not offered to God…let him be anathema."[33]

32 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:179-80. Even worse than the Word-Faith teachers who portray Christ as making atonement in hell after His death and the Socinians who say that He made atonement with His blood in heaven after His ascension (though "atonement" is used in a vague and erroneous sense in Socinianism), Romanism presents priests as offering sacrifices of Christ and placating God's wrath in the mass on "altars" all around the world for 2,000 years every day (contrast Heb. 10:11-14).

33 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:184.

The modern Roman Church has officially endorsed Trent, for example, at Vatican II (1962-1965) and in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), in accordance with its notion of itself as infallible. Hendrikus Berkhof himself realizes that the recent "reinterpretations" of Trent "have no official authority."[34] He ought to go further and condemn the dishonesty and devious language of some Roman Catholic theologians' "repackaging" or "representing" of the Mass in order to deceive the unwary or encourage those who desperately want to believe that Rome has changed.[35] Rome's duplicity only makes her sin the greater.

The fourth objection is probably both the vaguest and the most influential: Q.A. 80 is out of kilter with the irenic tone of the rest of the Catechism.

This is a strange objection since we have no indication that either the Heidelberg churchmen who prepared it or the Elector who had it published thought that it jarred with the Catechism's theme of comfort. One would think that they or the historic Reformed church, which has loved and steadfastly maintained the Heidelberger, would have noticed if Q.A. 80 had really sounded a discordant note.

Moreover, as well as being overstated, the irenicism of the Catechism is misunderstood by many. The peace of the Heidelberger is that of the one true gospel of Jesus Christ, not peace with heresy or false churches. It is precisely out of the peace of salvation in Christ and His cross alone that true polemics arise and are sustained.

Solus Christus (Christ alone) is the issue in A. 80:

> The Lord's Supper testifies to us that we have a full pardon of all sin by the only sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which He Himself has once accomplished on the cross; and that we by the Holy Ghost are ingrafted into Christ, who according to His human nature is now not on earth, but in heaven at the right hand of God His Father, and will there be worshiped by us—but the mass teaches that the living and dead have not the pardon of sins through the sufferings of Christ, unless Christ

34 Berkhof, "The Catechism in Historical Context," 114.

35 In this, some nominal Protestants sin like Eve, while others sin like Adam (I Tim. 2:14).

> is also daily offered for them by the priests; and further, that Christ is bodily under the form of bread and wine, and therefore is to be worshiped in them; so that the mass, at bottom, is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry.[36]

Every part of the answer concerns Christ and His "only sacrifice," which He "once" offered on the cross, bringing peace by the "full pardon of all sin."[37] Here we have the same message as Q.A. 1: It is because the Lord has "fully satisfied for all my sins" that my "only comfort in life and death" is "That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ."

"Now it strikes us correctly that the Catechism does not seek its strength from a spirit of anti-papism to hack and slash at Rome," writes Herman Veldkamp. He is correct: "Upon the question, 'What difference is there between the Lord's Supper and the popish Mass?' three points of difference are brought to the fore, which have reference to the *reconciliation brought by Christ, communion with Christ,* and the *homage which must needs be brought to Christ.*"[38] *Solus Christus* is the key!

Thus we have the antithesis in Q. 80: "What difference is there between the Lord's Supper and the popish mass?" where both the Lord Jesus and His "Supper" are sharply contrasted with the pope and his "mass."[39]

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36 *Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA*, 116.

37 Referring to Question and Answer 80, G. C. Berkouwer rightly states, "Our mention of the cross of Christ at this point follows immediately from the fact that in all of the controversy, the crux of the matter turns out to be the significance of the cross" (*The Sacraments* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969], 259).

38 Herman Veldkamp, *Children of the Lord's Day: Notes on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. Dr. Harry Kwantes (no place of publication or publisher, 1990), 2:285; italics Veldkamp's.

39 The same spirit is evident in the apostle's rhetorical questions: "... for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?

The real problem is not that Q. A. 80 clashes with the (true) irenicism of the Catechism, but that it opposes the (false) irenicism of many modern, compromising churchmen who have drunk deeply of the spirit of the age and become snared by political correctness. They are embarrassed by the bold testimony of the Heidelberger for they do not truly believe the *solus Christus* of the biblical and Reformed faith. Jesus Christ is the "Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6) and, therefore, there is no peace outside, or in defiance, of Him and His one sacrifice on the cross alone. The Catechism's polemic here is crucial for, in exposing the Mass, it condemns the sacramental system, priesthood, worship and church of Rome, for the Mass is the heart of Romanism and central in all these aspects of that false church (Belgic Confession, Art. 29). Thus Q.A. 80 opposes all communion with Rome as false ecumenism.[40]

In their spiritual blindness, liberal churchmen and departing churches are unable to see the crucial "difference" between the supper instituted by Christ and the idolatry promoted by the Pope (Q. 80), just as they cannot "distinguish" between the true church and the false church, between the bride of Christ and the whore of the devil, even though "These two Churches are easily known and distinguished from each other" (Belgic Confession, Art. 29). These churchmen and churches show false charity to Rome (and other false churches) because they are unfaithful in their own preaching, sacraments and church discipline (Belgic Confession, Art. 29) and so naturally have an affinity with those of like mind. If the church militant loses the love of the truth and the antithesis it engenders, it seeks out the church apostate. Once a church stops earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3), it starts foolishly reappraising the heresies once condemned by the church.

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or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" (II Cor. 6:14-16).

40 Cf. Clayton Spronk, "Should the Mass Really Be Condemned?" *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, vol. 39, issue 1 (November, 2005), 30-53.

Romanism

Moving from Q.A. 80, we come to other aspects of the Catechism's polemic against Rome. Lord's Day 11, on the meaning of the name "Jesus" in the Apostles' Creed, is the second strongest anti-Rome passage. Though not mentioned by name, especially the reference to "saints," in the denunciation of those "who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else," is unmistakeable (Q. 30). Again Christ alone as the all-sufficient One is key, for Lord's Day 11 proclaims Jesus as the "only Savior" (Q. 30) and "the only deliverer and Savior," since He is the "complete Savior" and we "find all things in Him necessary to [our] salvation" (A. 30). Thus "we ought not to seek, neither can find salvation in any other" (A. 29).[41]

From the truth of *solus Christus*, two conclusions inescapably follow: first, Roman Catholics and other false Christians are *not saved;* second, such hypocrites actually "deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior":

> Q. 30. Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?
> A. They do not; for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior; for one of these two things must be true, either that Jesus is not a complete Savior, or that they who by a true faith receive this Savior must find all things in Him necessary to their salvation.[42]

41 Louis Praamsma explains that Roman Catholics "see Mary as the mediator next to Jesus. They often call upon saints to help contribute to their salvation, even going so far as to believe that statues of Mary contain miraculous powers. People themselves can contribute directly to their salvation through good works. They may not be able to remove the eternal punishment for sin, but they can bear some of the temporal punishment for themselves or even for others." He correctly identifies this soul-destroying, blasphemous heresy as the denial of Christ alone: "These foolish beliefs make a mockery of Jesus' redemptive work. He is the only Savior, and nothing short of His blood, the blood of God's only Son, can wash away our sins" (*Before the Face of God: A Study of the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 1-24* [Ontario, Canada: Paideia Press, 1987], 46).

42 *Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA,* 95.

Lord's Day 11 and Lord's Day 30 are at one in stressing Rome's *denial* of Christ.

> ...though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they *deny* Jesus the only deliverer and Savior ... (A. 30).
> ....the mass, at bottom, is nothing else than a *denial* of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ ... (A. 80).

The Catechism's holy warfare against Rome is also evident, especially in its treatment of the first three of the ten commandments (Lord's Days 34-37).[43] Just as we are not saved by "saints" (Q.A. 30), so the first and third commandments forbid, respectively, praying to, and swearing by, "saints" (Q.A. 94, 102). Rome is also the chief target in Lord's Day 35's exposition of the second commandment's prohibition of "images." Its notion that "images" are "books to the laity" is specifically refuted (Q.A. 98).[44]

Whereas the polemics of Q.A. 80 and Lord's Day 11 are driven by *solus Christus*, the holy war against Rome in the Catechism's exposition of the first three commandments arises out of two other *solas*.[45]

First, there is *soli Deo gloria* (the glory of God alone). I must "worship" Jehovah (A. 96), who is the "one true God" (A. 95). As

43 The Heidelberger also enumerates the Decalogue differently from Rome and Lutheranism (Q.A. 92).

44 The refusal to tolerate images "in the churches" (Q.A. 98) also criticizes Lutheranism and addresses a local issue a few years before the publication of the Catechism: the erection of a monument as a memorial to Elector Otto Henry in the Church of the Holy Spirit (1558 or 1559). Bard Thompson explains, "It was an ornate piece of statuary, depicting cherubs and virgins in various stages of undress; and it was erected in the choir of the church, exactly where communicants received the Lord's Supper, Hesshus had approved the monument with delight, knowing that it would surely affront the Reformed theologians who prized simplicity" ("Historical Background of the Catechism," in *Essays on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 17). This issue was part of the controversy between Hesshus and Klebitz mentioned earlier. Hesshus lost and the statue was removed.

45 Strictly speaking, the plural of the Latin *sola* is *solae*, but it is customary today to speak of *solas*.

"the only true God," I must "rightly" "know," "trust" and "glorify" "Him alone" "with my whole heart; so that I renounce and forsake all creatures, rather than commit even the least thing contrary to His will" (A. 94). We "honor" Him as "the only one who knows the heart" (A. 102) and, in general, we must use His "holy name" "no otherwise than with fear and reverence; so He may be rightly confessed and worshiped by us, and be glorified in all our words and works" (A. 99).[46]

Second, there is *sola Scriptura*, the truth that Scripture alone is the supreme standard and rule for faith and life (cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 7). We must have as our God "that one true God who has manifested Himself in His Word" (A. 95), and we must not glorify Him "in any other way than He has commanded in His Word" (A. 96).[47] The regulative principle, the truth of *sola Scriptura* applied to His worship, as per the second commandment (Q.A. 96), leads to the primacy of preaching: Jehovah "will have His people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of His Word" (A. 98).

On the basis of *soli Deo gloria*, as explained by *sola Scriptura*, Rome's image worship and invoking, and swearing by, saints can only be described as idolatry, for "Idolatry is, instead of, or besides that one true God who has manifested Himself in His Word, to contrive or have any other object in which men place their trust" (A. 95). Like-

46 Reflecting upon the truth of Lord's Days 5-6, Caspar Olevianus, who has been seen historically as the number two author of the Catechism, polemicizes against all false religions and faiths: "Only the Christian religion and faith is the true faith; all others are false. For only Christians recognize God as one true God, who is perfectly just and perfectly merciful and thus the true God. He is perfectly just in that He does not leave sin unpunished but punished each and every sin with unspeakable hellish torment in his Son on the wood of the cross, whereby not a half but a full and just payment for our sins was made. He is perfectly merciful in that He makes us pay absolutely nothing but out of sheer mercy gave us the Son for our payment, without any merit on our part while we were yet sinners. By contrast, all other religions and faiths do not recognize God as perfectly just and merciful. Think once of the Jews, the Turks, or the Papists..." (*A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. and ed. Lyle D. Bierma [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995], 7).

47 The regulative principle of worship also opposes Lutheranism.

wise, Rome's unbiblical doctrine of transubstantiation "that Christ is bodily under the form of bread and wine, and therefore is to be worshiped in them" is undoubtedly an "accursed idolatry" (A. 80). Even the adjective "accursed" fits with the Heidelberger which quotes Scripture (Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:10) to the effect that all disobedience to Jehovah's law (including the first two commandments) is "cursed" of God warranting "His just judgment temporally and eternally" (A. 10).

The sacraments, a third major area of the Catechism's polemics against Rome, also help our understanding of Q.A. 80, since the Mass is discussed in the context of Reformed sacramental theology. Christ alone is the key note throughout this section (Lord's Days 25-30). The "one sacrifice of Christ" (A. 66, 67) is "the only ground of our salvation" (Q. 67). It is not the church but "Christ" who has "instituted" "two" "sacraments" in "the new covenant," not seven as Rome or three as Lutheranism teach (Q.A. 68).

The "external baptism with water" is "not at all" "the washing away of sin itself" (as with baptismal regeneration in Romanism and Lutheranism), "for the blood of Jesus Christ only," applied by the Spirit, cleanses us "from all sin" (Q.A. 72).

Lord's Day 28 teaches that by eating and drinking Christ in the Lord's Supper spiritually and by faith, we are partakers of His "one sacrifice…accomplished on the cross" (Q. 75). Hence Lord's Day 29 explains that the "bread and wine" in the Lord's Supper do not become (and do not need to become) "the very body and blood of Christ" (Q. 78), whether through Roman transubstantiation or Lutheran consubstantiation. The "minister," not a priest, administers the sacrament (A. 75).

Whereas some reckon Q.A. 80 to be out of sync with the rest of the Catechism, we can only conclude that it is masterfully integrated in the Heidelberger's sacramental theology and fits perfectly with its polemic against Romanism, especially as regards Rome's denial of Jesus "the only Savior" (Lord's Day 11) and idolatry (Lord's Days 34-37 on the first three commandments). Salvation in Christ alone to the glory of God alone according to Scripture alone is the source and power of this holy warfare.

We can be briefer with the Catechism's main remaining polemics against Rome. "Christ alone" governs the Heidelberger's exposition of the Apostles' Creed "He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary" (Lord's Day 14) and "He descended into Hell" (Q.A. 44). Though the Catechism takes a very different (and biblical!) line from Rome on these articles, it is entirely positive, saying nothing negative.

The warm, scriptural definition of faith and assurance (Q.A. 21) is, of course, contrary to Rome, which views assurance of salvation as a heresy, though again this is unstated.

But it is where justification (and its relationship to works) is treated that the Catechism's faith alone (*sola fide*) and grace alone (*sola gratia*) do battle with the false gospel of Rome (and others). We are righteous before the Holy One "only by a true faith" (A. 60) or "by faith only" (Q.A. 61) and are "partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only" (A. 65).

Each individual Christian rejoices in *sola gratia*: "to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, *merely of grace*, only for the sake of Christ's merits" (A. 21). The Reformation gospel of grace alone is always engaged in a holy warfare against salvation by man's works, for "we are delivered from our misery *merely of grace*, through Christ, without any merit of ours" (Q. 86). Every true believer confesses that it is "without any merit of mine, but *only of mere grace*" that I am "righteous before God" through Christ (Q.A. 60). Our merits and works are excluded not only because of salvation by faith alone through grace alone but also due to Christ alone, for we are delivered "only for the sake of Christ's merits" (A. 21).

Lord's Day 23 unites *solus Christus*, *sola fide* and *sola gratia*: I am "righteous before God" (Q. 60) "only by a true faith" and "only of mere grace" (A. 60), "because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God" (A. 61). This is the comforting, antithetical gospel of the sovereign grace of our covenant God: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Believing this, the true church must be militant against Rome and all who deny the gospel of Christ.

Lord's Day 24 answers three objections, arising from a false view of good works, made by Roman Catholicism against the gospel of salvation by faith alone through grace alone in Christ alone:

> Q. 62. But why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God?
> A. Because that the righteousness which can be approved of before the tribunal of God must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law; and also, that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.
> Q. 63. What! Do not our good works merit, which yet God will reward in this and in a future life?
> A. This reward is not of merit, but of grace.
> Q. 64. But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?
> A. By no means; for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not being forth fruits of thankfulness.[48]

Beginning with our "only comfort in life and death" (Q. 1), our Catechism includes and presents, both positively and negatively, the five great *solas* of the biblical and Reformed faith. Only by maintaining these five gospel *solas,* which necessarily bring conflict with Rome, can we, and do we, confess that our "only comfort in life and death" is "That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ" (Q.A. 1)![49]

(Strict) Lutheranism

"By design this catechism clearly contrasts Reformed Christianity with Roman Catholicism and subtly distinguishes it from elements of Gnesio-Lutheranism," writes Robert Godfrey.[50] Definitely the

48 *Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA,* 107.

49 This comfort the Roman church and gospel does not, and cannot, give. For a good, recent work on the necessity of polemics against Romanism today, see Robert L. Reymond, *The Reformation's Conflict With Rome: Why It Must Continue* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2001).

50 W. Robert Godfrey, "The Heidelberg Catechism among the Reformed Catechisms," in Jon D. Payne and Sebastian Heck (eds.), *A Faith Worth Teaching: The Heidelberg Catechism's Enduring Heritage* (Grand

Heidelberger is more critical of Romanism than strict Lutheranism, though Godfrey understates its differences with the latter, as we shall see.

