

The Standard Bearer

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The Heidelberg Catechism —450 years

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Belonging to Christ

Preaching in connection with our Catechism and regularly following the line of doctrinal instruction contained therein are of great importance and significance.

In II Timothy 4 the apostle Paul charges his son Timothy. The content of his charge is that Timothy must preach the Word and maintain sound doctrine, for the time is coming when men will have itching ears and will despise sound doctrine. The beginning of that time Paul could already see. And it is not exaggerating when we say that these days are upon us. On a morning like this, in this city of ours, which is by no means the worst city in our country, there are many people gathered together with itching ears, and still calling themselves Christians. It is not surprising that many people do not even know the first principles of sound doctrine. We may therefore be thankful that we still have ears for sound doctrine.

We may also be thankful that our fathers had ears for sound doctrine, and that they found a way to preserve this sound doctrine in our Heidelberg Catechism.

We must have sound doctrine, for without it we perish. The Catechism is sound doctrine, not because it is infallible, but because it is living doctrine. Therefore we must preach, not out of the Catechism, but with the Catechism as our guide. Preaching must always be a preaching of the Word. But that does not mean that it must be out of one single text. It may also be out of a group of texts. That is what we have in our Catechism.

We are about to start again with the discussion of that instruction as it was delivered to us by the fathers. Although the material contained in our instruction book is always the same, yet we can look at that material from different angles, and with a different application. This time it is our purpose to pass through the instruction of our Catechism from a practical point of view. The Catechism is easily applied practically, for it is practical. The Catechism is personal. It is a confession of what lives in the heart and mind of the church. In the Catechism the church confesses what it believes concerning the truth

This is a sermon on Lord's Day 1 by Rev. Herman Hoeksema carefully transcribed by Mr. Martin Swart.

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contained in the Word of God. And it does that in a personal way. You notice that at once. Already in the first Lord's Day the instruction is of a personal, subjective nature. It does not ask: "What is the only comfort in life and death?" but it asks: "What is *thy* only comfort in life and death?" Therefore the instruction of our Catechism is easily applied.

When I say that we will discuss the Catechism from that practical, subjective point of view, I do not mean that we will ignore and discard the doctrinal contents. For practice without doctrine is impossible. But we wish to ask how this doctrinal content becomes real for us, and in how far is this doctrine reality for us personally? In the second place, if the doctrinal truth is real for us, what fruit ought it to bear in our life? It is from the point of view of these two questions that we wish to study our Catechism. So with this first Lord's Day, the doctrinal subject of which is: Belonging to Christ.

Theme: Belonging to Christ. 1) The meaning of it. 2) The comfort of it. 3) The assurance of it. 4) The fruit of it.

The meaning of it

To belong to Christ is a thoroughly scriptural idea. The Catechism says: The only comfort of the Christian is that with body and soul he belongs to his faithful Savior Jesus Christ. To belong to Christ is a thoroughly biblical idea. Jesus speaks of His sheep, which the Father has given Him. So also the apostles. They speak of the Lord, who purchased us, and of the fact that we are Christ's. Frequently in the New Testament it is emphasized that the Christian belongs to Christ.

Now to belong to Christ is really a legal, judicial idea. It implies in the first place that Christ is my proprietor. He owns me. I am His property, of which He can dispose as He wills. In the second place it implies that He is my Lord. I belong to Him as a servant belongs to his master. His will is my law. In the third place it implies that He is my representative, and I am in Him. He represents me before the Father, and He is responsible for me. These three things are implied in the confession that we belong to Jesus.

This Lordship is unique, exclusive, and all-comprehensive. The Catechism asks: "What is your only comfort in life and death?" And it answers: "That I

with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ." That is unique, exclusive, all-comprehensive. I do not belong to Him just on Sunday, but every moment, in life and death. He is Lord of my body and soul. He is Lord of all that I am and have.

Now remember, we are looking at this Lordship of Jesus from the point of view of its being a profession. We do not speak of the truth that Jesus owns His people. It is true that He does. But we are looking at this Lordship from the subjective point of view, that I am His. We are speaking about the acknowledgment that I am His, that He is my proprietor, that He is my Lord, that He is my representative and is responsible for me.

How do we become His property? Not by giving ourselves to Him. Scripture teaches that we belong to Christ because of an act of God, by which He gives the church to Christ. Jesus says in John 10: "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep." Now do not turn that around. Jesus does not say: "Ye are not of My sheep, because ye believe not." He says: "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep." The sheep are Jesus' sheep, in the first place, by an act of the triune God whereby He gave the sheep to Jesus. In the second place, they become His sheep by an act of Christ whereby He purchased the sheep. The sheep must be redeemed. By nature these sheep belong to another. These sheep had, through sin, given themselves unto another. But they have been redeemed. They became the property of Christ because God gave them to Him, and because Jesus purchased them. And in the third place they become His sheep by an act of the Holy Ghost whereby they are marked, branded as Jesus' sheep. That is not our work, but the work of the triune God. The act of God by which He gave us to Jesus is not our act, but God's act. The act of Christ whereby He purchased us is not our act, but is the act of God. And the act of the Holy Ghost whereby we are branded as Jesus' sheep is not our act, but is the act of God. The whole process is of God. We do not give ourselves to Jesus. Oh yes, when Christ draws us unto Himself, we consecrate ourselves to Him. In that sense we can speak of giving ourselves to Jesus. But giving ourselves to Jesus in that sense is the fruit of the drawing of Christ by which He makes us His property.

The comfort of it

That is my comfort. Why do we speak of belonging to Christ as a matter of comfort? Comfort presupposes some evil that threatens me. It presupposes some grief that overwhelms me. The positive idea of comfort is that I have knowledge of a great good that counteracts, that I can put over against, the evil that threatens me. That is why we cannot give comfort. If I am to be comforted, I must have something instead of the evil that threatens me. The Christian says, I have but one comfort, and that is that I belong to Christ.

I possess that comfort over against a threefold evil. That threefold evil is first of all the guilt of my sin. I am sinful. My sin makes me guilty before God. And my guilt makes me worthy of death and condemnation. There is my original sin. There are my actual sins. There are my sins of omission and commission. And they make me worthy of death and condemnation. Over against this death and condemnation, my comfort is that I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. That is my only comfort. My only comfort is that I belong to Christ, and that He is my proprietor, my Lord, and my representative who is responsible for me. For He blotted out my sins, and wiped out my guilt. He blotted them out forever. And though my sins testify against me, and my conscience accuse me, I know that I am righteous before God.

In the second place, there is the corruption of my heart. There is the power of sin within me. And over against the knowledge of that corruption, I have only one comfort, namely, that I belong to Jesus, who delivers me from that power of sin and corruption.

And, finally, my only comfort over against the evil of death is that I belong to Christ. It is my only comfort over against death in all its fullness. That death threatens to swallow me up. I am afraid of death, even to the extent that I consider him a fool who says that he is not afraid of death. I am afraid of spiritual, temporal, eternal death. I am afraid of death that surrounds me and threatens to swallow me up. And over against that death it is my only comfort that I belong to Him. For He destroyed the power of death for me. And He merited eternal life for me.

The assurance of it

If that be true, we must have the assurance that we are

personally the property of Christ. According as we know that we belong to Him we have the comfort of it. It is a personal assurance. Are we able to say this? Are we able to say: "I know that I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, with body and soul, both in life and death, and that therefore I have comfort over against the guilt and corruption that make me worthy of death and condemnation"? How do we become assured that we belong to Him?

This assurance is necessary. But it is often lacking. With regard to this assurance, you may meet with two classes of people. There are some who frequently doubt, but who have no reason for doing so. And there are others who say they are always assured, but who have no reason to be so. You frequently find people who say that they often have moments of doubts. Not that they doubt as to the objective truth. They do not doubt that Christ's sheep belong to Him. That kind of doubt we do not find in our midst. But there is that other peculiar doubt. If you ask these people if they belong to Christ, they say that they often doubt. And they doubt, when they should be sure. There is no reason why such moments of doubt should exist for them. If you ask them the reason for their doubt, they say: "If I look at myself, at my sin, at myself apart from Christ, I see so much sin that I doubt whether I belong to Christ."