Lord's Day 18 on Christ's ascension contains the most polemical section in the Catechism against strict Lutheranism. However, this controversy began with the Lord's Supper (also where the Heidelberger's holy war with Rome is fiercest), for the Lutherans taught that Christ's body and blood are present in, under and along with the bread and wine (this is often called consubstantiation). This view led strict Lutherans to the doctrine of ubiquity: "the illocal, supernatural presence of Christ's human nature resulting from the communion of natures (*communicatio naturarum*) and the communication of proper qualities (*communicatio idiomatum*) in the person of Christ."[51]

Yet it was not until the Stuttgart Confession (1559), 42 years after Luther's publication of the Ninety-Five Theses and 13 years after his death, that ubiquity was given confessional status. Ironically, the Stuttgart Confession was written by Brenz, who had earlier been a more moderate Lutheran.[52] Thus whereas Q.A. 80 was a response to Rome's Council of Trent (1545-1563) on the Mass, Lord's Day 18 replies to strict Lutheranism's Stuttgart Confession (1559). Neither was a petulant, knee-jerk reaction. The Catechism simply teaches the Word "in season, out of season" (II Tim. 4:2).

There is a difference in the tone of the respective polemics, however. First, Rome is named ("the popish mass," Q. 80); strict Lutheranism is not. Second, Rome's position is strongly condemned

Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), 221.

51 Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 312.

52 Cf. Klooster, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 92. Willem Verboom explains that, before the appearance of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Luther's full Catechism (1529) and Luther's Large Catechism (1529) were used in the Palatinate, but Elector Otto Henry prescribed Brenz's Catechism (1535) in 1556, which was not sharply Lutheran on the Lord's Supper and penance. Hesshus, wanting to promote the strict Lutheran view of the second sacrament, sought to get rid of Brenz's Catechism ("The Completion of the Heidelberg Catechism," in *The Church's Book of Comfort*, 44-49).

("a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ and an accursed idolatry," A. 80); no such terminology is used here against strict Lutheranism. Third, Q.A. 80 strongly contrasts the mass and the Lord's Supper throughout; Lord's Day 18's four questions and answers are more defensive. They explain the truth of the Lord's ascension, especially concerning His body, anticipating and answering two critical questions of the strict Lutherans: "Is not Christ then with us even to the end of the world, as He hath promised?" (Q. 47) and "But if His human nature is not present wherever His Godhead is, are not then these two natures in Christ separated from one another?" (Q. 48).[53] The answer to this last question begins with an emphatic negative: "Not at all" or, in the original, "*Mit nichten*," an old-fashioned German word meaning, literally, "with noes" (A. 48)!

It is significant that the Catechism's polemics against Rome are based on the *solas* (especially *solus Christus*) but this is not the case with strict Lutheranism, which was, of course, a Reformation movement. Instead, Lord's Day 18 bases its (and the Heidelberger's main) polemic against strict Lutheranism upon the ecumenical creeds and their teaching regarding Christ and His two natures.

Lord's Day 18 is, after all, part of the Catechism's exposition of the Apostles' Creed. Its first question quotes that ancient formulary: "How dost thou understand these words, 'He ascended into heaven'?" (Q. 46). Truly explained, this article refutes strict Lutheranism's doctrine of ubiquity.

Olevianus, a significant member of the body responsible for producing the Heidelberger, repeatedly appeals to the Apostles' Creed in his exposition of Lord's Day 18, concluding with some polemics:

> This is the confession of the Christian Church, according to the simple understanding of the Articles of the Christian Faith…it is also an article of the faith that He ascended from earth into heaven…. Therefore,

53 Ursinus declares that Question 47 "anticipates an objection on the part of the Ubiquitarians," and Question 48 "contains another argument, or objection, which the Ubiquitarians are wont to urge" (*The Commentary of Dr. Zacharius Ursinus*, 247-8).

> Christ will use His omnipotence not to annul the articles of our ancient, true, Christian faith, but only to punish those who misuse His omnipotence to undergird their idolatry and hypocrisy.[54]

Likewise, Ursinus appeals to the Apostle's Creed in his twelve-page explanation of Lord's Day 18. Its last paragraph begins, "What then are we to understand by the Article, *I believe in Jesus Christ, who ascended into heaven*?"[55]

The second ecumenical creed involved in this Reformed polemic is the Creed of Chalcedon (451), especially its statement that Christ is

> …truly God and truly man...to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons ...[56]

Chalcedon underlies, and is assumed by, Q.A. 47 and 48, especially in the Catechism's affirmation that Christ's two natures are not "separated" (Q. 48), but are "personally united" (A. 48). Instead, it is the strict Lutherans who contradict Chalcedon by their doctrine of ubiquity, for they "confuse" and "change" Christ's human nature, since they fail to "preserve" its "properties" by making it omnipresent.

After considering the background in Heidelberg and the Catechism's teaching on the Lord's Supper over against Rome and strict Lutheranism, we can agree with Jon D. Payne's evaluation:

> The [Heidelberger's] theologically rich and eminently pastoral teaching on the Lord's Supper was crafted in the context of vigorous debates and fiery dissensions in both the civil and ecclesiastical arenas. Its aim was to condemn the popish Mass, discredit and sideline Lutheran

54 Olevianus, *A Firm Foundation*, 76-78.

55 Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharius Ursinus*, 253; italics in the original.

56 *Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA*, 17.

> views on ubiquity, and direct the citizens of Elector Frederick's realm to embrace a Reformed and Calvinistic view of the Supper…[which] would uphold the biblical teachings on Christ's ascension and the nature of His true humanity. Moreover, it would serve to drive citizens of the Palatinate to rest their faith in Christ alone, not in self, ceremony, or superstition.[57]

Having analyzed Lord's Day 18 and several other differences between the Reformed and the strict Lutherans (in our section on Romanism earlier), we should point out that the Catechism not only has fewer disagreements with Lutheranism than with Rome (as one would expect), but it also has more agreements with the former (as one would also expect).

Bierma summarizes the arguments of various scholars for the most likely source of the threefold structure of the Heidelberger: sin and misery, deliverance and gratitude (Q.A. 2). Amongst the possible origins, including Paul's epistle to the Romans, Calvin and Beza, Bierma lists Luther himself, Melanchthon and a catechism by Nicholas Gallus, a former student of Melanchthon.[58]

Bierma's conclusion is not that the Catechism's threefold division definitely had a Lutheran origin but rather that it was taken from "the common stock of Protestant theology."[59] This is an example of positive and helpful Reformed-Lutheran irenics, not only because Luther and Melanchthon were associated with Heidelberg, but especially because Gallus' catechism, *A Brief Orderly Summary* (1547 or 1554) was reprinted in Heidelberg in 1558 and used there before the Heidelberg Catechism.[60] The common threefold structure in these two catechisms was one way of bringing the people of the Palatinate into the riches of the Reformed faith.

Bierma also notes that the Catechism's biblical teaching that good works arise out of gratitude (Q.A. 86) is rooted in common Reformed

57 Jon D. Payne, "'As Certainly As I See and Taste': The Lord's Supper and the Heidelberg Catechism," in *A Faith Worth Teaching*, 123.

58 Bierma, "The Sources and Theological Orientation," 81-86.

59 Bierma, "The Sources and Theological Orientation," 86.

60 Verboom, "The Completion of the Heidelberg Catechism," 49-51.

and Lutheran soil, including Luther himself, Luther's Small Catechism, Melanchthon, the Augsburg Confession (1530), the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531) and Urbanus Rhegius, as well as Brenz's Catechism and Gallus' A Brief Orderly Summary.[61] Since these last two catechisms were in use in the Palatinate before the Heidelberger, we again see our Catechism's wise and peaceful way of furthering the Reformation in the Electoral Palatinate.

Some argue that the Catechism "sought to minimize conflict" with "key silences," especially on predestination.[62] It is true that it does not mention reprobation or define election. However, election or God's choice of us is spoken of in two places in the Heidelberger. In connection with Christ's second coming, we read that He shall "translate me with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly joys and glory" (A. 52). As regards the "holy catholic church" that Christ "gathers, defends and preserves to Himself," we are told that it is "chosen to everlasting life" (Q.A. 54). Moreover, the Catechism teaches that the first article of the Apostles' Creed means that Almighty God "upholds and governs" all things "by His eternal counsel and providence" (A. 26), which is of great "advantage" to us, for it leads us to "place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, [knowing] that nothing shall separate us from His love" (Q.A. 28).

In not mentioning reprobation or defining election, the Heidelberger is in keeping with the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the (longer) Westminster Larger Catechism and Calvin's (even longer) Genevan Catechism. None of these four catechisms is guilty of a sinful silence in this regard. Ursinus, the main author of the Heidelberger, even devotes over sixty percent of his commentary on the "holy, catholic church" (Q.A. 54) to a section "Of The Eternal Predestination of God," in which he confesses God's eternal and unchangeable decree of election and reprobation.[63]

61 Bierma, "The Sources and Theological Orientation," 86-9.

62 The terminology is that of Bierma, "The Sources and Theological Orientation," 94.

63 Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharius Ursinus*, 293-303. Election is also treated in the remaining part of Ursinus' exposition of Q.A. 54 (287-8, 292-3).

As Reformed Christians, we receive the Heidelberg Catechism as part of our Three Forms of Unity. Head II of the Canons of Dordt sets forth the truth of double predestination which governs our understanding of the Catechism, including its references to election (A. 52, 54).

In our "Formula of Subscription," church officebearers affirm that we

> ...do hereby sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord declare by this, our subscription, that we heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the [Belgic] Confession and [Heidelberg] Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, do fully agree with the Word of God. We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by our public preaching or writing. We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine, and particularly those which were condemned by the above mentioned synod [i.e., Arminianism, including its denial of election and reprobation], but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these, and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors.[64]

Similarly Article 55 of our Church Order states,

> To ward off false doctrines and errors that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings, the ministers and elders shall use the means of teaching, of refutation or warning, and of admonition, as well in the ministry of the Word as in Christian teaching and family-visiting.[65]

Since Article 68 requires ministers to preach the Heidelberg Catechism on the Lord's Day, this is one obvious way in which they pursue their holy warfare against heresies.

64 *Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA*, 326.
65 *Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA*, 397.

Anabaptism

Unlike the Romanists, but like the Lutherans, the Anabaptists are not specifically named in the Catechism.[66] However, there is no doubt that the presentation of infant (or family, or covenant) baptism in Q.A. 74 opposes this sixteenth-century movement (and twenty-first century Baptists):

> Q. 74. Are infants also to be baptized?
> A. Yes; for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God; and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult; they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the Christian church, and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant.[67]

As well as the rabid Anabaptist attack on infant baptism, the Heidelberger opposes their ambivalence to civil authority. Whereas anti-Romanist polemics are found in the Catechism's exposition of the first three commandments (Lord's Days 34-37), anti-Anabaptist ideas occur in connection with the third, fifth and sixth commandments (Lord's Days 37, 39-40).

The sixth commandment gives authority to the state to execute capital punishment: "the magistrate is armed with the sword to prevent murder" (A. 105). The state also has the right to call upon its citizens to make (appropriate) oaths, for, according to the third commandment, we many "swear religiously by the name of God" "when the magistrates demand it of the subjects" (Q.A. 101). These duties are reinforced by the more general teaching of the fifth commandment, which requires not only "That I show all honor, love, and fidelity to my father and mother" but also to "all in authority over me," including the civil powers (A. 104). The Peasants' War (1524-1525) and

66 In keeping with our earlier observations on confessions, we note that the Anabaptists are named in the Belgic Confession (Articles 18, 34, 36).

67 *Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA*, 111

the Munster Rebellion (1534-1535) would not have occurred if the Anabaptists had submitted to, obeyed, and "patiently" borne with the "weakness and infirmities" of, their civil leaders, believing that it pleased "God to govern [them] by their hand" (A. 104).[68]

If the Romanists are centrally opposed by the five *solas* (especially *solus Christus*) and the Lutherans by the ecumenical creeds (the Apostles' Creed and the Creed of Chalcedon on Christ's human nature), the Heidelberg Catechism's polemic against Anabaptism could be summed up by two words, both beginning with "c": covenant and creation. The covenant is the key doctrine in defending and maintaining the baptism of the children of believers. The word "covenant" is used four times and at the start, middle and end of Answer 74. Anabaptistic radical and world-flight ideas are refuted by the truth of God's order in His creation (Lord's Days 9-10) which means that God's "hand" (A. 27, 28) rules providentially through the "hand" of civil magistrates, since "it pleases God to govern us by their hand" (A. 104).

One's Own Church

There are times when polemics against heresies and other churches "out there" are relatively easy, when one is preaching to the converted about the unconverted, so to speak. Of course, those of Roman Catholic or Lutheran or Anabaptist persuasion may be present in the meeting or some of their ideas may be troubling the members of the church. Also, the saints need to be equipped to battle these errors and witness to those who are led astray by false doctrines. But the Catechism also battles false notions and sinful practices which may arise in one's own congregation and denomination. The church militant must fight against her own sins, by God's grace!

Is anyone in the congregation tempted to the folly of (sinless) perfection in this life? To this the Heidelberger answers with a firm "No" or "*Nein*" in the German:

68 Anabaptist ideas are also opposed by the Catechism's teaching on justification by faith alone and salvation by grace alone, as well as its high view of the means of grace, i.e., the preaching and the sacraments (Lord's Day 25-30), but here we are listing errors specific to the Anabaptists, not errors they share with other major groups.

> Q. 5. Canst thou keep all these things perfectly [i.e., the commands to love God with all one's heart and to love one's neighbor as oneself]?
> A. In no wise; for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor.
>
> Q. 114. But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?
> A. No; but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience....[69]

The last answer also exposes antinomianism, a deadly scourge in any church: "yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live not only according to some, but all the commandments of God" (A. 114).

As well as perfectionism and antinomianism, the Catechism also opposes another wrong view of the law which can ruin a congregation: moralism. Good works arise out of "gratitude to God for His blessings" (A. 86) and "proceed from a true faith, and are performed according to the law of God, and to His glory" (A. 91).

Another error that, like perfectionism, antinomianism and moralism, is often associated with more radical forms of Anabaptism is universalism, whose ugly head could arise in any church. It is opposed with a decisive "No" or "*Nein*" in Question and Answer 20:

> Q. 20. Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?
> A. *No*, only those who are ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits, by a true faith.

It is denied with an emphatic "*Mit nichten*," "with noes":

> Q. 10. Will God suffer such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?
> A. *By no means*; but is terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins; and will punish them in His just judgment temporally and eternally, as He hath declared, *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*

69 *Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA*, 85, 133.

Finally, it is rejected with an astounding "*Keineswegs*," "No way!"

> Q. 87. Cannot they then be saved, who, continuing in their wicked and ungrateful lives, are not converted to God?
> A. *By no means*; for the Holy Scripture declares that no unchaste person, idolator, adulterer, thief, covetous man, drunkard, slanderer, robber, or any such like, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

In our day, creation and providence must be taught (Lord's Days 9-10) especially over against evolutionism and "chance" (A. 27). In this way, the members of the congregation will trust "the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (A. 26) and "His fatherly hand" in all circumstances (A. 27), and not be seduced by theistic evolutionism (in its various forms) or give way to despair or pride in "adversity" or "prosperity" (A. 28).

Preaching, the first key of the kingdom of heaven, proclaims and conveys peace to believers and God's wrath to the impenitent in the assembly:

> Q. 84. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?
> A. Thus: when according to the command of Christ it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted; according to which testimony of the gospel God will judge them, both in this and in the life to come.[70]

Though gratitude for God's rich salvation and the demands of Jehovah's holy Word are the chief reasons why the Heidelberger insists on godliness in the church and among her members, Anabaptist criticisms of the lifestyle of some in the congregation are also an in-

70 *Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA,* 118.

centive.[71] With regard to the third commandment, for example, though the Anabaptists err by refusing lawful oaths (Q.A. 101), the people in the Palatinate (and Reformed church members today) must not err by swearing too frequently or rashly (Lord's Day 36), since that is to "profane or abuse the name of God" (A. 99).

It is only when the whole counsel of God, as summed in the Catechism, is faithfully taught (cf. Acts 20:27) and heresies solidly refuted (Jude 3) and "the ten commandments so strictly preached" (A. 115) that the congregation will understand the truth and exercise biblical church discipline of "those who under the name of Christians maintain doctrines, or practices inconsistent therewith" (A. 85). But if this second key of the kingdom of heaven (Q.A. 83, 85) is not used properly, the church will apostatize (II Tim. 4:3-4) and true spiritual peace will be lost.[72]

This is vital for the administration of the Lord's Supper. This sacrament is "instituted" only

> for those who are truly sorrowful for their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ, and that their remaining infirmities are covered by His passion and death; and who also earnestly desire to have their faith more and more strengthened, and their lives more holy; but hypocrites, and such as turn not to God with sincere hearts, eat and drink judgment to themselves (Q.A. 81).[73]

A resounding "No" or "*Nein*" is uttered in the next Question and Answer:

> Q. 82. Are they also to be admitted to this supper, who, by confession and life, declare themselves unbelieving and ungodly?
> A. *No*; for by this the covenant of God would be profaned, and His wrath kindled against the whole congregation; therefore it is the duty

71 Cf. Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, trans. William J. Heynen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981).

72 Thankfully, not only does our Belgic Confession have a robust ecclesiology (Articles 29-35), but also our Heidelberg Catechism is strong on church discipline (Q.A. 81-85).

73 *Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA*, 117.

> of the Christian church, according to the appointment of Christ and His apostles, to exclude such persons, by the keys of the kingdom of heaven, till they show amendment of life.[74]

Significantly, regarding the two covenant sacraments (Q.A. 68), it is God's covenant (with believers and their seed) which gives a resounding "Yes" or "*Ja*" (in the German) to the baptism of the children of believers, and it is God's (holy) covenant with His (adult) people which issues a loud "No" or "*Nein*" to the admission to the Lords' Supper of those "who, by confession and life, declare themselves unbelieving and ungodly" (Q.A. 82).

Of course, the minister must also, even primarily (like the Catechism), bring the comforting message of the gospel (Is. 40:1-2): the saving knowledge of the triune God as our Creator, Governor, Redeemer and Sanctifier (Lord's Days 8-10); through Christ's Person and work, both in His state of humiliation and His state of exaltation (Lord's Days 11-19); and by the abiding Spirit (Lord's Day 20). On the basis of our Savior's full atonement (Q.A. 29-30, 37), we are ingrafted into and partakers of Christ (Q.A. 20, 53, 64-65) and so forgiven and righteous (Q.A. 21, 56, 59-61, 126) and preserved for ever (Q.A. 1, 28, 53), as living members of God's one, holy, catholic and apostolic church (Q.A. 54). The Lord Jesus communicates Himself and His blessings to us by Word and sacrament (Lord's Days 25-30), so that we have fellowship with the living God in prayer (Lord's Days 45-52) and communion with Christ and His saints (Q.A. 55). As regards our future, in this life we are blessedly secure (Q.A. 1, 26-28) and in the next we will be perfectly joyful (Q.A. 52, 57-58); thus our prayers are infused with confidence and hope (Q.A. 120, 123, 125, 127, 129). No wonder the questions of our Heidelberger so often ask about our "comfort," "advantage," "profit" and "benefit." How rich is God's church in Jesus Christ!

Oneself: War and Peace Within

Not only does the Catechism contain polemics against various groups "out there" and against sinful ideas and behavior in one's own

74 *Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA*, 117.

church, but it also brings a deeply personal message of holy war and peace to every one of us.

This word of spiritual warfare and peace comes to us individually, of course, within the framework of the celebrated triple knowledge. I must know three things: "the first, how great my sins and miseries are; the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries; the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance" (A. 2). This is "necessary" so that I "enjoying this comfort" may "live and die happily" (Q. 2). To express this differently, it is through knowing our sinfulness (Lord's Days 2-4), believing the gospel of Jesus Christ (Lord's Days 5-31), walking according to the Ten Commandments (Lord's Days 32-44) and communing with the Triune God in prayer (Lord's Days 45-52), by His grace, that we know "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7).

Though we may not usually think of polemics in this way, the Heidelberger's holy warfare is chiefly directed against ourselves and our own sinful nature. The "first part" concerning "the misery of man" (Lord's Days 2-4) begins with this personal question, "Whence knowest thou thy misery?" (Q. 3), and contains this anguished confession, "I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor" (A. 5). The true believer laments, "I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil" (A. 60).

The seventh commandment teaches us that "we must with all our hearts detest" "all uncleanness," for it is "accursed of God" (A. 108). The tenth commandment, which summarizes the whole Decalogue, requires that "at all times we hate all sin with our whole heart" (A. 113). This mortification, the putting to death, slaying or killing of sin, is "a sincere sorrow of heart that we have provoked God by our sins, and more and more to hate and flee from them" (A. 89). This detesting or hating, fleeing from, and mortifying of sin is also described as a "struggle," for each child of God confesses, "I have to struggle all my life long" against "my corrupt nature" (A. 56).

There is an antithesis that exists deep within the believer in this life: the flesh versus the spirit (Rom. 7:15-25; Gal. 5:17) or the "old man" versus the "new man" (Lord's Day 33). Our warfare is against

the "old man"—mortification (Q.A. 89). Our peace comes through the "quickening" or vivification of the "new man"—"a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works" (Q.A. 90).

But it belongs to the last prayer in the Catechism and its last Lord's Day to provide the Heidelberger's fullest account of the believer's personal "spiritual warfare."

> Q. 127. Which is the sixth petition?
> A. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; that is, since we are so weak in ourselves that we cannot stand a moment; and besides this, since our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh cease not to assault us, do Thou therefore preserve and strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes, till at last we obtain a complete victory.[75]

Of this evil triumvirate, we have already spoken of our struggle with "our own flesh." Concerning our other two "mortal enemies, the devil, [and] the world" (A. 127), we read that Christ, seated at God's right hand, "defends and preserves us against all enemies" (A. 51) and that, at His second coming, He "shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation" (A. 52).

Thus in the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, we ask the Almighty to "destroy the works of the devil and all violence which would exalt itself against Thee; and also, all wicked counsels devised against Thy holy Word" (A. 123). We fight this "spiritual warfare" against the "assault" of our "evil...foes" (A. 127) with the weapons of prayer, the Word and the grace of the Holy Spirit (A. 123, 127). "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds" (II Cor. 10:4).

The Catechism helps us in our polemics by pointing out that the sixth commandment requires "that we do good, even to *our* enemies" (A. 107).[76] The Christian, also in his spiritual warfare, must, like an

75 *Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA*, 139.

76 John Calvin summed up our calling well: "Let us be peaceable as

athlete, "strive lawfully" to obtain the prize (II Tim. 2:5). We must understand that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

The believer's holy war in this world and perfect peace in the next is part and parcel of His being a "Christian," that is, "a partaker of [Christ's] anointing," especially as a king, so "that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life, and afterwards reign with Him eternally over all creatures" (A. 32).[77]

Of course, we can only fight because "our Lord" atoned for our sins, and so defeated Satan and his hosts, and "delivered us from all the power of the devil; and thus hath made us His own property" (Q. A. 34). He gives us peace, everlasting peace, for we are "not [our] own" but belong unto our "faithful Savior Jesus Christ" (A. 1). ●

near as we can: let us relent of our own right: let us not strive for these worldly goods, honor, and reputation: let us bear all wrongs and outrages, rather than be moved to any debate through our own fault. But in the meanwhile, let us fight for God's truth with tooth and nail" (*Sermons on Galatians* [Audubon, NJ: Old Paths, 1995], 169).

77 Accordingly, in the "Thanksgiving" prayer in our "Form for the Administration of Baptism," we "beseech" God for those baptized that they may "live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ; and manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion, to the end that they may eternally praise and magnify Thee" (*Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA*, 260; cf. 263).

Comfort for Living and Dying—
The Heidelberg Catechism's Grand Theme

Ronald Cammenga

Introduction

"What is thy only comfort in life and death?" For 450 years, in many different languages, nearly all the languages of the countries in which the Reformed faith found a home, that question has been asked. Ministers and elders have asked the question. Christian school teachers have asked the question. Parents have asked the question. And believers have put the question to their fellow believers and to themselves.

And for 450 years the answer has been given: "That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ…."[1]

Comfort—comfort for living and comfort for dying. Comfort for time, as well as for eternity. Comfort for the present, but comfort also for the future, no matter what the future may hold. *Real* comfort; comfort that is *grounded*, *well-grounded.* An *only* comfort, apart from which, or better, apart from *whom* there is no other comfort and no possibility for comfort.

At this conference we are *celebrating* the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism. We celebrate! Celebration involves joy and rejoicing. Celebration includes thankfulness, thankfulness to God! Celebration involves commemoration, marking a significant event or occurrence publicly. This is what we are doing tonight and at this conference.

Not all are joining us in celebrating the 450th anniversary of the publication of the Heidelberg Catechism, first published in January

1 All quotations of the Heidelberg Catechism are taken from *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America* (Grandville: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 81ff.

of 1563. Not all celebrated the Heidelberger when it first appeared. Some criticized it, criticized it sharply. The Catechism met with "a storm of protest from Lutherans," especially from Gnesio-Lutherans, the strict Lutherans who opposed the Philippists, the followers of Philip Melanchthon, after the death of Martin Luther. The very vocal and contentious Tilemann Hesshus, former professor at Heidelberg wrote a pamphlet entitled *A True Warning against the Calvinistic Heidelberg Catechism, together with a Refutation of Several Errors Contained in It*. Matthias Flacius Illyricus entitled his diatribe *Refutation of a Short German Calvinistic Catechism Published in This Year 1572*. The Heidelberg Catechism was also sharply criticized by the Roman Catholics. A certain Roman Catholic theologian named Engelbertus Kenniphovius wrote *A Refutation of the Heidelberg Catechism*. In 1566 the Elector Frederick was forced to defend the Heidelberg Catechism before Emperor Maximilian II and most of the other electoral princes at the Diet of Augsburg, many of whom were critical of the Heidelberg Catechism. Frederick made such an impression by his impassioned defense of his catechism that he was exonerated by the assembly.[2]

Not all Reformed Christians and Reformed churches are celebrating the 450th anniversary of the Catechism, at least not with the enthusiasm with which we are celebrating its anniversary. They have long ago buried this treasure, consigning it to the slow but certain death of forgetfulness. It is not any longer preached regularly, Lord's Day after Lord's Day in the Sunday worship services. It is not used as a tool for the instruction of the young people in the catechism classes of the church—the main purpose for which it was written. Many view it as outdated and irrelevant. In place of the Heidelberg Catechism, many of these folk contend, the church needs new confessions that address the challenges and opportunities faced by the church in the twenty-first century. Others have set the Catechism aside as offensive on account of its pointed polemics, offensive on account of its unequivocal condemnation of the errors of Roman Catholicism and

2 Wim Verboom, "The Completion of the Heidelberg Catechism," in *The Church's Book of Comfort*, ed. Willem Van't Spijker, tr. Gerrit Bilkes (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 55-6.

Anabaptism. They view it as an obstacle to ecumenism. Tonight we join together to celebrate God's gift to Reformed Christians and Reformed churches—to the Protestant Reformed Churches—of the Heidelberg Catechism.

But if the Reformed Church is to maintain its vitality, as well as its sense of purpose, it must have a living knowledge of its past. Historical consciousness is critical in an age in which churches and individuals deliberately cut themselves off from their roots. The celebration of the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism ought to serve in some small way to remind the churches of "the rock whence we are hewn." This was the hope expressed by the special committee of the German Reformed Churches in the United States entrusted with arranging the commemoration of the 300th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism.

> For ourselves, as a Church, much may be gained by renewing our communion, as we are here called to do, with the beginning of our own ecclesiastical life. In any case, it is wholesome to communicate thus in a living way with antecedent times. No form of existence in this world can be sound and vigorous that is not historical, rooted and grounded in the past. The single man, to be truly great, must remain bound through life to the memory and love of his childhood. So with all associations and communities of men; and so especially with religious organizations or Churches. No Church can deserve the name that is not a historical Church. It must have its right to exist in some charter handed down from the past; and to renounce its connection with this, is necessarily to become weak, and in the end to forfeit its title to consideration altogether. We claim to be a historical Church,—not an upstart sect of yesterday; we belong to the original necessity of Protestantism itself, whatever that may have been, and have the reason of our ecclesiastical being in the relations and circumstances of the period to which that great movement owes its birth. It is our duty, then, to cherish and cultivate a lively sense of our proper spiritual heritage in such view. Not to do so, can only be suicidal. Whether it be to hold fast ancient forms, or to unfold them into new shape, the condition of prosperity here remains always the same. We cannot *grow* in any way, except as we abide in living union with our own root. Hence the importance of our present year of com-

> memoration. Let us hope that it will serve to knit our sense of church existence with new force to what our Church was confessionally in the beginning, and thus make us strong for what may be the will of God concerning us in the future.[3]

It is altogether fitting that the Protestant Reformed Seminary takes the lead in this celebration of the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism. It is fitting for several reasons. First, the Heidelberg Catechism forms a part of the creedal basis of the seminary, so that all of the instruction that is given in the seminary must be in harmony with the Heidelberg Catechism. The *2013-2014 Catalog of the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches* states this explicitly.

> The seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches stands firmly committed to [the] truths of God's Word, seeks diligently to defend them, to develop them further, and to find in them the basis for all of the instruction offered in the school. In this way the seminary can serve the preservation of the truth in the midst of the church and be an instrument, under the blessing of Almighty God, to prepare men for the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ….
>
> The truths upon which this seminary stands are briefly these:
>
> 1) The infallible inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and their absolute authority in doctrine and life.
>
> 2) The Three Forms of Unity (viz., *the Heidelberg Catechism*, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordrecht), which have been historically maintained in the Reformed Churches.[4]

Second, the fundamental truths that are contained in the Heidelberg Catechism are the very truths that are taught to the young men aspiring to the ministry and studying in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. The

3 S. R. Fisher and Lewis H. Steiner, "Historical Introduction," in *Tercentenary Monument In Commemoration of the Three Hundredth Anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Chambersburg: M. Kieffer and Company, 1863; repr. facsimile, Forgotten Books, 2012), xxii.

4 *Catalog (August 2013-July 2014) Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Wyoming: Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, 2013), 4-5.

truths contained in this historic creed are taught in such a way that the faculty seeks to endear them to these men aspiring to the office of the ministry of the gospel. At the same time, the errors that the Heidelberg Catechism identifies and repudiates are errors that continue to threaten the church in our day. Thus, prospective ministers are prepared to do battle against the errors of the old as well as the new day. Further, students are taught to preach the Heidelberg Catechism, in order that after they have been ordained they fulfill the requirement of Article 68 of the Church Order that at one of the Sunday worship services "the ministers shall…explain briefly the sum of Christian doctrine comprehended in the Heidelberg Catechism."[5] Students are also prepared in the seminary to teach the Heidelberg Catechism to the young people, carrying out 450 years later one of the main purposes for which Elector Frederick III, the Pious, instructed the Catechism to be written. The years of training in the seminary prepare students, after receiving a call to a local congregation and after examination by the classis in which that congregation resides, to sign the Formula of Subscription, subscription to the confessions, namely the Three Forms of Unity, including the Heidelberg Catechism.

Join me tonight in celebrating the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism, an altogether unique gift of God to His church. In particular, join me in celebrating the Catechism's grand theme. That grand theme is *comfort*, comfort for living and comfort for dying.

Notable Features of the Heidelberg Catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism is a sparkling jewel in the treasure trove of our Reformed confessional heritage. The church historian Philip Schaff sings the praises of the Heidelberg Catechism:

> The [Heidelberg] Catechism is a work of [genuine] religious enthusiasm, based on solid theological learning, and directed by excellent judgment. It is baptized with the Pentecostal fire of the great Reformation…that wonderfully excited period—by far the richest and deepest in Church history next to the age of Christ and his inspired

5 "The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches," in *Confessions and the Church Order of the PRCA*, 399.

> apostles. It is the product of the heart as well as the head, full of faith and unction from above. It is fresh, lively, glowing, yet clear, sober, self-sustained. The ideas are Biblical and orthodox, and well fortified by apt Scripture proofs. The language is dignified, terse, nervous, popular, and often elegant. It is the language of devotion as well as instruction. Altogether the Heidelberg Catechism is more than a book, it is an institution, and will live as long as the Reformed Church.[6]

There are a number of notable features of the Heidelberg Catechism that set it apart as a creed and confession. To begin with, the Heidelberg Catechism is a *catechism*. As a catechism, its format is question and answer, query and response. That format is undoubtedly related to one of the main purposes of the new catechism, according to the directive of the ruler of the Palatinate, Frederick III. That purpose was that the catechism would serve as a tool for the instruction of the youth. Elector Frederick charged the Heidelberg University professor, Zacharias Ursinus, and the court preacher, Caspar Olevianus, to write a catechism that could be used, not only in the churches, but also in the schools and by parents in teaching the Reformed faith to their children. This purpose of the Heidelberg Catechism is reflected in the one who is addressed in the Heidelberg Catechism. Hoeksema comments on this:

> In close connection with this viewpoint of the Heidelberg Catechism stands the fact that the Catechism is very personal, and that it addresses throughout the child of the Church as "the man of God" that must be thoroughly furnished unto all good works. It speaks in the singular throughout: "What is *thy* only comfort?" "How many things are necessary for *thee* to know, that *thou* in this comfort mayest live and die happily?" "Whence knowest *thou* thy misery?" "What believest *thou*"…. And the once addressed is the baptized child of the Church, considered as a *living member*. In this respect the Heidelberg Catechism proceeds from the same standpoint as the Baptism Form. The child of the covenant is sanctified in Christ, and is baptized as member of His Church. God has forgiven us and our children all our sins, and

6 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes* (1877; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1905), 1:542.