Now if that should be a legitimate reason for doubt, then none of us could say, "I belong to Christ." We ought, surely, to see our sins. And we ought to examine ourselves daily, to find more sin. But there is a world of difference in who it is that reveals our sins to us. If the devil reveals our sins to us, he leads us away from Christ. But if God reveals our sins to us, He leads us to the cross, to the blood of atonement, and assures us that our sins are forgiven. In that forgiveness, we ought forever to fight to get rid of our sins.

On the other hand, if there is sin with our *will* in us, we may well doubt. That is the other class I referred to. They say that they are always sure that they belong to Christ. They boast of belonging to Christ. But you feel in your heart that they do not know what they are talking about. It is impossible to walk purposefully in the way of sin, and then say, "I belong to the Lord." If you do not walk in the way of the Lord, you have no right to have the assurance that you belong to the Lord. Some people

say they are sure, but they do not walk in the way of the Lord. Their mind is in the world six days of the week. On Sunday they belong to the Lord. But they live in the world all their life, and when they die they like to belong to Christ.

This is the confession of the Catechism: “That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” That is the confession of the Christian. All the rest is bunk. How do I know that I belong to Christ? By the Word of God and the testimony of the Holy Spirit in my heart. Some say that you must only believe the Word. But that is not so. If my natural name was in the Bible, then everything would be plain. But that is not the case. The Bible does not say: Mr. So-and-so belongs to Christ. My natural name is not in the Bible. The Bible says that only the sheep belong to Jesus. And how am I to know that I belong to His people, that I belong to His sheep?

Others say that it is only by the testimony of the Spirit that we become assured that we belong to Jesus. But that is not so either. For how do I know that that testimony is not the testimony of the devil? There are some who say that they know that they belong to Christ because of what the Lord has done for them some twenty or thirty years ago. It may be true that the Lord has done some-

thing for you twenty or thirty years ago, but that cannot be the basis for your assurance now. The fundamental question is, am I Christ’s *now*? Not, did I belong to Christ twenty years ago. It is not a matter of memory. It is a matter of daily experience.

How do I know that I belong to Christ? This is the way. The Spirit of my Lord testifies in the Word of God. And although He does not write my natural name in that Word, He does draw my spiritual picture there. In the Word is a picture of the sheep of Christ. You must find your picture in that Word. That is not difficult. In the first place, do you know yourself in your sins? In the second place, do you put your confidence in Christ for time and eternity? And in the third place, do you desire to fight against sin and to overcome it? If you find that spiritual picture in the Word, then there is that other testimony of the Spirit assuring you that you belong to Christ.

The fruit of it

And then this is the fruit, that we become sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him. I know, we have this fruit only in small beginning. But there is the desire and will to live unto Him. In the light of that, can we say: I belong to Him? 

EDITOR’S NOTE

Welcome to our celebration of the Heidelberg Catechism!

The annual Reformation Day issue is devoted to the Reformed confession published 450 years ago in Heidelberg, Germany. This special issue is linked to a conference on the Catechism sponsored by the Protestant Reformed Seminary October 17-19. Six speeches were given at the conference, and all the speakers graciously agreed to condense their speeches for the *Standard Bearer*. One speech/article will wait until the next issue, namely, the Heidelberg Catechism’s View of the Christian Life as Gratitude.

To round out the special issue, we selected a sermon on Lord’s Day 1 by Rev. Herman Hoeksema for the meditation. The reader should be aware that this is a sermon carefully taken down and written out by Mr. Martin Swart and filed away with hundreds of other

sermons preached in First Protestant Reformed Church. Thus the style is that of a preached sermon, and not one that Rev. Hoeksema edited for publication. Nonetheless, it was capably prepared for publication by Mr. Doezema, who sat under Rev. Hoeksema’s preaching for many years.

It certainly is appropriate that a Heidelberg Catechism sermon be included in this special issue. The power of the Catechism is exactly in its being regularly preached in Reformed churches. The Protestant Reformed Churches love the preaching of the Heidelberg Catechism, and owe a huge debt to this unique confession.

One final note—all six conference speeches/articles will be printed in a more complete form in the fall issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. Eventually that will be available on line at prca.org.

RJD 

History and Purpose of the Heidelberg Catechism

I. History of the Heidelberg Catechism

I.1 The Origins of the Heidelberg Catechism

As the name of the Catechism suggests, it was originally written and printed in Heidelberg. This happened 450 years ago. In those days Heidelberg was the capital of the Palatinate, one of the territories within the German Empire or the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

The Catechism was written by a man named Zacharias Ursinus. He was born in the city of Breslan, which is located in Silesia. Breslan is now the Polish city of Wrocław. He studied at the University of Wittenberg, where he met Philipp Melancthon, the closest co-worker of Martin Luther. During his studies Ursinus was even allowed to stay in Melancthon's home. In 1560, after having finished his studies, the 26-year-old Ursinus came to Heidelberg.

At that time, Frederick III was the prince or Elector who ruled in Heidelberg over the Palatinate. His contemporaries gave him the nickname "the Pious" since he was not only very interested in theology, but he was also eager to live his life in accordance with the commandments of God. This was not uncommon among princes.

In 1562 Frederick instructed a council of theologians to write a catechism for all the churches in the Palatinate. Zacharias Ursinus became the head of this council.

But why would a government care what the churches teach? Would we not say that such an intervention is not appropriate for a ruler? Just imagine what would happen if the governor of Michigan one day decided that all the people in Michigan must hold the same confession. The governor would determine the content of that confession and would order that this document was to be the binding

foundation for all the churches and schools in the entire state. This sounds very strange to our ears. But this was the situation 450 years ago. It did not even bother the people back in those days, since they were used to it.

A few years before the Catechism was written, the Diet of Augsburg had been held, which declared that every prince was to have the right to determine the confessional basis for his respective territory (1555). This so-called Peace of Augsburg meant that a Protestant person living in a territory ruled by a Roman Catholic prince either had to leave that territory or become Roman Catholic. The same was true for the Roman Catholics in Protestant territories. This is the origin of the state churches in Germany ("*Landeskirchen*") that have survived until today.

The authors of the American Constitution were influenced by individualism, which focused on the freedom of conscience. This was the presupposition for their concept of religious freedom. As we all know, this idea of freedom of conscience was prefigured in the Reformation. Take for instance Luther's famous statement before the Diet of Worms: "Here I stand, I can do no other." In his commentary on Romans, Luther made it clear that, according to Holy Scripture, the government was not to rule over one's conscience or over one's innermost thoughts. Instead, the rulers control only the visible realm, that is, the actions of the individual. But individualism as the basis for religious freedom was not known back then. The breakthrough for the idea of grounding religious freedom in individualism came up a century later under such men as Oliver Cromwell and John Locke in England.

In the sixteenth century people could not imagine a situation in which citizens of a province could hold different religious convictions and live peacefully at the same time. So the Peace of Augsburg meant religious freedom, not for the individual, but for each particular territory. When Frederick III came to power in the Palatinate in 1559, the

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territory was already Protestant, but the Reformation had been introduced in a moderate Lutheran version. From the very beginning of his reign, Frederick was confronted with theological discussion that mainly concerned the Lord's Supper. While listening to those debates, he became increasingly Reformed.

As a result of this, Frederick appointed Reformed men to key positions in Heidelberg. He also removed the pictures of the saints and crosses from the churches. Frederick was deeply convinced that he was obliged by the Peace of Augsburg to reform his territory. He also thought of himself as a successor of Old Testament kings such as Hezekiah or Josiah, who had initiated religious reformation in their lands.

This led him to the conviction in 1562 that a Reformed Church Order for the Palatinate was very much needed. The Heidelberg Catechism was part of this new Church Order.

After the Catechism was written in 1563 and the majority of the church leaders signed it, the first edition was printed. It included only 128 questions. The 80th question concerning the papal mass was included in the second edition, which was released shortly thereafter. Not much later than that, the third edition was published, this time dividing the Catechism into 52 Lord's Days. After its first printing, the Heidelberg Catechism was introduced to the congregations of the Palatinate by a sermon series, and by November 1563 it gained legal status in the Palatinate.

1.2 Reactions to the Heidelberg Catechism

From the very beginning there was a variety of reactions to the Heidelberg Catechism. 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.

Others, however, reacted against it. The attacks on the Catechism came up immediately after its first printing. Some pastors in the Palatinate were critical of the Heidelberg Catechism simply because they did not want to be bound by one catechism. They preferred the doctrinal leeway that they had enjoyed up to that point.