> received us through His Holy Spirit as members of His only begotten Son, and adopted us to be His children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism. That is the standpoint of the Baptism Form. It is no different with the Heidelberg Catechism. The children of the covenant that must be instructed are living children of God. This does not mean that the Catechism teaches presupposed regeneration. It does not speak on the basis of a supposition: it speaks with certainty. Neither does it mean that the instructor lives in the illusion that all the members of the church on earth are spiritual members of Christ's body. When it speaks of the keys of the kingdom of heaven it reveals quite clearly that it knows that there is a carnal seed of the covenant. But it does mean that this carnal seed is not addressed, it is left out of view. It is the spiritual seed that must be instructed in the Word of God. This spiritual seed, "the man of God," must be made perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work. It is the only seed that can be instructed and that can be made perfect in the truth. And, therefore, it is to this spiritual seed that the Catechism addresses itself throughout.[7]

It is a catechism, but secondly, it is a catechism written from a personal and experiential viewpoint. It is no objective treatment of church doctrine. But throughout it is warm and personal. That personal and experiential viewpoint comes out in the very first question and answer: "Q. What is *thy* only comfort in life and death? A. That *I* with body and soul, both in life and death, am not *my* own, but belong unto *my* faithful Savior Jesus Christ." Compare that to the first Q. A. of the Westminster Larger Catechism: "Q. What is the chief and highest end of man? A. Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever."[8]

Faith is *personal*; faith is *experiential*. Faith knows and faith believes for one's self. Not only with the mind, but from the heart, truth is believed and confessed. Herman Hoeksema extols the Heidelberg

7 Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1970), 1:24-25.

8 "The Larger Catechism," *The Westminster Standards.* (Suwanee, GA: Great Commission Publications, 2007), 35.

Catechism on account of its personal, experiential approach to the truth of Scripture. He writes in his three-volume commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism entitled *The Triple Knowledge* of "the practical, spiritual character and viewpoint of the Heidelberger: it considers the contents of Christian doctrine from the experiential standpoint of the believing Christian…this little textbook of instruction in the truth is direct and personal in form throughout."[9] A bit later Hoeksema says:

> There can be no doubt about the fact, that the Heidelberg Catechism considers and explains the truth from the viewpoint of the consciousness and subjective experience of the believing Christian in this world. In this respect it differs radically from the Westminster Catechisms, both the larger and the shorter. The Westminster Larger Catechism begins as follows: "What is the chief and highest end of man? Man's chief and highest end is, to glorify God and fully to enjoy him forever. How doth it appear that there is a God? The very light of nature, the works of God declare plainly that there is a God: but his Word and Spirit do sufficiently and effectually reveal him unto men for their salvation. What is the Word of God? The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, the only Rule of Faith and obedience." And then it continues to treat the doctrine of God, His virtues, the Trinity, the decrees, creation, man, the fall, etc. Now, look at the first Lord's Day of the Heidelberg Catechism. You at once discern the difference. The Westminster starts out from the question of the objective end and calling of man: to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever; the Heidelberger speaks of the subjective appropriation and experience of this truth by the individual Christian: my comfort is that I belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. The viewpoint of the Westminster Catechism is doctrinally objective; that of the Heidelberg Catechism is experientially subjective. The standpoint of the former is general and impersonal: it addresses no one, it speaks of *man*; that of the Catechism is specific and personal: it speaks to the man of God.[10]

And again:

9 Hoeksema, *Triple Knowledge*, 1:12-13.
10 Hoeksema, *Triple Knowledge*, 1:19-20.

> …we repeat, the viewpoint is that of the subjective experience or, if you prefer, that of the spiritual knowledge of the objective truth of the Word of God as possessed by the believing Christian in this world. There is an evident difference between the questions: "What is the chief end of man?" and "What is thy only comfort?" There is an obvious difference between the threefold division of the Heidelberger: sin and misery, redemption, gratitude, on the one hand, and the well-known six loci of dogmatics. The Catechism treats the truth, not merely as a science, but as the spiritual knowledge that is eternal life. John 17:3. It discusses the system of doctrine from the viewpoint of his faith to whose heart the objective Word of God has been applied by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, Who dwells in the Church, and Who leads into all the truth. It is not a theology, it is knowledge of God. The one that speaks here is regenerated and called. The Word, the truth of which he discusses, has been applied to his heart. He has ears to hear, eyes to see. And as he stand in the midst of the present world, full of misery and darkness, and as he himself, outside of Christ, lies in the midst of death, the clear understanding of that Word, or rather, that Word itself as it reveals to Him God in Christ, redemption and deliverance from the power of sin and death, and as he by faith lays hold upon that Word, is his comfort, his sole and all-sufficient comfort in life and death. In that thoroughly sound sense of the word the Heidelberger is experiential and subjective in its approach of the truth.[11]

At the same time, faith is also distinctive. This, too, is a notable feature of the Heidelberg Catechism. Faith receives, believes, and confesses the truth. But faith also rejects the lie and every departure from the truth of God's Word. The Heidelberg Catechism exposes and repudiates the gross errors of Roman Catholicism and Anabaptism. But the Catechism also distinguishes the Reformed faith from the errors of the Lutherans, particularly with regard to the sacraments and the proper government of the church. Like many of the creeds and catechisms produced in this era, the Heidelberg Catechism includes exposition of four main subjects: the Apostles' Creed, the sacraments (so controversial a topic in that day), the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer.

11 Hoeksema, *Triple Knowledge*, 1:23-24.

For this reason Frederick also charged Ursinus and Olevianus to write a catechism that set forth the Reformed faith not only over against Roman Catholicism and Anabaptism, but also over against Lutheranism. It is true that the Reformed regarded the Lutherans as fellow believers and extended to them the right hand of fellowship—and therein is also a lesson for the church today. Nevertheless, the Reformed had serious differences with the Lutherans, and the Heidelberg Catechism calls attention to those differences and does not downplay the differences between the Reformed faith and Lutheranism.

The Catechism's Theme of Comfort

But the most notable feature of the Heidelberg Catechism is that it was written with a *theme*. It is a catechism *with a theme*. What that theme is, the first question and answer make plain. The question is: "What is thy only *comfort* in life and death?" That is the Catechism's theme. Its theme is *comfort*. With that theme in mind, the questions of the Heidelberg Catechism were framed. From the viewpoint of that theme, the answers were formulated. Anyone with even the slightest familiarity with the Heidelberg Catechism knows that comfort is the theme of the Catechism. Comfort for living; comfort for dying. Comfort midst all the struggles, sorrows, disappointments, and persecutions of earthly life. An *only* comfort; a *sure* comfort. A comfort for time, as well as for eternity. A comfort that the Christian can never lose nor can ever be taken away. A comfort in Christ and belonging to Christ. Hear Philip Schaff once again:

> The genius of the Catechism is brought out at once in the first question, which contains the central idea, and strikes the key-note. It is unsurpassed for depth…and beauty, and, once committed to memory, can never be forgotten. It represents Christianity in its evangelical, practical, cheering aspect, not as a commanding law, not as an intellectual scheme, not as a system of outward observances, but as the best gift of God to man, as a source of peace and comfort in life and in death. What can be more comforting, what at the same time more honoring and stimulating to a holy life than the assurance of being owned wholly by Christ our blessed Lord and Saviour, who sacrificed his own spotless life for us on the cross? The first question and answer

> of the Heidelberg Catechism is the whole gospel in a nutshell; blessed is he who can repeat it from the heart and hold it fast to the end.[12]

Altogether unjustly the American Presbyterian theologian Benjamin B. Warfield faults the Catechism for its comfort theme. In an article entitled "The First Question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism," Warfield faulted the Heidelberg Catechism for its comfort theme because, in his judgment, the Catechism's approach was anthropological rather than theological. He wrote:

> No Catechism begins on a higher plane than the Westminster "Shorter Catechism." Its opening question, "What is the chief end of man?" with its answer, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever"—the profound meaning of which Carlyle said grew to him ever fuller and richer with the years—sets the learner at once in his right relation to God. Withdrawing his eyes from himself, even from his own salvation, as the chief object of concern, it fixes them on God and His glory, and bids him seek his highest blessedness in Him.
>
> The Shorter Catechism owes this elevated standpoint, of course, to the purity of its reflection of the Reformed consciousness. To others, the question of questions might be, What shall I do to be saved? And it is on this plane that many, or rather most, of the Catechisms even of the Reformation begin. There is a sort of spiritual utilitarianism, a divine euthumia,[13] at work in this, which determines the whole point of view. Even the Heidelberg Catechism is not wholly free from this leaven. Taking its starting point from the longing for comfort, even though it be the highest comfort for life and death, it claims the attention of the pupil from the beginning for his own state, his own present unhappiness, his own possibilities of bliss. There may be some danger that the pupil should acquire the impression that God exists for his benefit. The Westminster Catechism cuts itself free at once from this entanglement with lower things and begins, as it centers and ends, under the illumination of the vision of God in His glory, to subserve which it finds to be the proper end of human as of all other existence, of salvation as of all other achievements.[14]

12 Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 1:541.

13 Greek word meaning "joy" or "happiness." The word connotes a sense of personal well-being.

14 Benjamin B. Warfield, "The First Question of the Westminster Shorter

What! Did Warfield not read the whole of the first Q.A.? Yes, indeed, the theme of the Heidelberger is comfort, comfort for living and comfort for dying. But not comfort as an end in itself. Certainly not comfort as the be all and end all of the Christian life. But the Christian's enjoyment of the only comfort that is to be found in Jesus Christ "who, with his precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins," the only comfort that gives that gives the assurance that my heavenly Father causes all things be "be subservient to my salvation," the only comfort that includes that the Holy Spirit "assures me of eternal life," the enjoyment of the only comfort in order to "make me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him." The enjoyment of the only comfort, not as an end in itself. Surely not because the Christian and his salvation and comfort are the most important thing. But the Christian's enjoyment of the only comfort is *in order that* he will "live unto him." "Unto him'–that is the purpose of the Christian's comfort. The glory and praise of God, this is the purpose and goal of the Christian's comfort. The first Q.A. of the Heidelberg Catechism could hardly be more theocentric than in reality it is.

Besides the first Q.A., the word "comfort" can be found in a number of the Q.A.'s of the Heidelberg Catechism. It is found in the following *questions:*

> Q. 2: How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this *comfort*, mayest live and die happily? (84)
> Q. 52: What *comfort* is it to thee that "Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead"? (103)
> Q. 57: What *comfort* doth the "resurrection of the body" afford thee? (105)
> Q. 58: What *comfort* takest thou from the article of "life everlasting"? (105)

In addition, two of the *answers* in the Heidelberg Catechism speak of comfort.

Catechism," in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield, Vol. 6, The Westminster Assembly and its Work* (1932; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 379.

> Q. 44: Why is there added, "he descended into hell"?
> A. That in my greatest temptations, I may be assured, and wholly *comfort* myself in this, that my Lord Jesus Christ, by his inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors, and hellish agonies, in which he was plunged during all his sufferings, but especially on the cross, hath delivered me from the anguish and torments of hell. (100)
> Q. 53: What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost?
> A. First, that he is true and co-eternal God with the Father and the Son; secondly, that he is also given me, to make me by a true faith, partaker of Christ and all his benefits, that he may *comfort* me and abide with me for ever (103).

Even when the word "comfort" is not used, the Q.A.'s of the Heidelberg Catechism are written with comfort implied and with comfort as their aim.

Although among the major Reformation confessions and catechisms the theme of comfort is unique to the Heidelberg Catechism, this was not first time Ursinus had written a catechism with the theme of comfort. Prior to his participation in the composition of the Heidelberg Catechism, Ursinus had written two other catechisms, a shorter catechism for younger children, and a larger catechism for older children and adults. Both of these catechisms also begin with a question concerning comfort. Ursinus' Small Catechism begins:

> Q. 1. What comfort sustains your heart in death as well as life?
> A. That God has truly forgiven all my sins because of Christ and has given me eternal life in which I may glorify him forever.

Ursinus' Large Catechism begins:

> Q. 1. What firm comfort do you have in life and in death?
> A. That I was created by God in his image for eternal life; and after I willfully lost this in Adam, God, out of infinite and free mercy, took me into his covenant of grace that he might give me by faith, righteousness and eternal life because of the obedience and death of his Son who was sent in the flesh. And that he sealed his covenant in my heart by his Spirit, who renews me in the image of God and

> cries out in me, "Abba," Father, by his Word and the visible signs of this covenant.[15]

Given the fact that two of Ursinus' earlier catechisms were organized around the theme of comfort, comfort in life and in death, it is not surprising that the Heidelberg Catechism was written with the theme of comfort.

"Comfort" is our English word. It is the translation of the German "trost." The Heidelberg Catechism was originally written in German: "*Was ist dein einiger Trost im Leben und im Sterben?*" The Dutch equivalent is "troost." In Dutch the first Q.A. of the Heidelberg Catechism is: "*Was is uw eenige troost, beide in het leven en sterven?*" Our English word "comfort" comes from the Latin. It means "to strengthen" (*fortis*) "together with" (*con* or *cum*). To comfort is "to strengthen, to reassure, to provide relief, to give consolation and support." And that is also the idea of the Greek word used in II Corinthians 1. The Greek word is παρακλήσις, παρακλήσεως. This is the word that Jesus uses in John 14:16 and John 16:26 to describe the Holy Spirit. He is personally the Comforter, the Paraclete. Literally, He is someone summoned alongside in order to support, to reassure, to encourage, to provide consolation, solace, comfort."

One who enjoys comfort is free from anxiety, worry, doubt, and fear. He is at peace, perfect peace. He is at peace within himself, peace with regard to his earthly circumstances, and at peace with God. Comfort is what a friend provides for his or her friend. Comfort is a covenantal concept, an inherently covenantal concept. As our covenant friend, God comforts us. As covenant friends mutually, we reach out and comfort one another. In the bonds of covenant friendship, parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters in the Lord, we comfort one another. Within the bonds of the covenant, as covenant friends we do all that we can do to comfort one another. That comfort may be the word that we speak at the funeral

15 Ursinus not only makes use of the "comfort theme" in his Larger Catechism, but joins to that theme of comfort the theme of God's covenant of grace. That makes his Larger Catechism altogether unique among Reformation creeds and catechisms.

home to grieving brothers and sisters in Christ. That comfort may be the word of encouragement we speak at the visit we make to the hospital, in the home, or in the church foyer. It may be the comfort that takes the form of the card that we send, the letter that we write, or the email that we send. Comfort is how love and friendship are expressed.

We human beings need this comfort; we need this comfort both for living and dying. Comfort is not only for the dying, but comfort is also for the living. For people living in the mid-sixteenth century, it might have been necessary to have comfort for living, we can well imagine. After all, death and destruction were everywhere, lurking around every corner, it seemed. The Black Death (Bubonic Plague) had several times in the previous century visited many of the villages and cities of Europe, including Heidelberg. Some historians estimate that up to 200 million people had been killed by this deadly infectious disease by the middle of the sixteenth-century. And there were many other diseases besides, diseases that could be attributed to poor sanitation, impure drinking water, and poor diet. There were no antibiotics, and many people died of illnesses that today a regimen of antibiotics would easily cure. The infant mortality rate was very high; many couples buried several babies that had not yet reached a year old. Many women died in childbirth or from complications following childbirth. War brought horrific deaths to millions. Add to that the persecutions to which Reformed Christians were exposed—painful, cruel deaths for the sake of the Reformed faith, for the sake of the doctrines contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, persecutions perpetrated especially by the Roman Catholic Church and its bloody inquisition. Most people died before they reached forty; very few survived to the age of fifty.

But it is not any earthly disease, suffering, or sorrow that is the deepest reason on account of which we human beings need comfort. By the way, that we need comfort, the Heidelberg Catechism presupposes; we all *need* comfort. As far as the Christian is concerned, it is not even a question *whether* we need comfort. The first question of the Catechism is not: "Do you need comfort?" But the question is: "What is thy only comfort in life and death?" We all need comfort.

The reason, the deepest reason on account of which we humans need comfort is our sin. Our need of comfort is due to the fact that as guilty sinners we deserve the wrath of God on account of our sins. This is our misery, our great misery, really our only comfort. This is the teaching of Scripture. God commands His prophet in Isaiah 40:1 and 2, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem and cry unto her, that warfare is accomplished, *that her iniquity is pardoned*: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people….." Why? Because "her iniquity is pardoned." That implies that the great misery of God's people is their sin unpardoned by God. Not war, not sickness, not disease, not economic woe, not political unrest, but our sin—this is the cause of the misery of man. For this reason, man's comfort is the forgiveness of his sins by God. Since this forgiveness is grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people with the message of the forgiveness of their sins in the cross and for the sake of Jesus Christ." This is comfort, real comfort. In the language of the first answer of Lord's Day 1, our comfort is that our "faithful Savior Jesus Christ…with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins…." This is the gospel, the glorious good news and comfort of the gospel.

The Only Comfort in the Only Savior

The gospel proclaims the comfort that alone is to be found in Jesus Christ. The idea of comfort is prominent in 2 Corinthians 1. It would have been better that the translators of the Authorized Version had consistently translated the word "comfort" throughout the first chapter of 2 Corinthians, rather than sometimes "comfort" and other times "consolation." According to the apostle Paul, God is "the God of all comfort" (v. 3). In Him alone is to be found all true and lasting comfort. Apart from the God and Father of Jesus Christ there is no comfort. He alone is "able to comfort them which are in any trouble [any misery], by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (v. 4). "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation (comfort) also aboundeth by Christ" (v. 5). God is the God

of all comfort, but God is the God of all comfort *in* Jesus Christ and *for the sake of* Jesus Christ. For what we deserve as guilty sinners is not comfort, but misery, misery now and misery hereafter. The worst possible misery, which is the misery of the eternal judgment and wrath of God. For Jesus' sake, on account of His doing and dying we are delivered from that awful misery.

Jesus Christ is the *only* comfort. This is the message of the gospel. Comfort cannot be found apart from Jesus Christ the Savior. It cannot be found in any of the would-be saviors of the wicked world. It cannot be found in any of the self-proclaimed saviors of the false religions. It cannot be found in the leaders of the cults. For this reason we call all men everywhere to believe on Jesus Christ as Savior.

Neither can comfort and joy be found in anything apart from Jesus Christ. It cannot be found in any earthly thing: not in one's career; not in one's business; not in earthly success, recognition, a name for one's self. It cannot be found in pleasure, the mad pursuit of pleasure. It certainly cannot be found in a bottle, in pills, or in giving one's self over to debauchery. Comfort is alone to be experienced in Jesus Christ, through faith in Him. He alone has fully satisfied the justice and wrath of God. As He is the only Savior, so comfort is alone to be found in Him. This is the exclusiveness of the Christian gospel. This is the offense of the Christian gospel in every age.

This is comfort, not for all people, but for some people only. It is comfort only for those who "belong unto [the] faithful Savior Jesus Christ…." Only for those who belong to Him has Jesus Christ shed "His precious blood" and "fully satisfied for all [their] sins." That they belong to Him is due to the fact that the Father has given them to Jesus Christ. He has given them to Jesus Christ in His eternal decree of election. This is our comfort for living and for dying, that we have been chosen by God and according to electing grace have been given to Jesus Christ so that we are His and He is ours.

Thus, our comfort is that in life nothing can be against us, absolutely nothing. That does not mean that in life we are going to be spared any and all suffering. That is not our comfort, as that was not the comfort of Reformed living in the mid-sixteenth century. They suffered; many of them suffered grievously. And so may we. But

the comfort of the Christian is that "not a hair can fall from my head "apart from the will of my heavenly Father."

This is *my* comfort, first of all. It is the comfort of the child of God personally and individually. It is the comfort that the circumstances of my life personally, as well as everything in the universe around me is subject to the sovereign power of God. Not "the power of the devil," but the almighty power of God reigns supreme over all things. It is the comfort that even the devil, the demons of hell, and all the hosts of the ungodly are subservient to Him to whom I belong, so that they do His will, cannot but do His will, and fulfill His sovereign purposes.

And then, in the second place, it belongs to my comfort that the almighty God who holds in His hands the reins of the universe, is *my* "heavenly Father." He loves me for Jesus' sake. He desires my good and never my hurt. He works in and through all things that He has ordained, so that "all things must be subservient to my [and His churches'] salvation."

A Blessed Assurance

This is the believer's *assurance*. That is implied in this first Lord's Day, as it is implied throughout the Heidelberg Catechism. Comfort implies assurance. Comfort demands assurance. If I cannot be assured, then neither can I be comforted. And if I am comforted, that comfort rests on assurance, and cannot exist apart from assurance. That is the last part of the first answer: "by his Holy Spirit, he also *assures me* of eternal life."

And that is a distinctive, if not THE distinctive of the Reformed faith and of the Christian religion. It is a religion of assurance. That was at the time of the Reformation and is still today a great difference between Roman Catholicism and the Reformed faith.

Rome denies to its people the assurance of salvation. Of necessity Rome denies the very possibility of assurance. For Rome is a religion of works and merit. And anywhere works and merit are the basis for salvation, or even a contributing part of salvation, there cannot be there any assurance of salvation. The man who looks to his own works and merit for a part of his salvation can never be sure that

he has done enough, can never be sure that his works are sufficiently holy, and thus can never be assured of his salvation.

Rome kept her people then and Rome keeps her people today in terror. Because Rome was and Rome is a works-based religion, assurance is necessarily impossible. This was Luther's experience. And this was Rome's official doctrine. Rome went so far as to anathematize anyone who taught the possibility of assurance of salvation.

Now it stands to reason that one can only be comforted, truly comforted who lives in the assurance of salvation, the assurance that God is his or her God, and they are God's dear son or daughter. The first question and answer give expression to the believer's assurance. "What is thy only comfort in life and death? That I am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ…." I *know* that I am not my own, and I *know* that I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. The answer continues by affirming that Jesus Christ "with his precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins…." That is the Christian's comfort. It is not merely that Jesus Christ's death is the complete satisfaction for sin, or even for the sins of the elect. But with his precious blood He has fully satisfied for all *my* sins. *My* sins, even *mine*. *My* sins are paid for; His precious blood was shed *for me*. Perfect satisfaction has been made to God for *me*. *My* heavenly Father so preserves *me* that not a hair can fall from *my* head apart from His sovereign will. At the same time, He causes all that befalls *me* to be subservient to *my* salvation. *My* salvation. Assurance of salvation, eternal salvation. Assurance of salvation now, and assurance of salvation hereafter. Blessed assurance!

That assurance also comes out in the second question that is also included in the first Lord's Day. "How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest life and die happily?" The child of God "enjoys" this comfort; he "enjoys" it to such an extent that he lives and dies happily! The literal German underscores this assurance even more strongly than our English translation. For literally the German is: "How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou *in this comfort*, mayest live and die happily?" It is not merely a matter of "enjoying" this comfort, but it is a matter of being "in" this comfort.

Over and over again, the Heidelberg Catechism gives expression to the assurance of salvation that the believing child of God possesses. Think of Q.A. 21:

> What is true faith? True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel, in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits (90).

Call to mind Q.A. 26:

> What believest thou when thou sayest, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth? That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (who of nothing made heaven and earth, with all that is in them; who likewise upholds and governs the same by His eternal counsel and providence) is for the sake of Christ His Son, my God and my Father; on whom I rely so entirely, that I have no doubt, but He will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body: and further, that He will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears turn out to my advantage; for He is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing, being a faithful Father (92-93).

Think of the 32nd Q.A.:

> But why art thou called a Christian? Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing; that so I may confess His name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him: and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life; and afterwards reign with him eternally, over all creatures (96).

Recall the 44th Q.A.:

> Why is there added, "He descended into hell"? That in my greatest temptations, I may be assured, and wholly comfort myself in this, that my Lord Jesus Christ, by His inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors, and

> hellish agonies, in which he was plunged during all His sufferings, but especially on the cross, hath delivered me from the anguish and torments of hell (100).

Or yet the 54th Q.A.:

> What believest thou concerning the "holy catholic church" of Christ? That the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, fathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and for ever shall remain a living member thereof (104).

That is assurance! Blessed assurance!

Comfort—my only comfort. Assurance—assurance for me, even for me. This is the gospel. This is the gospel of grace, grace apart from works. This is the gospel recovered by the Reformation. This is the gospel whose contents are set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism.

Dr. Fred Klooster, in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, *Our Only Comfort*, suggests that the Catechism's sense of comfort and assurance are captured if one sings Luther's Reformation hymn, "A Mighty Fortress," replacing "fortress" in the opening stanza with comfort: "A mighty *comfort* is our God, a bulwark never failing."[16]

A mighty comfort—this is the grand theme of the Heidelberg Catechism. ●

16 Fred H. Klooster, *Our Only Comfort: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2001), 1:35.

Book Reviews

A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism, William Ames, trans. Todd M. Rester. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008, hardback, xxxii + 253 pp. ISBN 978-1-60178-045-4. [Reviewed by Angus Stewart.]

Not Really a Heidelberg Catechism Commentary

If you are looking for a commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, this book will disappoint you, for it is not really an exposition of the Heidelberger. William Ames did not believe in preaching the Heidelberg Catechism. Instead, he picked a verse or verses from the Bible on the subject of the Lord's Day and expounded his scriptural text.

The fifty-two Lord's Days are treated in forty-eight chapters, with Ames taking Lord's Days 26 and 27 (on baptism), 28 and 29 (on the Lord's Supper) and 36 and 37 (on the third commandment) together, and not covering Lord's Day 32, evidently reckoning it dealt with in his discussion of good works in Lords' Day 25. Ames' forty-eight chapters, averaging about 4½ pages, are headed with the relevant Lord's Day: "Lord's Day 1," "Lord's Day 2" and so on.

However, the text of the specific Lord's Day is not quoted at the start (or the middle or the end) of a single chapter; the ideas, sentences, clauses or terminology of the Lord's Day are not explained; and sometimes the chapter does not even refer to the Catechism at all. This is Ames' approach throughout the book. This is what he taught his students to do. But these are not model Heidelberg Catechism sermons!

Perhaps this is why Ames' friends—"former students and colleagues from the Academy at Franeker"—compiled and published this work under the (Latin) title *Christianae Catecheseos Sciagraphia* (p. xxvi), rendered in English as *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism*, recognizing that it is closer to a *sketch* than an exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Furthermore, it is hard to see how Ames' view of faith and assurance (37-43; cf. xxi-xxii) can be squared with Lord's Day 7.

Practical Use

Ames' method is one which twenty-first century readers might take a while to get used to. After quoting his scriptural text, his first paragraph makes exegetical remarks. Then he draws several "Lessons" (ranging from two to seven), which he reinforces with "Reasons" and applies with "Uses." Sometimes he includes "Questions" with their accompanying "Responses."

As in Ames' famous *The Manner of Theology,* his writing style is terse, with deep truths being stated in a short space. *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism* is not, therefore, an easy read. However, it does contain profound theology—examples are too many to cite—and it repays a more meditative form of reading, including pausing for reflection. This is the way in which God's people today would most benefit from the work, and preachers on the Heidelberg Catechism could find it stimulating in their sermon preparation.

Historical Value

Beside the practical use of *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism*, it is also of value historically, as the book's fine biographical and historical introduction especially shows (xii-xxxii). First, it fills out our picture of William Ames (1576-1633), a highly regarded Reformed preacher, and professor, the chief theological advisor and secretary to Bogerman (the presiding officer at the Synod of Dordt) and the author of *The Marrow of Theology* and *Conscience With the Power and Cases Thereof*, a significant manual of Puritan casuistry.

Second, Ames demonstrates well the inter-connections and cross-pollination of the Reformed world. He was an English Puritan who taught at a Dutch university and who was most influential in New England, especially at Harvard College and amongst the Congregationalists. Moreover, this book deals with a great German creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, and was originally printed in Latin in Franeker, Friesland (1).

Third, we see in Ames and his *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism* a fusion of Reformed theology and piety, doctrine and practice. This was served by the Ramist theological method and rigorous scholarship, including a discriminating use of Latin translations of the Old Testament

(always the Tremellius-Junius version, with a few of Ames' own emendations) and the New Testament (usually the Beza version, with several Amesian variations) (xxix-xxx, 231-238).

Ames' *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism* is the inaugural volume of the Classic Reformed Theology series under the general editorship of R. Scott Clark. It sounds like a fine project (pp. vii-xi) and one looks forward to more scholarly critical English translations of primary texts of Reformed orthodoxy. ●

An A-Z Guide to Biblical Prophecy and the End Times, by J. Daniel Hays, J. Scott Duvall, and C. Marvin Pate. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012. 512 pages. Paperback $12.99. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

Do you know what an "atbash" is? To what do the terms "chaoskampf" and "gematria" refer? Have you ever wanted a concise explanation of five different views of the rapture (pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, post-tribulation, pre-wrath, and partial rapture)? A place to turn for an overview of five different views of the book of Revelation (eclectic, historicist, futurist, idealist, and preterist)? Or a simple explanation of the difference of the millennial views, or of the distinction between historic premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism?

This book offers all that, and much more.

The substance of this book was published some years ago under the title *Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and the End Times*. The present volume is the softcover edition, with a revised title, and an attractive price.

In this book the authors give a brief description of many things that pertain to Biblical prophecy and the end times. The descriptions appear in alphabetical order by name—from "Abomination of Desolation" to "Zionism." The book includes overviews of:

- The Bible's prophetic books—the four major and twelve minor prophets, the four gospel accounts, Genesis, Psalms, 1 and II Thessalonians, II Timothy, and

Revelation. The books of I and II Samuel and I and II Kings are briefly treated in connection with the person of Samuel. Also an article is devoted to the apocryphal book Fourth Ezra.

- The prophets mentioned in the Bible, including prophetesses. For example, under "A" one will find articles about Agabus, Ahijah the Shilonite, and Anna.
- People and places in secular history in whom prophecies are fulfilled, such as Alexander the Great, Antichrist, Antiochus Epiphanes, and various Caesars; and Euphrates River, Israel, Rome, Turkey, United States, and more. Their comments under the article United States are brief (less than half a page), and can be stated in their own words: "Many wonder if biblical prophecy refers to the United States in any way. The answer to that question is 'no'" (466).
- Terms found in the prophetic books, such as Balm of Gilead, Four Living Creatures, Merkabah (the Hebrew word for "chariot"), Rewards, Seed of the Woman, and more.
- Approaches to the interpretation of prophecy. Atbash and Gematria both refer to an attempt to explain Scripture by finding numerical codes in it. The authors do not advocate this approach to prophecy, but include it as an approach which some use. In this connection they explain the different millennial views, and various interpretations of Revelation.

The value of this book is twofold: first, it serves as an informative reference guide; second, the authors present the material objectively, without trying to advocate their own approach to prophecy.

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Two questions arose in my mind as I read this book.

First, what is the authors' view of prophesy and its fulfillment? Which is essentially the same as asking, what is their millennial view?

All three authors are professors at Ouachita Baptist University; J. Daniel Hays is professor of Old Testament, J. Scott Duvall of New Testament, and C. Marvin Pate of Theology. Because they teach at a Baptist university, it is reasonable to assume that they are Baptists.

Not surprisingly, then, they are not postmillennials. While they explain the postmillennial view at appropriate points in the

book, they also point out basic ways in which postmillennial teachings contradict clear statements in the Bible (336). Although I am no postmillennial, I think they are too optimistic in saying that "in the latter part of the twentieth century, postmillennialism has declined sharply, so that today only a small minority of scholars adheres to it" (336).

From the authors' negative critique of dispensationalism, and their lack of critique of historic premillennialism, the reader gathers that they favor the latter. Especially does this come out in their article "Premillennialism, Historic." They do not view the fulfillment of prophecy as being "literal," as the dispensationalist does. They look for one bodily coming of Christ at the end of the great tribulation, do not expect a rapture, expect the church to be on earth during the Tribulation, and view "the church as the fulfillment of Israel or the 'true Israel'" (342).