The strongest opposition came from the Roman Catholic side, but also the Lutherans wrote many polemics against the Heidelberg Catechism. Some of the Lutheran princes from other German territories even sent messengers who were supposed to convince Frederick III to abolish the Heidelberg Catechism all together.

At the Diet of Augsburg (1566), many princes accused the Palatinate of not holding to the Augsburg Confession. The Emperor ordered that the new Church Order, together with the Heidelberg Catechism, was to be abolished immediately. Otherwise the Palatinate would stand outside of the Augsburg Settlement and the Elector would be subject to an Imperial ban. Frederick argued successfully against this, and the Catechism was finally granted toleration. But this debate and the many debates that followed weakened Frederick's physical vitality. He died in 1576.

His son Louis VI (1576-1583), who succeeded him on the throne, did everything to reestablish Lutheranism in the Palatinate. He wanted to overcome the isolation that the Palatinate had experienced within the German Empire due to their insistence on the Heidelberg Catechism. He did this by instituting a Lutheran church order and Lutheran confessions. Thus the Heidelberg Catechism was abolished in the Palatinate. Many Reformed theologians, among them Ursinus, were forced to leave the Palatinate.

When Louis VI died in 1583 after having reigned for only seven years, he was succeeded by his brother, John Casimir. Under his rule the Reformed Church Order was reestablished, along with the Heidelberg Catechism. This situation lasted for the next centuries.

1.3 Acceptance and Spreading of the Heidelberg Catechism

In spite of all the struggles that surrounded the establishing of the Heidelberg Catechism within the Palatinate, it spread widely outside of the Palatinate. In the decades that followed, it was adopted by more and more German territories. In Hungary it was adopted in 1567, and also large parts of Switzerland accepted the Catechism as their confessional basis.

In the early years the Palatinate was the only Reformed territory within the German Empire. Thus it became a place of refuge for many Reformed believers who were persecuted elsewhere, such as the Huguenots from France, and also people from the Netherlands. During those years the Netherlands was involved in a war against Spain. Many people who had fled to the Palatinate learned to know the Heidelberg Catechism there. Probably the most prominent of the Dutch refugees was Peter Dathenus (1531-1588). He was the Minister of the Dutch immigrant church in the city of Frankenthal, which is near Heidelberg. The Heidelberg Catechism was translated there into Dutch and smuggled into the Netherlands. At the National Synod of

Dordt (1618/19) it was adopted as one of the creeds of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands.

The first English version was published in 1572. It is very likely that it was taken to North America by immigrants in the late sixteenth century. In 1628 the first Reformed pastor came to New Amsterdam, later New York. The governor at that time (1650s), Peter Stuyvesant (1612-1672), who was himself the son of a Reformed minister, gave the order that the Word of God was to be preached in accordance with the established Reformed tradition in agreement with the Synod of Dordt. By this order, which was very early in United States history, the *Catechism* had officially arrived in North America.

2. The Purpose of the Heidelberg Catechism

Frederick III gave the answer to the question of the purpose of the Heidelberg Catechism in his preface by naming two purposes. The Catechism was supposed to serve the temporal as well as the eternal well-being of his people.

2.1 For Temporal Well-being

When we read the term “temporal well-being,” we have to bear in mind that everything that came from the Palatinate in those years was looked on with suspicion by Lutheran and Catholic princes. This was the reason why Frederick III considered it of high importance to declare to others what the Reformed actually believe. The Heidelberg Catechism was supposed to be that confession.

However, the Catechism also had an internal function for the Palatinate itself. 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 belongs, includes 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 supposed to be the unifying tie that stabilized the Reformation in the Palatinate.

2.2 For Eternal Salvation

As important as the temporal purpose of the Heidelberg Catechism was, its purpose was not only that the Christians in the Palatinate should live a quiet life for the stability of the territory. The main purpose was and is the eternal salvation of man. It was about the communication

of truth—the truth that is indispensable for the eternal salvation of the person that is to be instructed (the catechumen). The idea was that the student himself would answer. These answers were to be verbal. The student was called to give a testimony and to live according to it.

The Catechism was meant to serve as a bridge for the believer between his baptism and his partaking of the Lord’s Supper. This comes to expression within the Church Order of the Palatinate itself. The Catechism was placed between the section on the regulation of baptism and the section on the regulation of the Lord’s Supper. It all had to do with instruction 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.”

For this purpose the primary task was to teach Christian doctrine to the people—especially to the young people. Thus the Heidelberg Catechism has an *educational* (*teaching*) function. Frederick III saw the terrible lack of knowledge of God’s Word and the absence of upright Christian living.

In referring to Exodus 12:13 and Deuteronomy 4:6 and 11, he reminds us that God has given the clear order to teach the children. He expresses his distress over the fact that many churches ignored that commandment. To improve the situation, there was a reading from the Heidelberg Catechism during the morning service, and in the afternoon service it was the basis for the preaching. 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 52 sections (“Lord’s Days”).

Contributing to the Catechism’s richness is the completeness of the Scripture quotes. This demonstrated that the Catechism is rooted in Scripture and that it is best understood as a means to understand God’s Word and to live according to it, as Q/A 98 states that God will have His people taught by the lively preaching of His Word. This instruction should be given not only in churches but also in schools, that the youth would be “piously educated.” The exact title of the Heidelberg Catechism is: Catechism or Christian Instruction according to the usages of the churches and schools [!] of the Electoral Palatinate.

Of course, primarily it is the parents’ duty to teach their

children the content of the gospel, for which the Catechism can serve as a tremendous help.

The Heidelberg Catechism was written to teach healthy doctrine that also 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 can serve as this “form of doctrine.” The Christian does not live by separate Bible verses, but by a whole biblical system that has been “delivered” to him.

This means that the educational intention of the Heidelberg Catechism is not about a mere transfer of information; it is about being gripped personally by the gospel and its mighty truths. This is why the Heidelberg Catechism uses personal pronouns such as “your,” “mine” and “I.” “What is *your* only comfort in life and death? That *I* belong to *my* savior with body and soul.” Another example is the answer to question 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, uneducated reader in mind, it is not solely a children’s book. One never grows out of it. The Heidelberg Catechism is intended, like the Bible, for lifelong and active use.

Closely connected to the didactic purpose is the *apologetic* purpose. The Heidelberg Catechism is not only about teaching what is right, but also about teaching what is *not* right. It shows that the Christian must test the spirits and that he must say ‘no’ to false teaching. Right from the start of church history the purpose of dogmas, confessions, and catechisms was to reject false teachings.

Due to the historical context, we find that the Catechism primarily draws its political lines against Catholicism. From 1545 (with interruptions) the Roman Catholic Church held a council in Trent, which aimed to attack Reformation doctrine. As a part of its Counter-Reformation efforts, the Roman Catholic Church sent its pamphlets all over Europe.

When Catholic pamphlets made their way to the Palatinate, it became a pastoral necessity to speak a clarifying word into the situation. In late 1562 the Council of Trent decided 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*.

Q/A 80 is probably the best known anti-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 prayers to the saints (Q/A 94), and against worship through images (Q/A 97-98).

Even though attacking Roman Catholic doctrines is one of the most prominent aims of the Catechism, it also shows the differences between the Reformed faith and the beliefs of the Anabaptists. A well-known issue that the Catechism addresses in this context is the question of infant baptism (Q/A 74). Another difference between the Catechism and 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 5th commandment (Q/A 104). In its explanation of the 6th commandment, the Catechism points to the right of the government to use the sword against evildoers (“... *to prevent murder...*”—Q/A 105). All of this would not have been necessary if there were no Anabaptists in the Palatinate.

Finally, the Catechism opposes (Gnesio-)Lutheranism. This controversy has mainly to do with the Reformed rejection 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. That is why 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 the ubiquity of Christ’s human nature (Q/A 47).

Although it is necessary for the church to attack false doctrine, it is not her primary task to argue. The church’s main calling is true worship of the triune God. Therefore, the confessions—from their very beginning—also have a doxological function.

This purpose, to praise God in the right manner, is reflected in the Heidelberg Catechism. Next to the educational and apologetic purposes, the Heidelberg Catechism aims at giving to the church the proper language to use when she worships the triune God. I want to remind us of 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. 

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

Celebrating the Anniversary of a Catechism

Comfort for living. Comfort for dying. Comfort—this is the grand theme of the Heidelberg Catechism, whose 450th birthday we celebrate this year.