They differ from amillennialists especially in their view of what the millennium is/will be, and in their view of Revelation 20:1-10. This comes out also in their article "Amillennialism"—containing a fair, although by no means thorough, treatment of the doctrine. They are not entirely correct, however, in their fundamental explanation of the amillennialist view of Revelation 20: "The 'thousand years' mentioned in Revelation 20 symbolize the heavenly reign of Christ with Christians who have already died and gone to be with Christ" (24). They do not mention the amillennialist's explanation of the reign of Christ as being over all earthly history, over His church yet on earth, and over the kingdoms of this world.

The second question in the back of my mind was, what is the authors' view of the covenant?

They devote several articles to this topic. Some relate explicitly—Abrahamic Covenant, Covenant of Peace, Covenant Theology (with a paragraph about the covenant of works), Davidic Covenant, Levitical Covenant, New Covenant, Two-Covenant Theory. Other articles relate implicitly—Church, Church Age; New Israel; People of God. Interestingly, they have no article on Noah or the Noahic Covenant; and while they refer to the Mosaic Covenant at various points throughout the book, they have no article exclusively devoted to that subject either.

As indicated already, their view of who constitute God's covenant people is fundamentally correct: Israel of old, and the church now, are the people of God. In their words, "the people of God are those in both the Old and New Testament eras who have responded to God by faith and whose spiritual origin rests exclusively in God's grace" (329).

They view God's covenant with Abraham as "a unilateral covenant to which God bound himself by his promise," and which God fulfills on His own "without placing conditional stipulations on Abraham and his descendants" (11). By contrast, the Mosaic covenant "was a 'two-sided' or 'bilateral' agreement; indeed, it was a covenant of law (although certainly God's grace can be seen in this covenant as well)" (11).

Yet the authors nowhere tip their hand in favor of covenant theology, nor clearly explain what the covenant is. Although they do speak of the foundational nature of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, I surmise that they do not view God's covenant as the theme which unites all of Scripture, but rather view God's covenant as a specific promise which He made to specific people, which promise He remembers throughout all history as He gathers His people and prepares to send Christ again.

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Of passing interest was their article on Ultradispensationalism, which they trace to the teachings of E.W. Bullinger, and in which camp they place "C.R. Stam, Charles F. Baker, and others associated with the Grace Bible College in Grand Rapids, Michigan..." (465).

The authors are to be faulted for their suggestion that Isaiah 7:14 speaks not of a "virgin" but of a "young woman" (468).

The book includes a helpful Scripture index, but omits a subject index, and particularly an index of the topics that are treated. The reader has to glance through the entire book, to see its contents. If this book were ever reprinted or republished under any title, a subject index would be a helpful addition, and would take very little work to create. ●

A Reader's Guide to Calvin's Institutes, by Anthony N. S. Lane. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009. 174 pages. Paperback $15.00. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

This is a "reader's guide" to aid in reading the 1960 McNeill-Battles translation of Calvin's *Institutes*. Anthony Lane informs the reader at the outset: "This volume...is not a book to be read in its own right but functions purely as a reading guide." And a paragraph later, "This volume could be used in conjunction with a different translation of the *Institutes*, but a significant amount of material would then no longer be relevant" (9).

To guide one in studying the *Institutes* in a classroom setting, or in reading the *Institutes* on one's own, Lane divided the *Institutes* into thirty-two reading sections. On average, each section is eighteen pages long, though the shortest reading is eleven pages and the longest is twenty-eight. The "Table of Reading Lengths" is a two page appendix to the book (173-174). Using this system one reads through the *Institutes* over the course of a 16-week semester in which a class meets twice a week. Of course, using this system, one would not read every word of the *Institutes*; Lane's objective is to help the reader "cover all of Calvin's positive theology, while missing most of his polemics against his opponents and most of the historical material" (9-10). So, as Lane treats a particular section of the *Institutes*, he might make a comment such as "the second paragraph may be omitted" or "read the final sentence."

In the book Lane gives a summary of the *Institutes*—not a substantive summary (as is the Reformed Free Publishing Association publication by David Engelsma, *The Reformed Faith of John Calvin*) but a very brief summary. He covers an entire section of the *Institutes* in one paragraph, and sometimes even one sentence. He also includes brief summaries of the polemical and historical sections which he suggests the reader omit, so that the reader still has the basic thrust of Calvin's point.

Already, the book's positive value becomes evident—the book helps a reader, be he seminary student, busy pastor, or layman, to tackle the significant undertaking of reading Calvin's *magnus opus*.

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The book opens with a fourteen page survey of Calvin's life and work, an overview of the five editions of the *Institutes*, a statement of the purpose of the *Institutes*, and notes regarding the structure of the 1559 edition.

I appreciated Lane's balanced assessment of Calvin's role in the execution of Servetus ("Calvin must be judged against the background of his times," 14) and Lane's defense of Calvin against the accusation that he was "dictator of Geneva" ("his authority was primarily moral rather than legal," 14).

The next section of the book is a two page "Introduction to the Notes," in which Lane points out one major flaw with the McNeill-Battles translation:

> Though it aims to be a faithful translation of Calvin's text, no such care has been taken with Calvin's references. So, when it comes to biblical references, the fact that a passage is cited in the text...is absolutely no guarantee that Calvin cited it or even had it in mind..... So it is totally unreliable as an indicator of Calvin's citation of Scripture. The same applies to Calvin's citation of patristic and medieval authors (24).

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Lane is candid enough to inform the reader up front that, although an objective summary is his main goal, he does "occasionally discuss how the teaching might apply to today and also occasionally offer critical comments" (9). "Occasionally" means relatively seldom. The book contains some commentary, but very little.

Some of Lane's critical comments regard Calvin's method of defending his propositions. Perhaps Lane agrees with Calvin's main point, but at times Calvin is "a little too slick" (44), or "more dualist/Platonist here than most scholars now understand the New Testament to be" (55), or "very medieval" (68).

Even so, Lane's critical comments reveal something significant about Lane: unlike Calvin, Lane is not a staunch champion of sovereign, irresistible grace.

He does not agree with Calvin's doctrine of total depravity: "Calvin strongly emphasizes human sinfulness, perhaps excessively so" (36). Later he summarizes Calvin accurately

("Sin affects the whole of human nature. No part is exempt" [67]), then adds his own comment in parenthesis: "(This is what is meant by the (unfortunate) term "total depravity": not that humanity is as bad as possible, but that no part of our nature (e.g., our reason) is exempt from the taint of sin)" (67). Later he undermines Calvin's view that "*every* deed of the ungodly is sinful" (115) and that "even as believers our best works fall short of perfection" (117) by calling this a "hard position" and asking the reader: "Do you agree with him?" (115, 117).

Nor does Lane present Calvin as teaching limited atonement: "Calvin appears to teach that Christ's work is for all, but the application of it is only for some" (98). Even more significant than this statement, is the footnoted comment made in connection with it: "There has been considerable controversy about Calvin's relation to the later idea of limited atonement. He does not address the question directly, but the thrust of his teaching points to universal rather than limited atonement" (98). Perhaps some of Calvin's statements raise the question whether he teaches universal atonement; but a fair assessment of Calvin, in light of all his writings (commentaries included) is that he denies universal atonement. I get the impression that Lane knows this, because later, when commenting on Calvin's explanations of Scripture passages that refer to God's desire that all be saved, Lane says that Calvin "does not take these texts seriously enough" (133). Why? Perhaps because Calvin knows that it is *not* God's will that every human be saved, and so does not confuse the word "all" in these texts with the word "every"?

In addition to these doctrinal differences with fundamental aspects of Calvin's teaching, Lane alleges that Calvin "misrepresented and then chastised" Thomas Aquinas, who was "in fact...much closer to Calvin than he realized" (130, referring to *Institutes* 3.22.9), and that Calvin "grossly misrepresents those who believed in a millennium" (134, referring to *Institutes* 3.25.5).

Lane's commentary - specifically, when he differs from Calvin on the doctrines of sovereign grace—is the weakness of the book. However, these comments are sparse; and Lane makes clear to the reader when he is summarizing Calvin, and

when he is giving his own commentary.

Some people would be able to read through the *Institutes* without this reader's guide. I recommend this book for any layperson, members of a Bible study group, or of a book reading club, who want to read through the *Institutes*, but are daunted by the task. This book will help make the task manageable. ●

Comforting Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Heidelberg Catechism, Starr Meade, P&R Books, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2013. Paperback, 255 pp. [Reviewed by Martyn McGeown.]

Starr Meade has written a beautiful and worthwhile book. It is commendable to see a book on family devotions which does not dumb down doctrine for children or ignore doctrine altogether in favour of silly stories; and it is heartwarming to see our beloved *Heidelberg Catechism* itself used as the basis of family devotions. The same author has written a devotional based on the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* so this is her second "creedal devotional" work.

The aim of the book is to have families memorize the *Heidelberg Catechism* and discuss its doctrines together as a family. A worthy aim indeed! To that end, Meade arranges her material so it covers a whole year of fifty two weeks, with a short mediation for every day Monday through Saturday, not including Sundays. The meditations range from about eight to fifteen lines each, some being as short as six lines, others as long as twenty-five lines, so each week of devotions (including the text of the *Heidelberg Catechism* itself) is about four to five pages long. In each devotional, there are suggested passages from the Bible to be read and discussed as a family. Meade does not indicate the age group of the children who might profit from this book, but it is clear that she has children, indeed young children, in mind. The language is very simple and unadorned, and the many illustrations are directed toward children. Meade does an excellent job explaining theological concepts to young minds and applying them to young hearts. Ministers, who teach catechism

and who desire not to go over the heads of the lambs in their sermons, could benefit from this book.

Let me give a few examples of illustrations so you can get a feel for the book. On the Seventh Commandment: "A husband commits adultery when he treats a woman who isn't his wife in the special way he should only treat his wife…. Any kind of moral impurity is wrong in God's eyes. These would include dressing immodestly, or looking at pictures of people with too little clothing, or listening to 'dirty' jokes, or thinking impure thoughts" (208-209). On providence: "To know that God is behind everything that happens means that, when you're enjoying something truly wonderful, there's a someone to whom to say, 'Thank you." *Someone* who loves you dearly gave this wonderful thing to you. He arranged for you to enjoy it today" (61, Meade's italics). On heaven: "Sometimes you may wonder if you really want to go to heaven. You may be happy with your life here. If we could ask an unborn baby, still inside his mother, if he wants to come out, he would probably say no. He's safe, comfortable and warm. He has everything he needs. But he has no idea how wonderful it is to run, and sing and make friends and eat cherries and see rainbows" (125). On the kingdom: "God's kingdom is his rule over people's hearts and lives. It is a kingdom of grace now, bringing sinners to God, forgiving them, and changing their lives. It will be a kingdom of glory later, when no one is left to rebel against it" (237).

This book has some further commendable features. It takes the covenantal approach to children, treating the children of believers as members of the church and children of God. It promotes assurance of salvation (the theme of comfort) and is mostly free of common grace theology. There are a few hints of it but the theological emphasis is solidly Calvinistic (84, 112). My only major quibble is on the sacraments: the treatment and explanation of the meaning of the sacraments are generally excellent, but Meade leaves out Q.A. 80 (on the Mass), opining that "there has been concern among those who use this catechism that the position of the Roman Catholic Church may not be stated accurately" (160) and, supposedly to appeal to a broader audience, leaves the subject of

infant baptism an open question (144-146) which the *Heidelberg Catechism* certainly does not!

Having read this book, and seen how simply and beautifully the *Heidelberg Catechism* can be explained to children and used devotionally for that purpose, I ask myself: Why have the PRCA never written a book like this? Could not the devotionals on the *Heidelberg Catechism* commissioned by our brethren in Singapore, and shared on the Heidelberg Catechism Conference website, be compiled, edited and produced into a book. Would the RFPA be interested? ●

A Westminster Divine and *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*

The Way to Heaven, by John Philips (1585-1663), edited by C. Matthew McMahon & Therese McMahon. Puritan Publications, USA, 2013. 120 pages. Paperback $14.99, eBook $7.99. ISBN: 978-1-938721-95-3, eISBN: 978-1-938721-94-6. [Reviewed by Angus Stewart.]

Introduction

Some in our day claim that it is Roman Catholic or "extremist" to teach that outside the church there is no salvation (Latin: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), even though this is the teaching of the historic Christian church, from the church fathers onwards, including the Reformers, their successors and the Reformation creeds: Luther's Larger Catechism, the Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Belgic Confession, Article 28, Second Helvetic Confession, Article 17 and Westminster Confession 25:2. Despite the provenance of the last-mentioned creed, some reckon that this doctrine is not really "British," but rather continental, foreign to "this sceptred isle."

John Philips' recently republished work should dispel all such erroneous notions. This book of 120 pages is a sustained argument that eternal life is only found in Christ's church, for it is, as its title proclaims, *The Way to Heaven* for those eternally elected by God,

redeemed by Jesus Christ, irresistibly drawn by the Spirit and justified by faith alone.

John Philips or Phillips (1585-1663) was as British and, specifically, English, as one could be. Educated at Cambridge (B.A. and M.A.), he served pastorates in Suffolk and Kent. He ministered not only in England but also in Massachusetts in New England, then a British colony, before returning to (old) England. His wife, Elizabeth, was the sister of William Ames (1576-1633), a Congregationalist theologian, who laboured both in England and the Netherlands, where he observed the great Synod of Dordt (1618-1619). Philips began his ministry an Anglican or episcopalian, was a member of the largely Presbyterian Westminster Assembly and became congregational in his ecclesiology.

Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus

Philips (or his publisher, Felix Kingston of London) advertises and accurately summarizes the argument and content of *The Way to Heaven* in its original (1625) title page. The following six points are listed beneath the book's title, to which I have added comments in square brackets which further elucidate our author's reasoning:

> *1. That salvation is only in the Church* [the main thesis of the book]
> *2 What the Church is* [in which alone salvation is found]
> *3 By what means men are added to the Church* [in which alone salvation is found]
> *4 The Author, or Efficient of this addition* [to the Church in which alone salvation is found]
> *5. The time and continuance of that work* [of adding men to the Church in which alone salvation is found]
> *6. The happiness of those that are added to the Church* [and so enjoy salvation which is found only there] (6)

To this is appended the following pertinent biblical text: "This is the way, walk in it" (Is. 30:21). The point is that the church is the way to heaven (as Philips' title puts it) for those justified by faith alone in Christ alone and so God's people must "walk in it" (6).

After his "Introductory Letter" (7-20), the English Puritan introduces his subject and makes some remarks on the (highly significant) text for his work: "And

the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47) (21-22), from which he draws "four remarkable observations:"

> The first is the way to salvation; and that is, by being added to the Church.
>
> The second is the Efficient Author of this addition, and that is the Lord God.
>
> The third is the time and continuance of this work; and that is καθ ἡμέραν, daily, or from day to day.
>
> The fourth is the happy end of such as are added to the Church, and that is salvation. They all, and they only, are such as shall be saved (22).

Turning to his "first observation," the English theologian presents his thesis: "it must be known and believed of all that desire salvation that the *Regia via*, the King of kings' highway to heaven is the Church, without which Church, there is no salvation" (23).

To "demonstrate this truth," Philips turns first of all to the typology of "the ark of Noah, in which was most lively figured the Church of God. A type, twice alleged by Saint Peter, to this very purpose: to show that salvation is and only is in the Church" (23). This imagery has been judged by a few as popish when used by Prof. Engelsma in his *Bound to Join,* but it is cited as the first proof by a Westminster divine and referred to continually by him (e.g., 23, 46-48, 93, 104, 118-119). It is also found in Heinrich Bullinger's 1566 *Second Helvetic Confession* 17. Second, Philips explains the head-body union between Jesus Christ and His church (24).

Next, our author appeals to four other oft-recurring biblical pictures of the church: "This position, that salvation is to be had only in the Church, is not obscurely noted by those sacred families, so frequent in scripture, where the Church is resembled [1] to a house; [2] to a city, [3] to a mother, [4] to a vine" (24).

After treating each of these four in turn (25-30), the Westminster Assembly member identifies *extra ecclesia nulla salus* as a "divine truth" (46) or "doctrine" taught in the perspicuous Scriptures: "This doctrine of salvation in the Church only is not only thus illustrated by the bright-shining light of so many divine similitudes and parables, but is also warranted by evident and

invincible reason, grounded on the word of God" (31).

Then Philips states two "undeniable" principles: first, "there is only one saving truth" which "truth is nowhere to be found but in the Church of God" (Is. 16:2; I Tim. 3:15; John 16:13) and, second, "there are certain graces that accompany salvation (Heb. 6:9) which are the peculiar of the Church of God," namely, "The grace of election, the grace of vocation, the grace of justification, and the grace of sanctification; all of which jointly and independently have their period and end in glorification...(Rom. 8:30)" (31-32).

This opening section of *The Way to Heaven* is remarkable in that at least once, and sometimes two or three times, it is explicitly stated on each of its twelve pages (22-33), in varying formulations, that "salvation and freedom from eternal and utter ruin belongs only to the Church, the House of God, built firmly on the rock Jesus Christ" (25).

Next, Philips treats individually four steps in the *ordo salutis* or order of salvation: election, calling, justification and sanctification (33-42), showing how each is "such a property of the Church that it cannot possibly be separated from it" (34). "To conclude then, if there is no salvation without election, calling, justification, and sanctification; and none of these to be found, but only in the Church of God, it follows necessarily that there is no salvation out of the Church" (42).

So far we have considered the Westminster divine's arguments for *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* under two major heads: arguments from biblical images of the church (23-31) and arguments from the *ordo salutis* (32-42). Now we consider his third major head: arguments from the means of salvation, which are placed by God in Christ's church (42-45).

The Englishman explains the idea of the means of salvation and notes their ecclesiastical provenance:

> There are certain means appointed of God to work and increase saving grace, which if they shall be found to be the prerogative of the Church, it cannot be denied, but that only there salvation is to be had; for in reason, the end cannot ordinarily be attained without the means leading unto it (42).

Philips enumerates four "means to effect and perfect man's salvation:" "the written Word of God, called the Scriptures, the ministry of preaching the Word, the two sacraments of the New Testament, and prayer" (43). Quoting many apposite texts of God's Word, he proves that "these are the prerogatives of the Church" (43) and concludes, "Then we see that the means of salvation being only in the Church, salvation itself is only there, and not to be found elsewhere" (45).

On the basis of the foregoing (21-45), our Westminster divine makes four applicatory "remarks" (46). The first three expose errorists: people who think that those who lead "an outward civil life" may be saved in any religion, worldlings with no regard to the true religion and schismatics who "separate themselves from the society of the Church" over matters "merely adiaphorous or indifferent" (46-47).

The English Puritan's last and longest application is a forceful exhortation to join a true church:

> This calls all men with a most forcible invitation, even as ever they desire to be saved, to enter timely into this straight gate that leads to life (Matt. 7:14). Many of the Egyptians and other strangers, when they saw the great works God did for his Church, and in what safe and happy condition the people were in, they were over; they left their own country alliance and friends, and joined themselves to the Jews (Exod. 12:38). This we should do—forsake all, and follow Christ (Mark 10:28); leave all societies for the communion of the saints; for the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, but was fain to return into the ark again (Gen 8:9): so let a man compass the whole world, yet shall he never be able to find rest to his soul, until by entering into the Church, he take Christ's yoke on him (Matt. 11:29) (48).

Three Objections

First, someone might object that Philips is teaching that there is no salvation outside the *invisible* church, the company of the predestinate. But even our consideration of *The Way to Heaven* so far excludes this, especially its treatment of the preaching and sacraments (43-45) which are found in the church institute, for "the roadway [to heaven] is to be

joined with some visible orthodox congregation" (47).

The second "branch to be considered" in Philips' treatise, "what the Church is, where salvation is to be had" (49), is especially clear in answering this objection. The Westminster divine is careful "to distinguish the Orthodox and true Church from heretical assemblies" (56), sects or factions (49). The key issue for Philips is the marks or identifying characteristics of a true church. Our English theologian identifies two marks, faithful preaching and sacramental administration (55-58, 87-90), as do article 19 of *The Thirty-Nine Articles* (55) and John Calvin, though the latter also puts a high premium on proper church discipline.

Our Puritan also recalls the context of the theme text (Acts 2:47) for his book, for Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost issued a call to repent and receive the sacrament of water baptism (Acts 2:37-38). The Westminster divine concludes, "The visible Church then, where whosoever will be saved must be reconciled, is the Congregation of the faithful" (59; cf. Acts 2:41-47).

After distinguishing two major uses of the word "church" in Scripture—the invisible church of all the elect and the visible church of particular, instituted congregations (52-56)—Philips concludes, "from hence we may derive the true definition of the Church, where they must be united that ever looked to be saved" (54). Then our theologian of old England and New England clearly declares that those who are saved are truly part of the church invisible *and* the church visible, helpfully repeats the key relationship between means and end, and admirably unites his Reformed ecclesiology and soteriology:

> It is out of all controversy that such [as are saved] must be the number of the elect (according to the first notion of the Church) as hath been shown before, upon the point of election, being the first grace, and fountain of all other graces accompanying salvation. But yet, because the elect are not subject to the eyes of men, but are only known to God, the sacred Scriptures direct us everywhere to the visible Church, according to the second notion: for whomsoever God does elect to the end, those he appoints to the means tending to that end. Such therefore as desire salvation,

> must join themselves to the visible Church, by the ordinary way and means of effectual calling, justification, and sanctification; all which graces express themselves visibly to the eye of the world, by their effects and properties, causing the faithful to shine as a light in a dark place (54-55).

Notice again the call to church membership: "the sacred Scriptures direct us everywhere to the visible Church.... Such therefore as desire salvation, must join themselves to the visible Church."

Second, a reader who is more familiar with fundamentalism or revivalism or modern evangelicalism (which are largely Anabaptist) than with the Reformed creeds and theology might think that Philips' ship is sailing near Rome. Far from it!

Philips engages in a lively polemic with the "Romish church" and its "Antichristian religion" (16), including its councils, publications and theologians, such as Cassander, Baronius, Bellarmine (especially), the Douay-Rheims Bible and Trent. This is evident throughout *The Way to Heaven* (e.g., 114-117) and especially in its lengthy second "branch" (49-105) which builds on the first "branch" which explained "that salvation is only to be found in the Church" by showing "what the Church is, where salvation is to be had" (105).

Our author shows himself a skilful controversialist particularly in his treatment of "a few" of "the manifold errors of the Romish church" (65). The English theologian ably refutes "a short catalogue" of thirteen of them (65-87), such as Rome's doctrines of papal authority, images, transubstantiation, private Masses, invocation of saints, etc., in order to give "a taste of the rest" which are also "palpably gross" (65).

Third, a reader with some grasp of Reformed soteriology with its *sola fide* but little knowledge of Reformed ecclesiology with its *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* might think that Philips is denying or compromising justification by faith alone. Not at all! Our Westminster divine is rock solid on this article of a standing or a falling church and especially deals with it in two different connections in *The Way to Heaven* (35-40, 108-111).

Philips gives this definition: "Justification, then, is an action of God, by which he, pardoning

all sins, imputes righteousness to every true believer, out of his free grace and mercy, only on the merit of Jesus Christ" (36), which he then develops under six heads (36-39).

Head four unfolds the phrase "every true believer" as follows:

> This righteousness is imputed to every true believer: for it is faith only by which we apprehend Christ with all his benefits.... It is here that faith only is said to justify, because it is the only instrumental cause of our justification, in that it alone doth apprehend Christ, by whom we are justified. Scriptures for this are plentiful, "from all things," says St. Paul in his sermon at Antioch, "from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses, by Christ, everyone that believeth, is justified" (Acts 13:39). And disputing the question of justification, he so determines it, "Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law" (Rom. 3:28) (38).

Model Work

In various ways, *The Way to Heaven* presents a model of theological method. First, John Philips copiously quotes pertinent Scriptures. Second, he frequently appeals to the church's historic creeds: the *Apostles' Creed*, the *Nicene Creed*, the *Athanasian Creed* and *The Thirty-Nine Articles*, as well as the Book of Common Prayer. Third, he cites fitting instances in church history and felicitous passages from ecclesiastical authors, such as Cyprian, Hilary, Athanasius, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine (especially), Leo, Gregory, Bede, Theophylact, Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Lombard, Duns Scotus, Luther, Calvin, Chemnitz, William Fulke and others, as well as "secular" authors, such as Scipio, Seneca, Laurentius Valla, Erasmus and Polydore Virgil.

Our Westminster divine has a strong doctrine of God's sovereign grace (e.g., 32-42) over against man's alleged free will (116). He does not read into I Timothy 2:4 a frustrated divine desire to convert all men head for head; instead, he writes that "all men whom God will have saved, he will have 'to come to the knowledge of the truth' (I Tim. 2:4)" (31). Nor does Philips write of any futile wish in God to deliver absolutely everybody in II Peter 3:9, as if that explained why Christ has

not returned. Rather, the Lord is adding to His church "daily, or from day to day…to the last day." Indeed, this divine work shall not fail until "the number of the elect is once complete." "This consideration of the time is of excellent use. It shows the patience of God, in waiting so long from day to day for conversion (II Pet. 3:9)" (117).

As befits one with a solid soteriology and ecclesiology, Puritan Philips explains that often elect believers are a "remnant," a minority even in the visible church (95-101). All "promises," "privileges," "prerogatives" and "benefits" of the church belong to those "effectually called," "the Israel of God, the Children of the Promise," says our Westminster divine, explicitly appealing to Romans 9 and citing Paul, Peter and Augustine in support:

> That where many excellent privileges and comfortable promises belong to the Church, we must know that the sound and good heart only, and not the corrupt, is capable of those benefits. "I dare not," St. Augustine says, speaking of the prerogatives of the Church, "understand this, but of just and holy men." Therefore, St. Paul ties privileges to the true Israel of God, the Children of Promise (Rom. 9:4, 6, 8). And St. Peter, the promises, to them that are effectually called (Acts 2:39). By this we may see, both that the chief and most eminent, yes and the greatest number in the Church, if they lack true saving grace, have no right to the privileges and promises of the Church, though they live in the midst of it (99).

Note too that that these "comfortable promises belong to…the sound and good heart *only*, and *not the corrupt*…[who] have *no right* to the privileges and promises of the Church, though they live in the midst of it." Sounds very much like Herman Hoeksema on the covenant!

As regards the sacraments, our English theologian agrees with Calvin's teaching on Christ's real, spiritual presence in the Lord's Supper (74) and on baptism as an "effectual seal" of the "covenant" 111-113). Philips opposes the Anabaptists' rejection of infant baptism (113) and warns against "neglecting so weighty a duty," arguing, "If the Jew, for the neglect of Circumcision was to be cut off, how shall the Christian be

excusable (Gen. 17:14)? How shall he escape for the omitting of so great a Sacrament (Heb. 2:3)?" (114).

Our author also has some powerful applications to preachers and hearers (106-108), concluding with these words, "Set down then this resolution in your heart, with the faithful in the Psalm; 'I will hear what God the Lord shall speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his Saints: but let not them turn again to folly' (Ps. 85:8)" (108).

Conclusion

Matthew McMahon and his wife, Therese, are to be commended for editing, updating and publishing this "very famous work" (5), John Philips' *The Way to Heaven*. Well done!

If this reprinting of the book is important, the occasion for its first printing is unusual and intriguing: the misconstrual of one of his funeral sermons, which report was seized upon by a censor, as Philips explains in part of his "Introductory letter" (10-18).

If misconstruals and one censor occasioned the publication of John Philips' *The Way to Heaven* by Felix Kingston in London in 1625, many misconstruals by many censors arose before and after the publication of Prof. Engelsma's *Bound to Join* by the RFPA in Jenison in 2010. Moreover, if the Westminster divine had lived in the twenty-first century and members of the British Reformed Fellowship in 2004 had asked him for instruction on joining a true church, he would have given essentially the same answer as Prof. Engelsma, except that the Puritan would have been more detailed on *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* than the Professor![1] ●

1 For more on *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* in the Christian and Reformation tradition, see Angus Stewart, "*Bound to Join*: Review and Defence" (www.cprf.co.uk/articles/boundtojoinreview.htm).

The Best Method of Preaching, by Petrus Van Mastricht, translated and introduced by Todd M. Rester. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013. 82 pages. Paperback $10.00. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

"This little book on preaching, translated from Latin and Dutch, is intended to whet your appetite for what is to come in the projected publication of Petrus van Mastricht's massive dogmatics, *Theoretico-practica Theologia*, which is presently being translated and published by the conjoined efforts of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society and Reformation Heritage Books" (21).

Why a book on *preaching* to whet our appetite for a book on *theology*? Todd Rester indicates the reason in his introduction: Mastricht was convinced that the study of theology must have the practical purpose of promoting godly living; and that the way in which the theologian/pastor makes this purpose plain to the people is by preaching.

Rester proceeds in his twenty page introduction to introduce us to Mastricht (1630-1706), who served both as pastor, and later as professor of Hebrew and theology in the University of Duisburg and later the University of Utrecht. Rester informs the reader of the influence of Johannes Hoornbeeck and Gisbertus Voetius on Mastricht, and of Mastricht's polemics against Cartesian philosophy.

The body of van Mastricht's treatise begins on page 23 with his own preface to his work, in which he sets forth four advantages of using a theoretical-practical method of preaching - for the minister in his sermon preparation, for the hearers in their following the sermon, for clear instruction and for the practice of piety. In the next eight chapters, Mastricht sets forth his method. While Mastricht did divide his treatise into sections or headings, the editors made these into various chapters. They regard the basics of sermon arrangement, sermon introductions, exegeting and explaining the text, preaching doctrinally, preaching to comfort believers, preaching against sin, preaching for self-examination, and exhorting unto good works.

Chapter 9 is entitled "Cautions, Handling Lengthy Texts,

and Delivery." And the final chapter emphasizes again why this method is the best method.

Let me defend Mastricht's use of the term "theoretical." Were someone to use that term to refer to my preaching, I would question either my ability to understand and present the material clearly, or my critic's ability to receive sound doctrine. For Mastricht, the term "theoretical-practical" preaching refers to the faithful doctrine of the text, clearly understood and expounded for the edification of the people. It is a good term.

The book is full of good reminders to the preacher: divide the sermon in a way that promotes the people's understanding; don't explain at length what is obvious; show that the doctrine in the text rests on other Scriptures as well, and is practical; defend that doctrine against error; engage in controversy when necessary, but then only in those controversies which are relevant to the times and to the people, not in those which are long dead; comfort the people regarding their sins, their anxieties, their earthly struggles, and their upcoming death; call the sinner to repentance; point the people to the way of godliness.

Throughout the book, as he presents his method, Mastricht demonstrates it by referring to Colossians 3:1. By the end of the book, the reader understands how Mastricht would preach that text.

The book is brief—82 pages long, of which 53 contain the body of the work itself. The book's dimensions are small; the type is amply spaced; some pages between chapters are blank. All of which means, first, that the book is a quick read, and second, that the book illustrates a principle which to Mastricht was fundamental: brevity (26). Don't misunderstand—Mastricht is not in favor of 15 minute homilies which merely skim the surface of the text. His sermons would be meaty; I dare not say how long they would last. But they would not stray from the doctrine and application of the text; would not be dense, scholarly, and learned; their goal would be to leave the people with substantial spiritual food and reason for reflection.

The reader notices that the content of the book is centuries old. Mastricht's writing style reflects the times in which he lived: sentences are long, and are phrased in such a way that

the reader must read slowly to understand Mastricht's point.

Finally (I'm striving for brevity in this review), reading the chapter "Preaching for Self-Examination," one can see why the *Nadere Reformatie* and Puritan preachers liked Mastricht so well - his approach to self-examination was not merely that of the Reformed confessions in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 81 and 82 and in the Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper; rather, it was that approach which encouraged deep introspection, required one to determine if he was in the state of sin or state of grace. Mastricht says:

> The goal of the examination is that when the investigation has been completed, those endowed with saving virtue and who have discerned that they are in the state of grace may be strengthened. And, on the contrary, those who labor in vices, especially deadly ones, are forcibly dragged to a concern, fear, and care for their correction (68). ●

The Church's Book of Comfort, edited by Willem van 't Spijker, translated by Gerrit Bilkes. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009, hardback, x + 291 pp. ISBN 978-1-60178-056-0 [Reviewed by Angus Stewart.]

The title of this fine work on the Heidelberg Catechism, *The Church's Book of Comfort*, alludes to the famous first question: "What is thy only comfort in life and death?" It consists of nine articles in seven chapters by six Dutch theological doctors, dealing with church history, biography, theology and catechetics, and complete with helpful pictures, boxed inserts and bibliographical details.

Summary of Contents

The opening chapter, "The Reformation in Germany," sets forth the historical background very well, dealing especially with Martin Luther, including his Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 (pp. 4-10), the spread of Lutheranism and the rise of Calvinism in Germany.

Chapter 2 homes in on Heidelberg, the center of the Palatinate

electorate, tracing the political and ecclesiastical developments from Elector Philip the Upright (1476-1508) to the godly Elector Frederick III (1559-1576), as the influences of Romanism, Lutheranism and Calvinism waxed and waned (pp. 27-38). The writing of the Heidelberg Catechism is set within progress in education, religious instruction and earlier catechisms (pp. 38-61).