We *celebrate!* We celebrate the catechism known as the Heidelberg Catechism, which catechism is this year four-hundred-fifty years young.

We celebrate thankfully! Our thankfulness is to God, who as the Giver of every good and perfect gift is the Giver of the Heidelberg Catechism to His church. The truths set forth in this confession are the truths that He has revealed in His Holy Word. These truths He led the Reformers of the sixteenth century to uncover and recover from the darkness and bondage of the Romish church. They are the truths that by means of the Heidelberg Catechism’s instruction have served ever since the time of its composition for the blessing of Reformed churches the world over. They are the truths that have been handed down from one generation to the next since the time that the Heidelberg Catechism was first published. Dear as these truths were to the Reformers and the church of the Reformation, dear as they were to our forefathers for whom the Heidelberg Catechism served as an instrument for our instruction, so dear may this catechism be to our children and grandchildren—such is our fervent prayer.

Its truths are priceless—beyond compare. They are the truths by which we Reformed people live. And they are truths for which we Reformed people are willing to die. We confess these truths—from the heart. We stand by these truths at all cost. For the sake of the truths articulated in this catechism we are willing to let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also. Indeed, the body they may kill, but God’s truth, God’s truth as set forth in this catechism, abides still.

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There are two things notable about this Reformed confession, a sparkling jewel in the treasure trove of our Reformed confessional heritage. The first notable feature is its format and structure. It is in the form of a catechism. Its format is question and answer, query and response. That format undoubtedly is related to one of the main purposes of the new catechism, according to the directive of the ruler of the Palatinate, Frederick III, the Pious. That purpose is that the catechism would serve as a tool for the instruction of the youth. The young people of Frederick’s realm, by his directive, must be instructed in the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed faith. They must be instructed from a distinctively Reformed perspective, in distinction from the extremes of Roman Catholicism and Anabaptism, as well as Lutheranism. It is true that the Reformed regarded the Lutherans as fellow believers and extended to them the right hand of fellowship, at least those Reformed who were not of a radical bent. Nevertheless, the Reformed had serious differences with the Lutherans, particularly with regard to the sacraments and the proper government of the church. Frederick was determined to indoctrinate his subjects, young and old alike, in the distinctive Reformed faith. With a view to achieving this purpose, the new confession was crafted as a catechism, in question and answer form.

Comfort for Living and Dying

A second notable feature of this catechism is its theme. It is a catechism *with a theme*. It is not only a catechism, one among the many produced by the church in the Reformation age. But it is a catechism with a theme, an underlying theme. With that theme in mind, the questions of the Heidelberg Catechism were framed. From the viewpoint of that theme, the answers were formulated. And what is that theme? Anyone with even the slightest familiarity with the Heidelberg Catechism knows what that theme is. That theme is *comfort*. Comfort for living. Comfort for dying. Comfort amidst all the struggles, sorrows, disappointments,

and persecutions of earthly life. An *only* comfort. A *sure* comfort. A comfort *in Christ*. A comfort *for time and for eternity*. A comfort that the Christian can never lose and that can never be taken away.

Comfort—that is the grand theme of the Heidelberg Catechism. That makes this catechism unique. Like so many other of the Reformation creeds and catechisms it includes the four standard elements: the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments. But it treats these four elements from the viewpoint of comfort, the Christian's comfort. The term "comfort" is found in several of the other questions and answers, beside the first question and answer: Q 2, Q 52, Q 57, and Q 58, as well as the 44th and 53rd Answers. And even when the word "comfort" is not used, the questions and answers are written with "comfort" implied.

"Comfort" is our English word. It is the translation of the German *trost*, the original language in which the Heidelberg Catechism was written. "*Was ist dein einiger Trost im Leben und im Sterben?*" The Dutch equivalent is *troost*. In Dutch, the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism is: "*Wat 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. Comfort is strength, courage, an ability to face the future no matter what the future may hold. One who is comforted is free from anxiety, worry, and fear. He is at peace, peace within himself, peace with regard to his earthly circumstances, and peace with God—perfect peace.

This is the idea, too, of the Greek New Testament word for comfort. It is a Greek word from which we derive the word "paraclete." This is the name Jesus gives to the Holy Spirit in John 14-16. The Spirit whom Jesus would send from the Father, who would abide with the church, and lead the church into all truth is the "Comforter," the "Paraclete." A paraclete is literally one who is "called alongside of" in order to comfort, to encourage, and to strengthen. The idea is that the paraclete is called alongside of someone in order to be a support and a friend.

Comfort is what a friend gives to his or her friend. Comfort is a covenantal concept. As our covenant friend, God comforts us. As covenant friends mutually, we comfort one another. In the bonds of covenant relationships, like parents and children, husbands and wives, we are a comfort one to another.

We need this comfort both for living and for dying. For people living in the mid-sixteenth century, it might have been necessary to have comfort for living, we suppose. After all, death and destruction were everywhere and around every corner. The Black Death (Bubonic plague) had several times in the previous century visited many of the cities of Europe. It is estimated by some that up to 200 million people had been killed by this deadly infectious disease by the mid-sixteenth century. Other diseases could be attributed to poor sanitation, impure drinking water, poor diet. There were no antibiotics, and many people died of illnesses that today a simple regimen of antibiotics would easily cure. The infant mortality rate was very high. Many women died from complications to childbirth. War brought horrific death to millions. And many more died exceedingly painful deaths on account of persecution, particularly the persecutions of 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 or suffering that is the deepest reason on account of which we humans need comfort. The reason is in God and the wrath of God that we deserve on account of our sins. 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 her 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, 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. "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."

The Only Comfort in the Only Savior

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 idea of comfort is prominent in II Corinthians 1. It would have been better that the translators of the King James had consistently translated the word "comfort"

throughout the first chapter of II 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. He alone is “able to comfort them which are in any trouble, 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 greatest possible misery, which is the eternal judgment and wrath of God. For Jesus’ sake, on account of His doing and dying, we are delivered from that awful misery.

This is the *only* comfort. Comfort cannot be found apart from Jesus Christ, the Savior. It cannot be found in any earthly thing: career, business, success, recognition, a name for oneself, money, or pleasure. It certainly cannot be found in a bottle, in pills, in giving oneself over to debauchery. Neither can it be found *in anyone else*. Not in self, not in one or another of the would-be saviors of the world, the leaders of the cults or of the false religions. Comfort is *alone* to be experienced in Jesus, through faith in Him. He alone has fully satisfied the justice and wrath of God. As He is the only Savior, so is comfort 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.

At the same time, 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 believers 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.” That is my comfort,

first of all. 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 comes from knowing that even the devil, the demons of hell, and all the hosts of the ungodly are subservient to Him, so that they 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 church’s] 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.

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, as it is still today, a great difference between the Roman Catholic Church 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 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 in terror. Because Rome was and Rome is a works-based religion, assurance is necessarily an impossibility. 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 only one who lives in the assurance of salvation can truly be comforted, only one who lives in the assurance that God is his or her God and that he or she is God’s dear son or daughter. The first question and

answer gives 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. 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 eternal salvation. Assurance of salvation now, and assurance of salvation hereafter. Blessed assurance!

That assurance also comes out in the 2nd question, which immediately follows. "How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die happily?" The child of God *enjoys* this comfort; he enjoys this comfort to such an extent that he lives and dies happily! The literal German underscores this assurance even more 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's 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 believer enjoys. Think of the 32nd answer: "Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing." Or think of the 44th answer: "That in my greatest temptations, I may be assured, and wholly comfort myself in this, that my [*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." Or think of the 54th answer: "that I am, and forever shall remain, a living member" of the church of Jesus Christ. That is assurance.

Comfort—my only comfort. Assurance—assurance for me, even for me. This is the gospel. This is the gospel of grace. 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."¹

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

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

PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

The Great Blessing of Preaching the Catechism

There is another Frederick in the story of the HC. His name among us ought to be as infamous as Frederick III's is famous. This other Frederick

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is the Italian Isaac *Frederici* (pron: Freh-deh-REE-chee). Among those who love the HC, the name Isaac Frederici ought to be as black as the name Jakob Harmen, aka Jacobus Arminius.

Among readers of the *SB* the name Arminius likely is a dirty word. I was reminded of that—and both encouraged

and slightly amused—by what happened recently on a high school class trip to Chicago. One of the young students spotted an Armenian restaurant and said, somewhat alarmed, “I didn’t know they had their *own restaurants!*” “They” obviously meaning Arminians with an “i”. Of course, the theologically sensitive young lady was not aware that the ethnic group called Armenians (with an “e”) has nothing to do with the heretical teaching of Arminius (with an “i”). Arminius is infamous among the Reformed.

The name Frederici should have similar opprobrium poured upon it. Isaac Frederici attended the Synod of Dordt as one of the representatives of the Remonstrants—the Arminians. Hailing from Utrecht in the Netherlands, Frederici’s unique distinction was his assignment to offer before the Synod official objections to preaching the HC. As we all know from history, the Great Synod was unmoved by his objections and quickly reinforced the mandate to preach weekly from the beautiful confession of Reformed churches.

Frederici is representative of a long line of objectors to the preaching of the HC. Many since have repeated his objections. Thankfully, I have not heard from very many such objectors in recent decades. And I thank God that his objections did not win the day at Dordt.

For the HC must be preached! And preach it we will, for the defense and preservation of the churches in the truth.

The preacher’s mandate

It is worth noting that the Church Orders of almost all Reformed Churches (not of our Presbyterian brothers, but that’s another story) mandate the preaching of the HC. The Church Order of the PRC, although slightly different from some others, is representative. “The ministers shall on Sunday explain briefly the sum of Christian doctrine comprehended in the HC, so that as much as possible the explanation shall be annually completed, according to the division of the catechism itself for that purpose.”

In one form or another this is still the official mandate of the Canadian Reformed, Christian Reformed, Free Reformed, German Reformed (RCUS), Heritage Reformed, Netherlands Reformed, Reformed Church in America, and United Reformed denominations; to say nothing of a number of Reformed churches of Dutch background in countries outside the North American continent. Even though some of the regulations weaken the mandate to make it almost impotent, and among some the mandate is perhaps not enforced, it is nevertheless notable that all these

churches charge their ministers to preach the HC.

In many denominations, this mandate of the Church Order is reinforced (or *enforced*) by the annual visitation of the churches by representatives of their classis. In the PRC, each consistory is asked: “Is the HC regularly explained in the services for divine worship, so that no doctrine is left unexplained?” Strikingly, second only to *the fundamental* question, “Is the word administered at least twice on the Lord’s Day?” comes this question about Catechism preaching.

This concern of the classes (regional gatherings of the churches) has an interesting history. One of the *original* questions for Church Visitation was more pointed: “Does his [the minister’s] work give evidence of diligent study, particularly his preaching of the HC?” In 1902, when the CRC noticed laxity already then in HC preaching, they responded with a significant decision pressing classes to “give proper attention to the matter.” But the tradition of the churches’ mutual oversight of HC preaching roots back in the first decades of HC preaching in the Netherlands. In 1667 the Friesian Classis of Woodster lamented, “Our Frisian people will perish like the Jewish people for lack of knowledge.” Three years later, at the 1670 Synod of Friesland, Classis Dokkum proposed that at every classis and synod meeting, each church would be asked, one by one, “Do you preach the HC?”

A long and honorable history (not just from the Reformation!)

The reason for this mandate is a long history of catechism preaching in the Christian church. If we only knew this history better, we would be able better to explain to our Christian neighbors the good and beneficial practice of preaching the Catechism. Why, they ask, would your church preach from a man-made document? Why, each week, from this 450-year-old catechism? Why preach from anything besides the Scriptures? Our answer will certainly include this: “Catechism preaching is the history of Reformed churches from their beginning!” If we are speaking to a Reformed Christian, we may add: “This was the practice of your denomination until recently.” But to all Christians we can say with confidence: “This was the history of the Christian church far before the publication of the catechism from Heidelberg. As far back as our knowledge of history reaches into the post-apostolic age, we find the church preaching catechisms.”

I find this a very powerful part of our defense of this

beautiful practice. Most Reformed churches mandate preaching the Heidelberg, a mandate in existence since the time of the Reformation almost 500 years ago. But the *Reformation* fathers mandated Catechism preaching because they were restoring what had been the practice of the Christian church from the time of the apostles! This is not well known among us.

The history of *Heidelberg* Catechism preaching from the date of the Catechism's publication is relatively well known among Reformed readers. In the upcoming *PR Theological Journal*, I will relate that history more extensively, as well as expand on other points I only mention here. Now, it suffices simply to state that sound Reformed churches, especially our forefathers in the Netherlands, preached the HC from the time of its publication.

But the history of preaching catechisms *before* the Reformation must be remembered. Too often, the historical defense of preaching the HC has stopped after it has reached back to the Reformation. Important as the *Reformation* tradition is, the practice of preaching a catechism is the *Christian* tradition. Let me explain.

If you read the history of the Reformation, you will notice that when synods mandated the ministers to preach the HC, no one questioned the practice. Of course, Arminians like Frederici at the Synod of Dort had objections to preaching the Heidelberg; but behind those objections was not so much an objection to preaching a *catechism*, but their aversion to the doctrines of *sovereign grace* that the Heidelberg Catechism propounded. At the time of the Reformation, ministers preaching catechisms was *expected*.

Prior to the Heidelberg's writing, Calvin wrote and preached catechisms. So did Luther in Germany. After he made a round of Church Visitation and found appalling ignorance, especially in the rural areas, Luther revised a series of sermons he had preached on the 10 commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments. He published them under the title "Larger Catechism" in 1529, offering them as preaching models for the young ministers. Catechism preaching was Luther's answer to the faltering of the reformation movement on account of ignorance.

The reformers were not innovators. They were restorers, re-formers. They restored the old and good traditions. They recognized that preaching a system of catechetical instruction was tradition. So they re-established a preaching norm in which, at one of the meetings of the gathered believers on the Lord's Day, the fundamental Christian doctrines were systematically explained. First, the Apostles'

Creed article by article; then the sacraments; finally the 10 commandments as the rule of gratitude and the Lord's Prayer as the model for a life of communion with God. That's the stuff of catechisms from the beginning of the Christian church. And we all recognize that as the essence of the Heidelberg Catechism—with the Reformed, or biblical explanation of these fundamentals. For almost 2,000 years, the Christian church preached these basic doctrines to the people of God; the church preached catechisms.

There is one sin the churches are not guilty of when they preach the Catechism, and that is the sin of novelty.

What a blessing is the preaching of the HC!

Those who in their recent generations have lost Catechism preaching rue the day that it was lost among them. And those who have been able to maintain HC preaching attribute their preservation as Reformed churches in large part to the faithful preaching of the truth as it is found in this creed. So, rather than take the time to defend this practice against critics, let me explain what motivated our fathers to restore this practice, and what motivates us to continue it.

First, good HC preaching *grounds* the people of God in the *doctrines* of Scripture. To put it differently, HC preaching assures theological literacy in the churches. The people of God love God with all their *minds* first of all.

Second, good HC preaching anchors the church in *history* and *tradition*. If there is one thing every new generation needs, it is a sense of history—a deep and abiding sense that their faith and practices are the good old tradition, that blazing new trails is not what the true church should be known for. The good practice of HC preaching instills in the people of God that sense: we stand on the broad shoulders of the fathers before us; we have not come to the knowledge of this truth on our own. This is what it means to be Reformed.

Third, good HC preaching gives the people of God theological and biblical *balance*. The practice forces the minister to preach the *whole* counsel of God. You must not be exposed to the personal interests (may I say "whims") of each new preacher that comes your way, or of the same preacher who decade after decade mounted the same two or three hobby horses. It would not be unlike mom preparing lasagna for dinner every night. She may say it's a different recipe each time, but it's still lasagna, and a family needs variety and balance. In the HC, all the fundamental truths of the Bible are there for annual explanation so that nothing is left out.

Fourth, good HC preaching promotes *unity, continuity,* and *stability* in the churches. HC preaching promotes *generational* unity—this up and coming generation embraces the same thing as the previous generation! How important for parents and grandparents in the churches! It promotes *denominational* unity—this congregation hears the same truths preached as that congregation. It was unity that Frederick III was interested in when he commissioned the writing of his catechism.

Fifth, good HC preaching assures that the people of God hear the *gospel*. Comfort! Hope! Grace! Friendship with God! Jesus Christ! The center and theme of the HC is the gospel. My heart is gladdened with the good news of Jesus Christ as I know my sin and misery, as I see how I am delivered from this condition of sin, and as I learn to express my gratitude for such gracious deliverance.

Finally, good HC preaching maintains a proper *subjective* element in the preaching. The HC's approach is personal. It is also experiential, addressing the genuine, biblical

experiences of the people of God. Its aim is to *comfort*. It addresses personal and private *temptations*. It deals with what we ought to love and what we must hate. It tells me how to mortify my old man. It instructs me to use all my gifts for the advantage and salvation of my neighbor. These are the true biblical experiences.

There is a right way, and wrong way

This subjective and experiential aspect of the HC leads me finally to emphasize that the *Catechism* must be preached. Let me be positive: If a minister preaches the very language, tone, and context of the Catechism (rather than a related text, or merely the topic suggested), he does justice not only to the churches' mandate, but also to the calling pastors have to preach to the *heart* of Jerusalem. But he does so with Jerusalem's own official explanation of "experiential."

The blessing of Catechism preaching! Begone Frederici!



REV. ANGUS STEWART

War and Peace in the Solas of the Heidelberg Catechism

The Christian's calling to engage in holy war against the lie and his enjoyment of the blessing of spiritual peace can both be helpfully summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism's teaching on the five solas of the Reformation (*sola* is Latin for alone or only). Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone to the glory of God alone according to Scripture alone. The solas exclude and so fight against all that "adds" to the truth of the gospel, for, in reality, any addition takes away from it and so denies it. The solas give us peace because they shut us up to the only comfort of God's rich and free salvation.

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Faith Alone!

We are justified before the Holy One "only by a true faith" (A. 60) or "by faith only" (Q. & A. 61) "without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28). This is great "profit" to the believer, for he or she is "righteous in Christ before God and an heir of eternal life" (Q. & A. 59)! In short, "we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only" (Q. 65).

This first sola (faith alone) militates against any and all other ways of receiving and applying to ourselves (imputed) righteousness (A. 61) and preserves us so that we "may never be condemned before the tribunal of God" (A. 56). "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

Christ Alone!

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). With its eye especially on Roman Catholicism, the Catechism asks, "Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?" (Q. 30). Its answer is simple and direct: "They do not: for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior" (A. 30). Christ alone negates and opposes all other alleged saviors or co-saviors.

Christ is our "only High Priest," who redeemed us by "the one sacrifice of His body" (A. 31), for it is "the only propitiatory sacrifice" (A. 37). The Heidelberg emphasizes this truth especially in connection with the sacraments, which direct us to "that one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross" (A. 66) "as the only ground of our salvation" (Q. 67), for "the Holy Ghost teaches us in the gospel, and assures us by the sacraments, that the whole of our salvation depends upon the one sacrifice of Christ which He offered for us on the cross" (A. 67).

Regarding the first sacrament, we are "admonished and assured by holy baptism that the one sacrifice of Christ upon the cross is of real advantage to us" (Q. 69), for "the blood of Jesus Christ only [applied by] the Holy Ghost [can] cleanse us from all sin" (A. 72).

Likewise, the Lord's Supper admonishes and assures us that "that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished" at Calvary (Q. 75) is "the only sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which He Himself accomplished on the cross" (A. 80). This is of unspeakable comfort to the elect, "Because, with respect to the justice and truth of God, satisfaction for our sins could be made no otherwise than by the death of the Son of God" (A. 40, cf. Lord's Days 4-6), for "only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God" (A. 61).

The gospel of Christ alone explains the origin of, and justifies, the Catechism's condemnation of the blasphemous sacrament of Roman Catholicism. Since "the mass teaches that the living and the dead have not the pardon of sins through the sufferings of Christ, unless Christ is also daily offered up for them by the priests...the mass, at bottom, is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ" (A. 80).

Christ is the "Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6) to those who

trust in Him alone, but the divine warrior (Is. 63:1-4; Rev. 19:11) against all who reject Him or deny Him as the only, complete Savior and His all-sufficient cross.

Grace Alone!

The Heidelberg's treatment of "true faith" includes the intimately related doctrines of grace alone and Christ alone: "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" (Q. & A. 21).

Lord's Day 23 mentions all of the three solas we have spoken of so far in this article. 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).

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).

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).

God's Glory Alone!

The "one only true and eternal God" is three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, subsisting in "one only divine essence" (Q. & A. 25). To Him all glory is due for "our creation," "our redemption," and "our sanctification" (A. 24).

As the "only true God," we must "know," "glorify," and "trust in Him alone," and "expect all good things from Him only" (A. 94). Since "the mass teaches that...Christ is bodily under the form of bread and wine, and therefore is to be worshiped in them," it is "an accursed idolatry" (A. 80), 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).

Because Jehovah is the "only true God," the first commandment impels us to "avoid and flee from all idolatry, sorcery, soothsaying, superstition, [and] invocation of saints, or any other creatures" (A. 94). Regarding the third commandment, the Heidelberg argues that since God is "the only one who knows the heart," we must not "swear by saints

or any other creatures” (Q. & A. 102). Thus the Catechism proceeds from the truth of God alone and the first and third commandments to condemn especially Romanism for praying to, and swearing by, “saints or any other creatures” (A. 94, 102).

Moving from the Decalogue, which is in the first section of the third part of the Heidelberg on gratitude, we come to prayer, which is the “chief part of thankfulness” (A. 116). We learn here that we must “from the heart pray to the one true God only” (A. 117). The exposition of the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer explains that, since Jehovah is “the only fountain of all good,” we must “withdraw our trust from all creatures and place it alone in [Him]” (A. 125).

God alone is the strength and peace of all His children, as the psalmist confessed, “Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved” (Ps. 62:1-2).

Scripture Alone!

The truth that Scripture alone is the supreme standard and rule for faith and life (cf. Belgic Confession 7) is not expressly stated in the Heidelberg Catechism, as are the other four solas, but it may be easily deduced from it “by good and necessary consequence” (cf. Westminster Confession 1:6).

The “one true God only” has “manifested Himself in His Word” (A. 117), and we know of the Mediator “from the

holy gospel” (A. 19). Therefore, it is “necessary for a Christian to believe” “all things promised us in the gospel” (Q. & A. 22).

Since Jehovah rules us by His “Word,” which is blessed to our hearts and lives by His “Spirit,” the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come,” includes praying against “all wicked counsels devised against [God’s] holy Word” (A. 123). The Heidelberg specifies two such ungodly attacks against Scripture: founding good works “on our imaginations or the institutions of men” (A. 91), and worshiping Him “in any other way than He has commanded in His Word” (A. 96).

“Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way” (Ps. 119:104)—this is the call to holy war for the Christian. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119:105)—this is the way of spiritual peace for the believer.

Our Only Comfort!

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 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)! 

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

The Covenantal Character of the Heidelberg Catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism is a covenantal confession. That might not be immediately obvious to all. Those who doubt it might point to the fact that the Heidelberg Catechism nowhere defines the doctrine of the covenant of grace. In fact, the Catechism does

not ever discuss the covenant as a separate doctrine. And even more, the Catechism refers to the covenant in only a very few places.

Yet, the intent of this article is to demonstrate that the Heidelberg Catechism is a covenantal confession. For in the Heidelberg Catechism the truth of God’s everlasting covenant of grace is *assumed*. All the instruction of the Catechism is given under the presupposition that God has determined a covenant of grace. The Catechism proceeds

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under the assumption that God has determined not only a covenant Mediator but also a covenant people, the elect. God has determined the blessings of the covenant. And God has determined to save His covenant people and to live with them forever. Accordingly, God sent His Son (the Mediator) into the flesh to die for His covenant people. God leads His people through this life and receives them to glory. All the theology of the Heidelberg Catechism is taught with those covenantal assumptions.

The covenantal character of the Heidelberg Catechism arose out of the hearts and souls of its primary authors—Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus. Both of these men were covenant theologians. They had circulated in Reformed centers and interacted with such Reformed theologians as Calvin, Beza, Bullinger, and Oecolampadius. Their training and their interest in the doctrine of the covenant are evident from their writings. Caspar Olevianus wrote a treatise on the covenant entitled *The Nature of the Covenant of Grace between God and the Elect*. Although it was not published until 1585, some fourteen years after the Heidelberg Catechism, it indicates his keen interest in the covenant. His catechism sermons on the Apostles' Creed were also published originally under the title "AN EXPOSITION of the Symbol of the Apostles, or rather of the Articles of Faith. In which the chief points of the everlasting and free covenant between God and the faithful are briefly and plainly handled."¹ These sermons are replete with references to God's covenant. A couple examples will indicate this. At one point in these sermons Olevianus discusses the theme "What the Kingdom of Christ is, and that the new covenant is administered therein."² Later he expounds the idea that "After that Christ the King and Priest of his Church has engendered in those whom he calls, the study of reconciling themselves unto God, he offers, and gives also unto them that same reconciliation and that in the form of a covenant, the sum whereof is contained in the articles of the faith."³ And he expands considerably on the topic "That the covenant between God and us is free and undeserved, and stands only in faith: through which after that he has put out the remembrance of sins, he renews the believers in his own image."⁴

Even more to the point, Zacharias Ursinus wrote a cat-

¹ Recently retranslated by Lyle D. Bierma and published by Reformation Heritage Books, 2009.

² From the 1581 edition, *Early English Books Online*, p. 45.

³ p. 52.

⁴ p. 54.

echism for use in the classroom in his theology classes in Heidelberg.⁵ This catechism contains many questions and answers strikingly similar to those found in the Heidelberg Catechism. Although the Heidelberg Catechism has almost no references to the covenant, Ursinus' Larger Catechism contains some 61 references to "covenant" and another 11 to "Testament." It begins with a familiar question: "What firm comfort do you have in life and in death?" But the answer is quite different from that of the Heidelberg Catechism:

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*. [Emphasis mine, RJD.]

Q. & A. 2 continues the theme of the covenant: "How do you know that God has established such a covenant with you? A. Because I am a true Christian."

In this catechism, Ursinus defines the covenant (Q. 31) and describes the content of the gospel in terms of the covenant—"Q. 35 What does the gospel teach? A. It teaches what God promises us in the covenant of his grace, how we are received into it, and how we know we are in it; that is, how we are set free from sin and death and how we are certain of this deliverance." Similarly, the Larger Catechism explains that the work of the Mediator is "to restore the covenant between God and men who rebelled against him." And, to quote no more, in the eighty-seventh question it connects the atoning work of Christ with the covenant:

Q. What benefits come to us from the suffering and death of Christ? A. It is the one sacrifice by which he has earned our admission into the covenant of divine grace, that is, the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, righteousness, and eternal life.

Ursinus and Olevianus were Reformed theologians who were developing the doctrine of the covenant in their theology. They wrote the Heidelberg Catechism with the covenant as the theological background.

⁵ Called the "Larger Catechism" in distinction from the "Smaller Catechism" intended for instruction of the children.

The question begs to be asked, why does the covenant appear so seldom in the Heidelberg Catechism when both these men wrote so freely of it in other documents? Briefly, the answer is, first, that the doctrine of the covenant was not developed by Luther, but by the Swiss Reformed such as Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Bullinger, and Calvin over against the Anabaptists. This had significant political implications. The Peace of Augsburg (1555) determined that the ruler of a given province could determine the religion of it. However, the choices were Lutheran or Roman Catholic. Reformed was not an option. If the Heidelberg Catechism had come out explicitly as a Reformed catechism, all the other German princes—both Lutheran and Roman Catholic—could very well have joined military forces in order to compel Frederick III and the Palatinate to conform.

Second, the doctrine of the covenant was developing. Ursinus and Olevianus understood that while they were free to lecture and even preach on this doctrine, at the time the Catechism was written it was not wise to give this doctrine a prominent place in a catechism intended to instruct the youth in the basics of the Christian religion.

Third, the Heidelberg Catechism was destined to become a Reformed confession. Confessions are the fruit of the Spirit of Christ (the Spirit of truth) guiding the church into the truth. At that point, the church was not clear on the doctrine of the covenant. The Spirit therefore led the church to formulate the Heidelberg Catechism with a minimum of discussion of the covenant and in this way kept out of the creed incomplete teaching, and even serious error on this doctrine.

Thus we have seen that the primary authors of the Heidelberg Catechism were covenantal theologians, and they clearly wrote the Catechism assuming the reality of the covenant. Further evidence for the assertion that the Catechism is a covenantal confession is in the catechism itself.

God's covenant of grace is a relationship of love and friendship that God establishes with His elect people in Jesus Christ. That covenant is with believers and their seed in the line of continued generations. That Olevianus maintained that the covenant is with the elect is evident from the title of his treatise on the covenant. That Ursinus maintained the same is evident from Question 33 in his Larger Catechism:

Q. What is the difference between the Old and the New Testament? A. It is the same testament or covenant of God with all the elect from the first promise given in Paradise, concerning the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent, to the end of the world....

Personal and Experiential

First, then, the covenant is living with God in love and friendship. The Catechism captures that with teaching that is experiential. It is intensely personal, as is evident from the personal pronouns used throughout. "What is *thy* only comfort...?" (1) "Whence knowest *thou thy* misery?" (3)

Closely connected with that, the Catechism does not merely teach the doctrines. It presents the truth in terms of how the believer *experiences* those truths. Consider Q. 28. "What *advantage is it to know* that God has created, and by His providence doth still uphold all things?" Or, Q. 43—"What *further benefit do we receive* from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross?" Again, Q. 45, "What doth the resurrection of Christ *profit us?*"

Defining Relationships

The covenant is a *relationship* between God and His covenant people. The Bible often presents the relationship with these words: "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12, et al.). Or, again, God is our Father, and we are His children (Ex. 4:22; Lord's Prayer). And again, that God is our husband, and the church is the bride (Jer. 31:32; Eph. 5:23ff.). The Heidelberg Catechism indicates its covenantal foundation as it sets forth the relationships between God and His people.

Jehovah is our God (4—the Lord thy God), who is also our Creator (6, 24, 26). He is our Father for Christ's sake (26 and 120), and that Father preserves His own so that apart from His will, not a hair can fall from their heads (1). We are His children, not naturally, but by adoption (33).

The Catechism also sets forth our relationship to Jesus.

He is our Mediator (36), who is also our Savior (29), and our Head (49, 50, 51, and 57). By implication, He is Lord over His brethren as the firstborn in the family of God (34).

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of the Heidelberg Catechism
were covenantal theologians,
and they clearly wrote the
Catechism assuming
the reality of the covenant.

He is also our chief Prophet and Teacher, our only High Priest, and our eternal King (31).

The Spirit is the agent of the covenant, who makes it to be a reality as He regenerates (8) and sanctifies (24), who creates faith in us, thus grafting us into Christ by the spiritual bond of faith (20, 21). He is the earnest of our salvation (49), who renews us in the image of Jesus Christ (86), and preserves and strengthens us so that we cannot be destroyed by the Devil himself (128).

The covenant is a relationship. The Heidelberg Catechism sets forth the triune (covenant) God's relationship to His covenant people.

Two Parts of the Covenant

The covenant of God, according to the Baptism Form, has two parts, namely, what God does for us, and what God requires of us. The Heidelberg Catechism sets forth both parts of the covenant.

Already in the first Q. & A. the Catechism testifies to God's saving work: redemption from sin, deliverance from the power of the devil, preservation, and eternal life—all ours. God provides the Mediator and Savior. God accomplishes the whole salvation. God grafts us into Christ with the living bond of faith. God promises "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" (21). Every part of salvation God accomplishes in His covenant.

And of His people He expects obedience. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (4). He commands us to trust Him and rely on Him entirely (26); to be patient in adversity and thankful in prosperity (28). As anointed, I am expected to confess His name, present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him: and to fight against sin and Satan in this life (32). Indeed, the whole of the law is our calling before God.

Because the Heidelberg Catechism does not treat the covenant explicitly, it does not specifically identify God's covenant as conditional or unconditional; as being with the elect only, as being eternal. And yet, it can be demonstrated that the Heidelberg Catechism is in harmony with the covenant concept that is unconditional, eternal, one-sided, and with the elect. That the covenant foundation of the Catechism is unconditional is evident from three things especially. First, that faith is a work of God engrafting us into Christ (20). That is a work that no man can do, and thus

faith cannot be a condition. Second, infants are included in the covenant (74), and they can in no way fulfill a condition in order to enter the covenant. And, third, among the existing confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism has the clearest and strongest statement on justification by faith alone, without works (59-64). Justification by faith and works is the by-product of a conditional covenant. The Catechism will have none of it.

That the covenant is an eternal relationship is perfectly in harmony with the Catechism's emphasis on eternal life and living with God. Christ has not only redeemed us from sin, but obtained "for us the favor of God, righteousness and eternal life" (37). Our death is "a passage into eternal life" (42). And consider Q. & A. 58.

58 Q. What comfort takest thou from the article of "life everlasting"? A. That since I now feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, after this life I shall inherit perfect salvation, which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man" to conceive, and that, to praise God therein for ever.

That the covenant is with the elect alone is not stated, obviously. However, there is the usual Reformed emphasis on Christ as Mediator (of the covenant) who died to save His people, and Christ as Head who died for His own. The implication is that the covenant is made with the elect alone. In addition, church and covenant are virtually identified in 74, and the church is described as "chosen" (54).

The Catechism plainly teaches that the covenant is with believers and their seed (74). That this seed can only be the elect seed of believers, and not all children, is plain from the fact that to each of them is promised "redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith." If this is promised to the children by the God who cannot lie, it is a promise God can and will make only to His people chosen in Christ.

Much more evidence exists in the catechism itself of its covenantal underpinnings, from the beautiful description of the covenant relation Adam and Eve had with God before the fall into sin, to the sacraments—signs and seals of God's covenant, to the blessed covenant fellowship with our heavenly Father in and through prayer. But our allotted space is more than filled.

What a blessing is the Heidelberg Catechism to the Reformed church that embraces the doctrine of God's everlasting covenant of grace! 

Report of Classis East
September 11, 2013
Byron Center PRC

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, September 11, 2013 at the Byron Center PRC. Each church was represented by two delegates. Rev. J. Slopsema was the chairman for this session.

The business was routine and classis was finished early.

As the chairman noted, this is a sign that the churches have peace and unity in their midst.

Classical appointments were given to Faith PRC. There were no expenses for this session.

Classis will meet next on Wednesday, January 8, 2014 at Southeast PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huisken
Stated Clerk 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Congregation Activities

With the Word of God found in Galatians 6:10 in mind, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are the household of faith," we extend our congratulations to our sister church in Singapore, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, organized November 9, 1986, and the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL, organized on November 11, 1988.

The bulletin of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA of Sunday, September 29, included a thank-you to all in their congregation who were able to spend some time at Hope the day before. That day was a scheduled work-day for the members. Various projects were lined up for completion, including trimming trees and shrubs, checking the sprinkler systems, painting porch poles and trim, and re-coating the social-hall roof.

The congregation of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI continues their efforts to place their

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Pictorial Directory on line. Members were encouraged to send in any updated pictures to their website. If they were hesitant to do that, they could make arrangements with those in charge of the project to have a new picture taken. So, if curiosity gets the better of you, we encourage you to go to Georgetown's website and have a look. We did!

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Loveland, CO PRC sponsored a lecture on September 26 at their church. Prof. David Engelsma spoke on, "The Coming of the Kingdom of Christ: Christianizing the World?" This lecture promised to critique the common grace and Christian Reconstruction projects of turning this world into the kingdom of Christ before the second coming, but Prof. Engelsma also promised to emphasize the Reformation's "office of all believers" in living and advancing the kingdom of Christ in all areas of everyday earthly life.

The Evangelism Committee of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada reminded their congregation to invite

family and friends to a lecture held on September 27. This lecture featured guest speaker Rev. Steven Key, pastor of the Loveland, CO PRC, speaking on the topic, "The Reformed World View: How shall we live?" In this lecture Pastor Key hoped to address such questions as: How are we to view the world? What is our calling in the world? and What is the church's calling?

Sister-Church Activities

We thank Stephanie Lanning, wife of our denomination's minister-on-loan to Singapore, Rev. Andrew Lanning, for providing the "News" with the following from her blog, "Stories From Singapore." "On September 21 we had a Mooncake Gospel Meeting at church [the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church]. This is a meeting held around the time of the Mooncake Festival each year. The meeting is completely in Chinese, so that people can invite their Chinese-speaking relatives and friends to hear the gospel. Elder Lee Kong Wee spoke on John 18:12-30 under the theme, 'The Light of the World.' After the speech there was dinner, with mooncakes for

dessert. The Mooncake Festival, also called the Mid Autumn Festival or Lantern Festival, is a Chinese harvest celebration. There are legends linked to the beginning of it, but from what I can gather, what remains today is mainly the lighting of lanterns and the eating of mooncakes. Around the festival time, mooncakes are sold all over Singapore. These are pastries filled with a variety of ingredients, including red bean pasta and lotus."

Members of our sister church in Northern Ireland, the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, welcomed Rev. J. Y. Paulraj to their fellowship on Sunday, September 8. Rev. Paulraj, pastor of a Reformed church in Vellore, India, has had contact with our churches, especially the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, and their pastor, Rev. Carl Haak, over the past several years. Rev. Paulraj was in Northern Ireland for a few days in September, so Covenant invited him to give a PowerPoint presentation after their Sunday evening service on September 8. His speech about his work in Vellore proved to be very interesting and should be on-line soon at youtube.

com/cprcni, if you want to take a look.

Denomination Activities

By all accounts, the annual meeting of the Reformed Free Publishing Association, held September 19 at the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, was a wonderful evening. In addition to a large crowd of readers, families, and friends, the night also marked a record high attendance for Association members, with 84 present. Also encouraging was the addition of 14, mostly young, new members. Rev. Brian Huizinga, pastor of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA gave an excellent and timely speech entitled, "Encouraging the Next Generation to Read." The audio recording of the meeting is available for download on SermonAudio.com and the text of the speech will be published in upcoming issues of the *Standard Bearer*.

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC hosted an evening of volleyball games and bonfire with the young people of the

Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI on Saturday, September 21.

On Sunday, September 29, the Young Calvinists presented a "Con-tate Domino" event at First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. This singing event was designed for young people and young adults.

The Young People of the Hull, IA PRC were invited to Kooima's Corn Maze, with a bonfire to follow, the evening of September 19, and then, we assume, in an effort not to be outdone, the Young Adults of Hull followed with a trip to Kooima's Corn Maze, with bonfire following, on September 27.

School Activities

On the evening of October 3, parents and teachers of Hope PR Christian School in Walker, MI were invited to Hope's fall PTA meeting. Rev. David Overway, pastor of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI, spoke on applying Scripture to our children, teaching our children the meaning of Scripture as it applies to them, and the importance of practical application of biblical stories and doctrines.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The members of the Adult Fellowship Society of Hope PRC of Redlands express their sincere Christian sympathy to Trudi Hopkins and her family in the loss of her husband and their father and grandfather,

BEN HOPKINS.

"(He) set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust" (Psalm 40:2b-4a).

Gary Gaastra, Vice-president
Donna Bruinsma, Secretary

Bound Volumes

■ With the September 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer*, volume 89 was finished. If you would like your own issues bound, please deliver them to the **RFPA office** before the end of October. For additional orders, call Paula at (616) 457-5970.

Lecture

*Earthquakes,
Cancer,
Wildfires,
Violence,
Tornadoes,
Terrorist Attacks,
Car Crashes,
Heart Attacks—*

Do things happen by chance?
Does everything have a reason?
Who is in control in this world?
What comfort is there in the calamities
of life?
How can this be for my good?

Hear Rev. Ronald Van Overloop
speak on:

**“Calamities: The Mighty God,
Our Father, Has the Answers!”**

FRIDAY, November 8, 2013
7:30 P.M.

at Covenant United Reformed
Church
3724 Lovers Lane
Kalamazoo, Michigan

sponsored by the Evangelism Committee of
Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hudsonville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Deacon Dave Kraker and his family in the death of Dave’s father,

MR. HOWARD KRAKER.

We pray that our Lord may comfort them with His word in James 1:25: “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

Rev. Garrett Eriks, President
Ralph Vander Veen, Clerk

SB Index

■ A new improved digital index of the *Standard Bearer*, volumes 1 - 89, is now available at www.RFPA.org. The cost is \$10.

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Peace Protestant Reformed Church express their Christian sympathy to the family and friends of

MR. BART ZANDSTRA,

who was taken to glory by his Redeemer. “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. Clayton Spronk, President
Barry Warner, Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour
November 2013

Date	Topic	Text
November 3	“No Likeness Compared to God”	Isaiah 40:18-21
November 10	“Jehovah: The Sovereign King”	Isaiah 40:22-24
November 17	“The Strong and Holy One”	Isaiah 40:25, 26
November 24	“The Source of a Happy Heart”	Proverbs 15:16, 17