"The People Behind the Heidelberg Catechism," the next chapter, focuses on "Two Crown Witnesses," Ursinus and Olevianus (pp. 67-74); before turning to two men in the theological faculty, Boquinus and Tremellius, a converted Jew (pp. 74-78); four church superintendents, Veluanus, Willing, Sylvanus and Eisenmenger (pp. 78-83); and the four remaining members of the Heidelberg consistory, Zirler, Diller, Zuleger, Erastus (pp. 83-88). These twelve men were a cosmopolitan lot, being born in what are now Poland, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland. This is a useful chapter, especially since it covers the lesser known figures.

From the more German context of the Heidelberg Catechism in chapters 1-3, chapters 5 and 6 move to the Netherlands. What religious instruction was communicated in family, school and church before and after the Reformation (pp. 129-139)? What were the main Reformed catechisms used by the Dutch in the sixteenth century before and after the publication of the Heidelberg Catechism (pp. 139-145)? What about Peter Dathenus, who translated the Catechism into Dutch and versified the Psalms (pp. 156-161), and Herman Faukelius, who abbreviated the Catechism in the Compendium in 1608 (pp. 161-163)? What about the recognition of the Catechism in the Dutch Reformed church in its synods and classes from Wezel in 1568 to Dordt in 1618-1619 (pp. 163-186)?

Chapter 6 treats, first, the preaching of Heidelberg Catechism sermons from the sixteenth to the twentieth century (pp. 187-199); second, collections of Heidelberg Catechism sermons in book form for the same period (pp. 199-210); third, the instruction of catechumens in classes using the Heidelberg Catechism up to the nineteenth century (pp. 211-250). It is within the best aspects of this tradition that the PRC stands, by God's grace, in-

cluding the Heidelberg Catechism Memory Books and Workbooks by Revs. Wilbur Bruinsma and Dale Kuiper, respectively.

Willem van 't Spijker ably sets forth "The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism" (ch. 4), which "superbly captured the message of the Reformation" (p. 89), and "The Continued Relevance of the Heidelberg Catechism" (ch. 7), comparing it with other Reformed creeds (pp. 251-264), defending it from criticism (pp. 264-270) and explaining its "eternal youth" (p. 94), as some have described it (pp. 270-272).

This brief summary of the contents of *The Church's Book of Comfort* hardly does it justice but it at least introduces some of the excellent subjects addressed.

Interesting and Helpful Material

The Church's Book of Comfort states the contemporary consensus on the authorship of the Heidelberg Catechism:

> Although the precise course of events leading to the appearance of the Heidelberg Catechism remains obscure, historical research of the last few years has led to the conclusion that Ursinus was its chief author. A draft prepared by him was approved by a team of collaborators from various factions, among whom Olevianus carried the most weight (pp. 60; cf. 54-55).

But not all those involved in the finalizing of the text of the Heidelberg Catechism ended well. Johannes Sylvanus moved from Roman Catholic to Lutheran to Zwinglian to Reformed views, before becoming an Arian! He was beheaded in the marketplace of Heidelberg, while his friend Adam Neuser, minister at St. Peter's Church in Heidelberg, fled to the anti-trinitarians in Transylvania, ending up a Muslim in Turkey (pp. 81-83)!

Frederick III's preface to the first edition of the Catechism (19 January, 1563) is helpfully cited in full (pp. 63-65), including these words on its origin and purpose, emphasizing the instruction of the youth of the church:

> For this reason, on the advice of our entire theological faculty here, also in cooperation with all superintendents and the chief ministers of the church, we have had prepared and compiled in both German and Latin a concise booklet of instruction or catechism of our

> Christian religion extracted from the Word of God. This was done so that in the future not only will our young people be instructed in the Christian doctrine in a godly manner and admonished in unanimity, but also so that pastors and schoolteachers themselves will have a reliable model and a solid standard as to how to approach the instruction of our young people, and so that they will not change one thing or another on a daily basis or introduce a contrary doctrine (p. 64).

This is true Reformed "youth ministry"!

The Elector's noble defence of the reformation in the Palatinate and the Heidelberg Catechism before Roman Catholic Emperor Maximilian II at the Imperial Diet of Augsburg in 1566 is also provided in a boxed insert (pp. 56-58):

> As far as my catechism is concerned, I confess it. In its margins it is also so solidly grounded in Holy Scripture that it has proven to be irrefutable. Indeed, thus far you yourself have not succeeded in doing so and I hope that with God's help it will continue to be irrefutable for a much longer period to come (p. 57).

Zurich Reformer Heinrich Bullinger highly praised the Heidelberg Catechism as the "best catechism" in a letter to Olevianus:

> I have read with great eagerness the Catechism that was produced with the encouragement of the eminent Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate, and while reading it I sincerely thanked God, who initiated and prospered this work. The structure of this book is clear, its content pure truth; everything is very easy to follow, devout and effective. In succinct conciseness it contains the fullness of the most important doctrines. I consider it to be the best catechism that has ever been published. Thanks be to God! May He crown it with His blessing (p. 252).

The Church Order of Heidelberg placed the Catechism after the baptism form and before the Lord's Supper form, clearly presenting a thorough catechizing of the covenant children and their believing response as the way from their (passive) reception of the first sacrament to their (active)

participation in the second sacrament (pp. 96-97). Moreover,

> The forms for the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper that are incorporated in this [Heidelberg] church order closely resemble the classical forms of the Dutch Reformed tradition. They express the "doctrine as taught here in these churches as the doctrine of complete salvation" (p. 97).

Around the turn of the sixteenth into the seventeenth century, profession of faith was typically made in the Palatinate at age 14 (p. 43).

Marten Micron's (1523-1559) Shorter Catechism (1552), one of the catechisms used in the Netherlands before Dathenus' 1566 Dutch translation of the Heidelberg Catechism, indicates a firm grasp of God's covenant with the children of believers. It defends infant baptism "on the grounds that small children share in God's salvation, not as a reflection of their profession, but on the basis of God's Word" (p. 142). Note also its care for deaf or mentally handicapped church members:

> 92. Q. Why was faith and its oral profession not equally demanded from the children of the church prior to baptism?
> A. The church has far surer confirmation of its salvation from the Word of God than from the profession of adults. And congenital illness, as a result of which some persons can neither believe nor make profession, is not counted against them for Christ's sake, in whom they are blessed—that is, regarded as holy, righteous, clean, and faithful—no less than are other adult believers. The same must be thought with respect to the baptism of adults of the church who are deaf or mentally handicapped (p. 142).

Indeed, *A Brief Orderly Summary* (1558), a catechism used in the Palatinate before the publication of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), concluded with "A Brief Christian Confession for Young Children and the Mentally Handicapped," in which the following three things are centrally confessed: "(1) I am a poor sinner, (2) I am saved by Christ, and (3) I confess that I am called to gratitude" (p. 50)—essentially, the three "parts" of our Heidelberg Catechism.

What Christian parent or

minister or elder is not moved by these words of a dying fourteen-year-old Dutch girl?

> My dear Father, I desire that thou wilt promise me that thou wilt go to Rev. De Witte and Rev. Ardinois and thank them that they have taught me catechism classes (for they teach the Catechism every Tuesday in the Mare Church, as their colleagues do in due course in other churches) and tell them that those beautiful Scripture references that they have taught me in their catechism classes have brought me so much comfort on my deathbed, indeed have brought me salvation. Oh! Oh! Those wonderful and lovely catechism classes that I always attended with so much joy and never once missed in all the time that I attended them ready to respond to questions (p. 223).

Also included are encouraging examples of ladies reading and discussing catechism sermons while ironing or sewing, or of saints reading aloud from a catechism sermon book to each other in their homes on the Lord's Day or through the week (pp. 205-208).

But not all in the Netherlands enjoyed Heidelberg Catechism preaching, especially, though not exclusively, the Arminians and worldly folk (pp. 187-199), with apostasy leading to dropping Catechism preaching which led to deeper apostasy (p. 199). Something to guard against here!

Besides the authorial labours of the six Dutch doctors, we must register our thanks for the translational work of three members of the Bilkes family, especially Gerrit, the main translator, for this was a big task (p. x). ●

When Life Goes Dark: Finding Hope in the Midst of Depression, by Richard Winter. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012. 272 pages. Paperback. $17.00. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

This book is about depression—*severe* depression. Severe depression is not just feeling in the dumps, or extreme self-pity. Severe depression is a biological/psychological/spiritual condition which significantly cripples a person's ability to function normally,

and which often requires a combination of medical, therapeutic, and pastoral treatment.

Perhaps you say, "Oh, I know someone who is depressed—they should read this book!" No, if they are experiencing severe depression at the moment, they should not read this book. Often those struggling with severe depression are in no position to read much at all—just a chapter of the Bible, or a brief devotional is enough. Before they can read a book about depression, they must work through their own depression.

The author intends the book for those who are "vulnerable to depression. It is for those who want to find ways to resist the slippery slopes and vicious circles of confused emotions that so often end in depression. And it is for those who offer comfort and counsel to the oppressed" (11). Such, I agree, could profit from this book.

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Many have taken in hand to write a book about depression.

Such books are helpful only to the degree that the author convinces his reader that he knows what he is talking about.

Some simply don't understand depression. I state this as a fact, not as a fault; assuming that they, their close friends, and their near relatives have never struggled with depression, I rejoice! That they don't understand depression they reveal by treating the matter simplistically—for example, by concluding that anyone who cries a lot is depressed, or that all depression is sin. A friend told me once: "The more I know about depression, the less I understand it." I've come to agree. Some people, by speaking as if they have the subject figured out, make evident that they don't know what they are talking about.

Other authors have some understanding of depression, even though neither they nor a close friend or family member have experienced it. They glean their understanding either from having studied depression, worked with depressed people, or studied the experiences of people in the Bible. Laying out biblical principles for dealing with struggles in one's life, such books are helpful, and such authors make a valid contribution.

But the author who knows his subject by personal experience will almost always resonate with the reader. Richard Winter

is qualified to write this book in three respects. First, he is a licensed psychiatrist. Second, he is a professor of practical theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, MO - the national seminary of the Presbyterian Church in America. Third, as an adult, and after finishing an earlier edition of this book in the 1980s, he himself experienced a time of depression. He speaks of the irony of his experiencing depression after the first edition of his book was published, "almost as if God was saying, 'You think you know a lot about depression, but let me teach you a thing or two'" (12).

*****

Winter's book is divided into two parts, each part having six chapters. After the second part is an appendix, which is essentially a thirteenth chapter. The book concludes with his endnotes, a name index, a subject index, and a Scripture index.

Part one is entitled "The Roots of Sorrow: *Nature's Effects and Nurture's Choices*."

In the first two chapters, he explains what depression is, and how it differs from other times in life in which one feels down. Quoting Charles Barber, "To confuse the two, depression with Depression, is to confuse a gentle spring rain with a vengeful typhoon" (22). Winter then distinguishes between severe depression and dysthymia (in layman's terms, between acute and chronic depression). He explains the difference in depression between men and women, and between adults and children. He includes a section regarding depression in Christians: "The Christian's struggle with depression is often complicated, because the Bible can seem irrelevant, prayer a pointless exercise, forgiveness impossible, and God far away - if he exists at all" (32). And in chapter two he treats the more specific matter of bipolar disorder and mania, with an excursus on "positive psychology" (the study of happiness).

The next three chapters deal with various factors that contribute to depression. Chapter three treats biochemical factors—personality, brain chemistry, genetics, physical illness, PMS, and postpartum depression. He also discusses the implications of this for medications and electroconvulsive therapy. Chapter four treats psychological factors, including child/parent relation-

ships, critical incidents in one's life, thought patterns, perfectionism, loss and separation, social and economic factors, childhood adversity, and learned responses. Chapter five deals with loss and grief—not only because of death, but also because of broken relationships, infertility, chronic illness, and living in the shadow of sin and the fall.

The first part concludes with a chapter about suicide. Winter explains why some people commit suicide, gives risk factors for others to determine if someone is more likely to commit suicide, and gives suggestions how to help such people.

Having finished describing depression, the author turns his attention in part two to giving principles for dealing with depression and helping depressed people. Part two is entitled "Coping With the Dark and Moving Toward the Light."

What does one do, who is at a breaking point, wishing he could die? In chapter 7, "Breaking Points and Suicidal Saints," Winter gives warnings and encouragements from the lives of Moses and Elijah.

How to cope with anxiety, worry, and fear is the subject of chapter 8. Winter distinguishes between healthy and unhealthy anxiety, and explains extreme fears such as phobias and generalized anxiety disorder, OCD, and posttraumatic stress disorder. In the last part of the chapter, he gives biblical principles for dealing with anxiety and fear.

Sometimes depression is rooted in anger and failure to forgive. In chapter 9 Winter explains how anger manifests itself (sometimes so disguised one doesn't recognize it as anger), how to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate anger, and the connection between anger and forgiveness. Again, Winter gives biblical principles for dealing with anger.

Guilt and shame can also be at the root of depression (chapter 10). Winter distinguishes the two: "If *guilt* is about what we have *done*, *shame* is about who we *are*" (p. 182). Sometimes the problem is *false* guilt (feeling guilty when one has not sinned) or *false* shame (feeling bad because other people say you are, rather than being truly ashamed at being a sinner); other times it consists of dealing with true guilt and shame by denying it, drowning it, shifting blame, and becom-

ing perfectionistic. People who struggle with these tendencies must be encouraged not to worry about what people think of them, but to believe God's forgiving grace, and to see that He restores His children and empowers us to live a transformed life.

Often those who are recovering from depression need to learn how to care for themselves - be sure to exercise, take breaks, learn now to say "no," learn how to express oneself in a healthy way, detect negative and sinful thoughts which will start a downward spiral, and more. In chapter 11 Winter gives a more comprehensive "self-care" list.

Then, in a most interesting part of the book, he describes a series of counseling sessions with "Sarah," whose depression was rooted in perfectionism. Effective counseling is difficult work: the counselor must gain the trust of his/her client; ask the right questions to understand the client's true problems, and to know what approach to take in helping (you don't always help one perfectionist by doing exactly the same things as you did with another); be ready to challenge the thinking of the client (which the client does not always appreciate); and guard against "countertransference," in which the client unconsciously begins to trust *in* (not just to *trust*) the counselor, and expects him to be the perfect person who will meet all her unmet needs.

Chapter 12 emphasizes the need to hold out hope - real and true hope - to the person, who has usually lost a proper sense of perspective; and to help them understand life's purpose and reasons for suffering.

In the appendix, the author faces the question of the role that Satan plays in depression. In fact, as he points out, every Christian is involved in spiritual warfare our whole life long; no less is this true of depressed people. Are depressed people demon *possessed*? The depressed person might wonder—but there is a difference between being *possessed* and *oppressed*, and the latter usually is the case. At the same time, while depression is an illness, and leaves one weak, Satan takes advantage by severely tempting the depressed person.

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I do not agree with Winter's explanation of some Bible passages. For example, I don't believe that Jesus was "sad as he wept for his friend Lazarus" (99).

Why would He be? He knew He would raise Lazarus from the dead! There are other instances as well.

On the positive side, Winter views mankind as fallen—he speaks of original sin and depravity. He views Christ as coming again to judge—and uses this doctrine to underscore that our actions matter. On the other hand, the astute Reformed reader will recognize statements and ideas in the book with which he does not agree: "It takes a conscious, willing choice to cooperate with the Spirit of God" (154); "Most people are not totally corrupt" (214); and the idea that practical wisdom is rooted in common grace (149, 192). Nor would most of my readers see any value in using clips from Hollywood productions to help the client understand himself or herself (209).

These things, however, do not detract from the value of the book, which is to provide a good description of depression, as well as explain its causes and how to help the depressed person. Adding to the value of the book are two factors: first, the author makes important and necessary distinctions—he is not simplistic in his approach; second, the book emphasizes the use of biblical principles in helping the depressed.

No one book exhausts a subject; more can always be written. On the subject of depression, more will certainly be written - some good, and some bad. This book is good—but don't let it be the only book of its kind on your shelf. ●

Contributors for this issue are:

Ronald L. Cammenga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

Jürgen Burkhard Klautke, professor in the Academy for Reformed Theology in Marburg, Germany, and a leader of the Confessing Evangelical-Reformed Congregation in Giessen.

Douglas J. Kuiper, pastor of the Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minnesota.

Martyn McGeown, missionary-pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland, stationed in Limerick, Republic of Ireland.

Angus Stewart, pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland.