

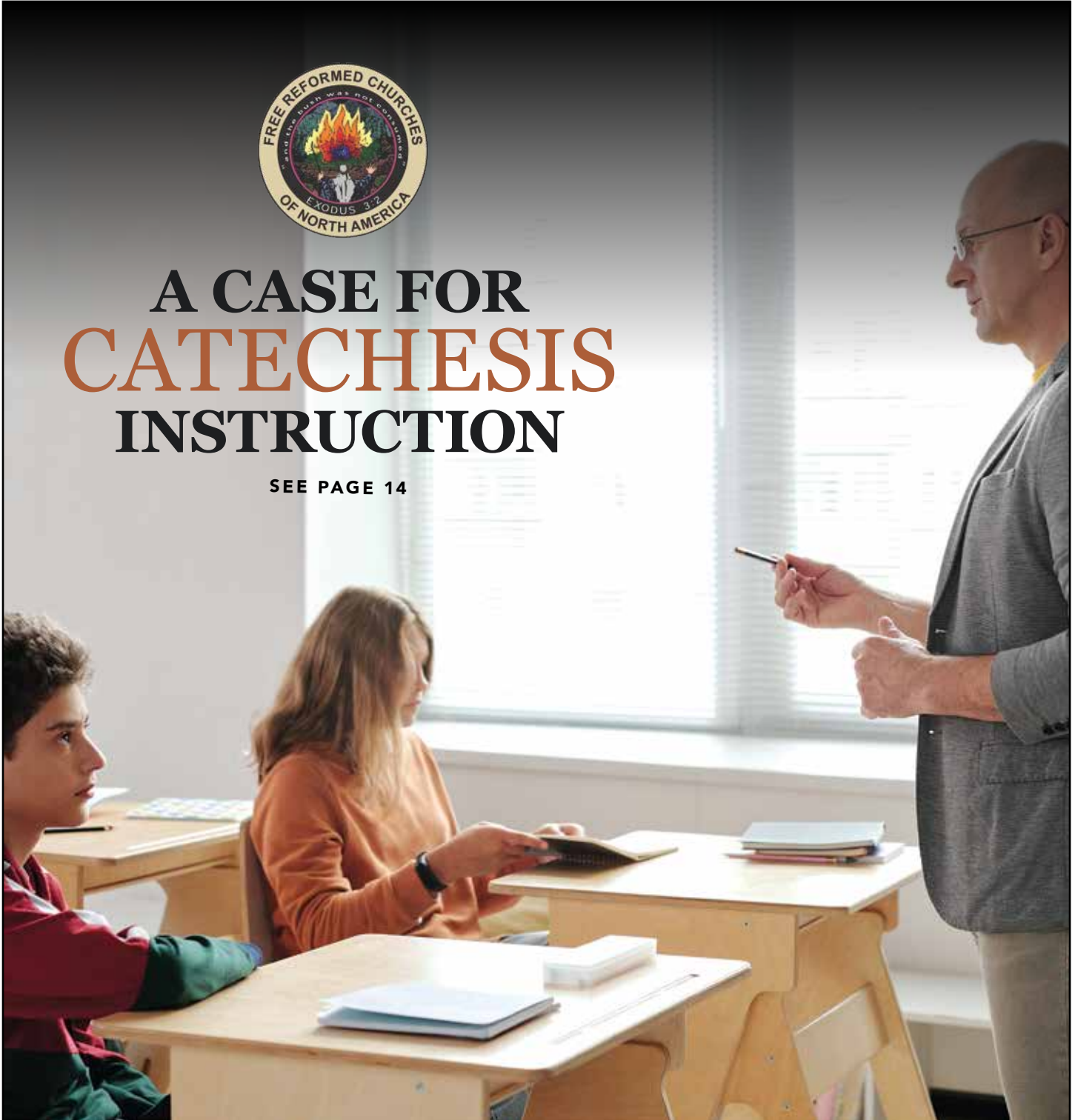
THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



A CASE FOR CATECHESIS INSTRUCTION

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THE CHRISTIANS CONFIDENCE IN LIFE

**“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”
Philippians 1:6**

Whenever God starts a work, He always finishes what He starts. He sees it through to the end. Unlike us, God has all of the infinite resources He needs at His disposal to ensure that what He purposes to do will be accomplished. This means that whenever God begins a saving work in the heart of any of His people, they can rest assured that He will carry on that work until it is finally completed. For this reason, the Christian can have confidence in life. This is the confidence that Paul expresses in Philippians 1:6, that “he which hath begun a good work in them will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

The Commencement of this Work

Paul says here in this verse that God had begun a good work in the lives of the believers who were in the church at Philippi. The same is true of every child of God in every age and generation of the church. God is the one who begins the work of salvation in their hearts. God is the one who sovereignly takes the initiative in beginning a good work within us. Salvation always begins with God. God is the one who makes the first move. Moreover, we know that if He did not make the first move, then we would make no move at all. All of us were born running away from God. If God had never taken the initiative to find us, then we would still be running away from Him.

This is the glory of the entire message of the gospel: God comes to us in His grace and in His love to actively seek and to save that which was lost, that which was running away from Him. The word that is translated here as “begun” is referring to this grace. It speaks of a very deliberate and decisive act on God’s part in which He is the seeker, the mover, the author of our salvation. He comes to do a very definite work within His people – the work of regeneration or the new birth. Now we often speak of salvation as being a work for us, and that is absolutely true. God sent His Son into this world to do all that was necessary for us in order that we might be saved. However, in order for anyone to actually enjoy the benefits of the saving work of Christ on our behalf, that redemption which Christ has purchased for us must be actively applied to us.

This is exactly what God has purposed to do and is exactly what He does do then in the hearts of His people. This good work of applying the benefits of salvation purchased by Christ begins therefore with the work of imparting new life to the soul – a soul that is languishing in a state of spiritual death when God comes to it. But He comes in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring into being a new life within our souls, the life of God Himself. In the new birth, God makes us partakers of the divine nature by making us alive together with Christ. This is the good work then that Paul is confident that God had begun in the hearts of these believers in Philippi.

The Continuation of this Work

However, when God visits us with His salvation, He does not just begin a work within us by imparting new life from above to the soul. He also carries on the work that He has now begun within the soul. That is why Paul goes on to say that He which hath begun a good work in us will perform it, or go on performing it, until it is completed. God now takes personal responsibility for completing the work of His own hands. The ongoing work of God within the hearts of His people is like the work of a sculptor. They are like clay in the hands of the divine potter. Having begun a good work within them, God will go on constantly working upon them and within them from day to day to shape, mold, and fashion them into the image of his Son, Jesus Christ. The work of regeneration or the new birth is always followed in God’s plan and purpose of salvation by the work of sanctification. In sanctification, God works continuously to cause us to grow up to maturity in Christ by progressively working to make us more and more like Christ in thought, in word, and in deed.

In absolutely everything God does in our lives as believers, we need to remember that He is working toward that very definite goal of bringing us into a greater conformity to the likeness of Jesus Christ. He will not rest until that “good work” is finally finished. However, it is not a work that happens overnight or all at once. It is a process that will not be completed until the day of Jesus Christ. We need to learn then that God does not make us perfect straightaway. Paul is stressing to us here that the work of God’s grace is only begun in this life, but is never finished here. As long as we are in this world, we will always be able to look at ourselves and see many things in our hearts and lives that have the potential to discourage us and get us down because we realize that we are not making the progress that we would desire.

The Completion of this Work

But Paul also wants us to remember that God does not leave off in the middle of His work. He finishes what He starts. He completes the good work He begins in the lives of His people. The child of God needs to remember, as one old saint of God put it: “The Lord always looks at His people, not as they currently are, but as they will be when they’re done.” The believer is called to remember that they are still a divine work in progress. When God looks at them with all of their blemishes and imperfections, He sees what only He can currently see. He sees what He knows they will yet become by His grace. For just as the work of regeneration is always followed by the work of sanctification, God knows that He will accomplish the work of their glorification when Christ returns to this earth again for the second time. Only on that great day, the day of Jesus Christ, will God finally and completely perfect what concerns each of His people.

While it does not yet appear what we shall be as believers, as John reminds us in his first epistle (3:1-2), we know this, that when Christ shall appear on the great day of the resurrection, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. We will finally have received a perfect, glorified body like unto His own glorious body and then we will finally dwell with Him forever, body and soul, in the new heavens and the new earth. That is the glorious reality that Paul is anticipating here with such confidence. This reality awaits all of those in whom God has begun a good work. As believers then, we are called to anticipate and look forward to this great reality by faith so that we would be encouraged to keep on pressing on in our walk with the Lord, confidently believing that He which hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. ①

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“AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS” (3)

Repentance and forgiveness are beautiful yet rare, whether it be in politics, the workplace, church, extended families, or home. These realities call us to return to the basics about forgiveness. We have seen the need to forgive and the nature of forgiveness in different situations. The calling to live out of a forgiving spirit is high – higher than we can attain on our own. How can we truly pray, “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”? By the grace of the God of forgiveness in Christ received by His Spirit.

Who calls to forgive?

Mere theory is often easy to dispense, but practice is another matter. If we have been hurt, we can think, “You have no idea what I’ve gone through. How can you tell me to forgive?” But who calls us to forgive? Not a theologian in his quiet office in a wonderful seminary, but the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Who was ever so mistreated as He was? He came from heaven moved by love and went about doing good. He never wronged anyone in any way. None of His actions or words gave anyone any reason to feel wronged by Him.

Yet, He was met with misunderstanding, resistance, rejection, slander, and plots to kill. When He cast out devils, they slandered Him of doing so by Beelzebub. When He showed grace to sinners, He was accused of being a gluttonous friend of sinners. When He preached that He was the Messiah, they tried to throw Him off the cliff. In the end, He was betrayed, abandoned, arrested, mocked, beaten, and scourged. He endured the greatest human travesty of justice the world has ever witnessed in His trial before the high priest and later Pilate. How did He respond to this all as He was being crucified? “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). He had a forgiving spirit that desired them to know the forgiveness of God. As the one more wronged than any other, He displayed a forgiving spirit that rises above any other.

Easily we think, He forgave because He was the Son of God, but I am not. That is very true, but let us never forget that Christ Jesus was a real human being who forgave His enemies. We can think, “He was perfect, I am not.” That is also true and that is our problem. Another way of saying we are not perfect is to say we are sinners prone to hate rather than love, hurt rather than help, and be self-centered rather than God-centred.

Receiving Forgiveness

If that is what we are, we need to repent and confess our sin before God. Maybe you are thinking that someone else has to repent and

ask forgiveness from you, but have you ever come to God that way with your sin against God? We may see the faults of others so clearly and they may indeed be very real, but are our sins real as well? So real that we cannot shake them off, bury them, or shrink them, but only confess them in their real ugliness, real dishonor of God, and real hurt toward others?

When we become sinners before the God of glory, we are no longer simply troubled about others' sin, but our own. Our own becomes the worst because God shows us what is in our heart. He leads us to confess, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight" (Psalm 51). I deserve judgment rather than forgiveness. Yet, I plead for pardon rather than condemnation.

At His feet, such supplicants find God is who He has revealed himself to be: "thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee" (Psalm 86). The God who has every right not to forgive is ready to forgive!

We may be sure of that readiness because of what He has done to be able to forgive sins. He did not just forgive sins the way we may forgive a debt by not demanding payment. God's justice must be satisfied. The debt of sin must be paid by one who has no debts of his own to pay. That is why He sent His own Son in the flesh to live in perfect righteousness and receive that great debt of His people's sin on His account. He paid it in full as He suffered God's infinite wrath against sin and laid down His life for sin. Christ was willing to be rejected and despised by man, forsaken and punished by God, and bear the curse and shame of crucifixion in body and soul. He was willing to suffer because God is ready to forgive. He secured a perfect righteousness made up of perfect love to cover the guilt of unloving and unforgiving spirits. God sent His Son to open the way back to Him, through clearing away guilt, bringing to true repentance, and filling with a love that is pained about sin and delights in approaching to God.

This God is the source of all forgiveness! Who can stay from a God more ready to forgive than we are to confess our sin? Who would rather carry the burden of sin that would sink us into hell rather than fall down before the God ready to forgive for the sake of the blood and righteousness of Christ? Only pride, unbelief, blindness and folly keep any of us from such a God!

Those sins only make us need forgiveness the more. Amid those sins, He stretches out His arms to receive the wicked who have so abused His goodness and those who find no forgiveness in their hearts. To walk past the outstretched arms of this God in Christ, to hold onto sin, and to maintain a bitter spirit toward others is to perish.

Forgiven to forgive

What a wonderful contrast it is to find forgiveness with Him for all your sin! Then you begin to understand Ephesians 4:32: "be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, *even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*" God's forgiveness makes you forgiving! The more you experience of the greatness of your sin and the wonder of His forgiveness, the more His love melts your heart and revenge trickles out. The more His pardoning love fills you, the readier you become to forgive. The more you know of forgiveness giving reconciliation with God, the more you want to seek reconciliation with others! This is God's grace!

In a Netherlands Reformed mission station in Papua New Guinea, an aboriginal came and knelt at the Lord's Supper table with the others. But then he stood up again and hurried back to his bench and sat with his head in his hands. A few minutes later, he stood up again and went to the table and took the hand of the man beside him. After the service, the preacher asked why he did that. He said, "When I bowed at the Lord's Supper, I saw that the man beside me was the one who murdered my father. I remembered I had sworn I would drink his blood even as he drank my father's blood. Though this vengeance didn't live in my heart anymore, I couldn't kneel beside him as brother in Christ. I went back. But when I sat down again, I saw in my heart how Jesus hung on the cross and

The debt of sin must be paid by one who has no debts of his own to pay. That is why He sent His own Son in the flesh to live in perfect righteousness and receive that great debt of His people's sin on His account.

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prayed between murderers: ‘Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ When I heard him praying for those who crucified him, then I could stand up and forgive the man who murdered my father.”

This is the power of God’s grace by His Spirit. Maybe you struggle to have a forgiving spirit. Let that struggle bring you before the God of forgiveness for yourself. May the power of His forgiveness overcome all your reluctance! He has grace to give by His Spirit! What a blessing to know that forgiving grace that bears fruit in a forgiving spirit.

An indispensable, sweet grace

This grace of a forgiving spirit is so valuable in life. It may be exercised amid the many so-called “little” problems that can so easily build up if there is not a forgiving spirit in marriage, family, church, school, or the workplace. It may be exercised amid sins that have so pained you and threaten to overwhelm life with the waves of bitterness, self-pity, anger, or hostility. We are always in danger of becoming victims of not simply what others do against us but of our own resultant bitterness, anger, and depression.

The grace of a forgiving spirit is rooted in love and produces patience and forbearance. How beautiful to see sin confessed and forgiveness expressed! These graces do not always take away all the hurt or consequences of sin, but they are God’s way of healing wounds, strengthening bonds, and building up amid brokenness. Sometimes in the way of forgiveness, relationships become even better than they had ever been before. Let us then seek this grace of a humble spirit that is ready to confess sins and forgive wrongs.

This grace of forgiveness also strengthens confidence that God will continue to give His forgiving grace. As the Heidelberg Catechism paraphrases the Lord’s prayer, “as we forgive our debtors means, “even as we feel this evidence of thy grace in us, that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbor.”

Who may go to God with child-like confidence that God will forgive? Children who pray, “Our Father who art in heaven...forgive us our debts.” Who may know they are children? Those who feel *evidence* of His grace in them. One evidence is a loving, forgiving spirit.

Feeling that evidence gives expectation that the God who has shown mercy will continue to show mercy in forgiving sin.

Knowledge of God’s forgiving grace does not make the prayer for forgiveness redundant, but sweet. As one who has transgressed against a loving Father, God’s child may confess that sin and plead for forgiveness, knowing He has already proven that He is ready to forgive.

The opposite is also true. If we persist in holding grudges, refuse to forget injustices, and cling to an unforgiving spirit, we can cherish no hope that God has forgiven our sin. To think we cannot forgive others but God has forgiven us is to say others’ sin against us is far worse than our sin against God. The purpose of the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18 is to show that claims to be forgiven without it making you forgive are baseless. Then there is every reason in us for God to reject our petition for forgiveness. That only makes us need His gracious forgiveness the more. Let that direct you away from others to this God who is still ready to forgive.

Knowing His forgiveness encourages to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” That is the petition of one who realizes that the debts others owe him are small compared to the debt he owes God, the one whose concern about his debt before God makes him lose sight of the debts of others, the one whose chief desire is to know the reconciled face of God in Christ!

When that is your desire, you can never ask Him for this grace too often! God’s forgiving grace in Christ will never be exhausted. After all, Christ taught and teaches to pray daily, “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” ①

The grace of a forgiving spirit is rooted in love and produces patience and forbearance. How beautiful to see sin confessed and forgiveness expressed!



Christian Ministry to Israel commits over \$15,000 CDN annually to support missionary couple Albert and Esther Knoester and their work at a drop-in coffee shop in downtown Dimona in the Negev Desert. Read more about this couple and their work in our next newsletter.

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BLACK LIVES MATTER

Phillis Wheatley by Simonetta Carr. Published by Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Hardcover, 64 pages.

Few people will disagree that "Black Lives Matter," though there may be concerns about what some promote with this slogan on their banner. Anyone who knows something of the history of slavery in the English-speaking world will agree that the often inhumane practices of slavery present a very dark page in the history of our Christian past. Even more recent decades have witnessed shocking and inexcusable racial attitudes and treatments. Reading this true story of a little black girl of unknown age, who came to America from Africa on a slave boat in 1761, will give some perspective and understanding of the dreadfulness of slavery. Yet, the story of Phillis Wheatley is also a story of God's sovereign grace. This young black slave girl became the author of the first poetry book to be published by a woman in the English language. She became a celebrated Christian poetess and her life was an example and evidence that the black race was not intellectually inferior, as was generally held during that period in history.

This beautifully illustrated book is part of the Christian Biographies for Children series written by talented author Simonetta Carr. This story is simply told, understandable for young readers, but is also furnished with many details explaining the background to "Black History" in America. Based on historical data, the author traces the life of a young, apparently orphaned, black slave girl who survived the 240-day boat journey in a merchant ship commissioned by an American merchant to buy about one hundred "prime slaves" from local traders in West Africa in exchange for 2,640 gallons of rum and other goods. Captain Peter Gwinn was told to buy as few women and girls as possible. But somehow young Phillis survived the conditions on board as one of seventy-four survivors of ninety-five slaves on board (p. 9) and was sold to John and Susanna Wheatley, who had lost a young daughter to death. They were assured that frail, little Phillis, named after the ship that brought her to America, was about the same age as the girl they lost. But no one knew how old she was, not even Phillis herself.

Her owner, John Wheatley, was a respected merchant and had one other black slave, but also an older daughter Mary, who appears to have taught Phillis so well that in sixteen months she could read the most difficult portions in the Bible. Under the tutelage of Mary, she studied literature, history, geography, and even some Latin. The Wheatleys also took Phillis to church. She also met Occum, a Mohegan minister of the gospel who stayed in the Wheatley home. To him she wrote the first of many letters. Occum was a poet also and apparently encouraged her, so that in 1765, four years after coming to America, she wrote her first poem. A year later, she wrote a poem which mentioned that the classic cultures of the Latins and Greeks can teach some virtues, but eternal life is found only in Christ.

Most of her many poems were of a religious nature or commented on current events. This was the time when the Americans protested the British Parliament's imposition of what they thought were unfair taxes. When part of an imposed tax was annulled, Phillis wrote a poem addressed to King George III, thanking him for his part and praising him as a father to his

people. She also wrote a poem in honour of Whitefield when he passed away, praising him for how much she had learned from his preaching. Selina Hastings, also known as Countess of Huntington, mentor of many evangelical preachers, was also one of her favourites. So many of her poems were published that the Wheatleys decided to publish them in a book. This was difficult, not because of Phillis's young age, but because many people doubted that Africans had the same mental abilities as people of European descent.

Due to poor health, it was decided that she ought to travel at sea. This decision brought her to London, England, where she was treated with admiration and honour as a gifted author and also as a model for abolishing slavery. Phillis had met Benjamin Franklin, a supporter of John Newton (former slave ship captain), and the aunt of William Wilberforce. By staying in Britain, as suggested, she would have gained her freedom, but she chose to go back to

America, where her owners set her free. In January 1774, Phillis saw the first copies of her book, published by the British press and featuring a portrait of her, which was a great honour at the time.

The death of her mentors, the Wheatleys, and especially her beloved Susanna, whom she regarded as a mother, left her unsupported and financially struggling. During the Revolutionary War, she took George Washington's side and wrote him letters, urging him to grant freedom to the slaves. She kept busy writing poetry and celebrated the end of the war with the poem entitled "Liberty and Peace," in which she expressed her hope that the freedom America had gained from Britain would usher in a time of peace and prosperity for the country (p. 45). Phillis married well, but ended up in poverty due to her husband's business failure and ill health. Phillis died in 1784, at the presumed early age of 31.

Although Phillis's life seems to end somewhat tragically, this does not reduce the importance of her legacy, to which Simonetta Carr dedicates a full chapter (pp. 52-54). Her legacy continues and books about her life are still written. A statue in Boston honours her as a black woman and an important figure in American history. She was a gifted poetess, a sincere Christian, and a great example for all who believe that black lives matter. In the following poem, she confesses what she thought to be her own greatest personal legacy:

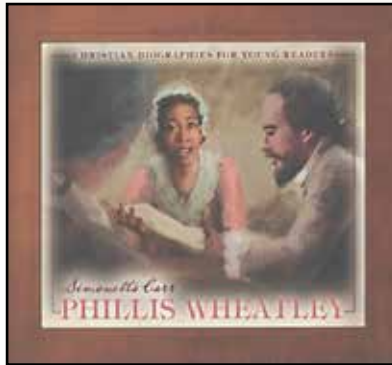
On Being Brought from Africa to America

'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land;
 Taught my benighted soul to understand
 That there's a God that there's a Saviour too:
 Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
 Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
 "Their colour is a diabolic die."
 Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,
 May be refin'd, and join the' angelic train. ①

Further Reading

See also *Daughters of the Faith Series – Freedom's Pen: A Story Based on the Life of Freed Slave and Author Phillis Wheatley*. Available from Reformed Book Services and Reformation Heritage Books.

This book and others may be purchased in Canada at Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario, and at Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.



THE ORDER OF SALVATION (I)

Introduction

With the summer season ending, most of us are ready to return to our daily routines of working to earn a living while our children and young people go back to their studies to prepare for future positions in society. With renewed energy, we continue to provide for our own and our family's physical needs, but let us not forget that we also need to be actively involved in looking after our spiritual needs. Let us engage in faithful church attendance, prayer, and Bible study, in order to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). In this connection, I would like to explore with you the biblical doctrine of the *Order of Salvation* or *Ordo Salutis*.

What is the Order of Salvation?

What do we mean by the *Order of Salvation*? It concerns the application of salvation. While the Bible teaches that our salvation was accomplished by Christ and must be regarded as His *finished* work, Scripture also insists that Christ, by His Spirit, needs to make us *partakers* of that work. Many seem to forget or fail to pay enough attention to this very important truth. To be saved, we need both Christ's work *for* us and *in* us. The latter He does by and through His Spirit who unites us to Himself. As John Calvin writes in Book III of his *Institutes*,

We must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours [one with us] and to dwell within us... Paul shows the Spirit to be the inner teacher by whose effort the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air or beat upon our ears.

To bring about this spiritual union, the Spirit of Christ follows a certain order or way. Calvin uses all of Book III to explain in over 300 pages "The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ: What Benefits Come to Us from It, and What Effects Follow."

The Benefits of Salvation

Most Reformed theologians agree that the Holy Spirit bestows a number of benefits on believers. These benefits, according to Louis Berkhof and other Dutch Reformed scholars, are calling, regeneration, faith, repentance, justification, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. The Scottish Presbyterian

theologian, John Murray, includes assurance as an additional blessing. The question is, are these benefits granted and experienced by God's people in a chronological order? The answer is yes and no. There are people who take these various benefits as separate and successive experiences, one after another, but this approach can easily lead one into the vagaries of subjectivism and mysticism.

At the same time, Dr. Anthony Hoekema, late professor at Calvin Theological Seminary, taught that the saving benefits of the Holy Spirit cannot be separated, but they can and should be distinguished from each other. He writes,

By regeneration we mean that work of the Holy Spirit whereby he initially brings us into a living union with Christ and changes our hearts so that we who were spiritually dead become spiritually alive. It will be obvious that regeneration as thus defined must precede conversion (including faith and repentance), justification, sanctification and perseverance, since these last-named experiences presuppose the existence of spiritual life. In this sense, we could speak of a kind of order in the process of salvation.

Scriptural Evidence of a Logical Order

While it is true that an all-wise God does not need to perform His saving acts in a chronological and sequential order as we, creatures of time, must act, there is nevertheless a logical *order* in which God saves us from sin and its consequences. Scripture describes us as "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1) and therefore unable to save ourselves by our own efforts (John 6:44). God needs to act on us and draw us out of our misery by His almighty power while we are still spiritually dead. The order of salvation is an attempt to understand the nature and logical order of the steps God takes to save us.

This order is, however, more than just an abstract system invented by theologians, because Scripture itself tells us that our salvation is accomplished by means of a divinely-ordained progression. One of the clearest evidences is Roman 8:28-30. In that passage Paul writes:

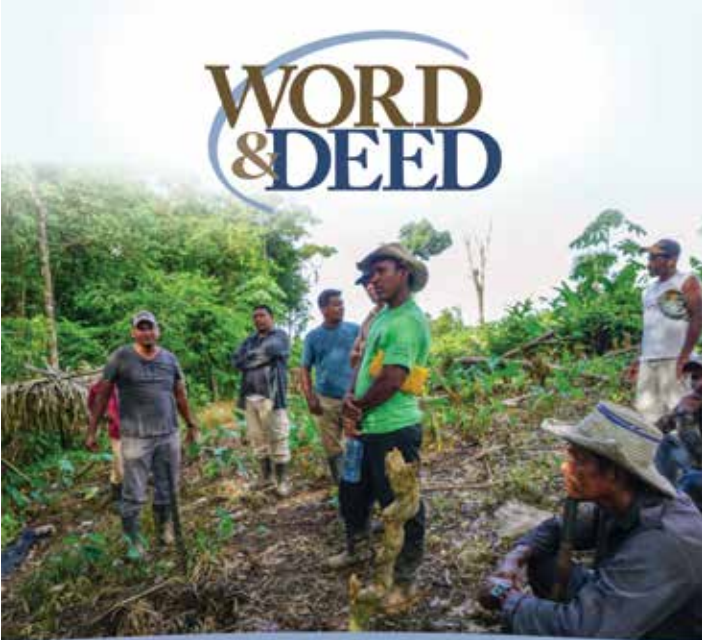
And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

The Golden Chain of Salvation

This passage is often referred to as the golden chain of salvation because Paul not only speaks of an unbreakable order in God's




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Colossians 3:17

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plan of salvation, but he also emphasizes that our salvation is from beginning to end the work of our sovereign God. Both His creative and re-creative work which “He has in us begun shall by His grace be fully done.”

Paul speaks of those foreknown by God as being predestinated. Arminians take this to mean that God looks down the corridors of time and then chooses to save those of whom He knows in advance that they will believe the gospel when they hear it. This interpretation is wrong because Paul has already told us that the calling of certain people to salvation is not based on foreseen faith, but on God’s sovereign purposes (Rom. 8: 28).

Furthermore, foreknowledge does not merely mean that God knows in advance what we will do, but rather that God knows us as individuals in the full sense described in Psalm 139. Here David says that God knows us and our thoughts before we even think them because He is the one who has formed us in our mother’s womb (vv.1,2,16).

According to Paul, all those whom God foreknew, He also predestined. Predestination refers to the particular end or purpose for which they were chosen, namely, to be conformed to the image of Christ. This process will not be completed in this life but after death, when they will pass through the final link in the chain and enter the state of glorification. Those foreknown are predestined, and those who are predestined are called effectually by the preaching of the gospel to which they respond by faith in Christ, whereby they are justified and are declared righteous in His sight.

The final link in the chain of salvation is that those foreknown, predestined, called, and justified are at last said to be glorified. This process of glorification begins with sanctification, which cannot be severed from justification, its twin sister.

How Christians Should React to God’s Order of Salvation

The apostle Paul answers this question with another question in Romans 8:31: “What shall we then say to these things?” What conclusion should we draw from the divine agenda God has before Him as He is unfolding His plan of salvation? Here we have an unbreakable chain which begins with foreknowledge and ends with glorification. The wonderful fact is that no one

included in this chain will slip through the cracks because there are no cracks to slip through. Those who share in the first link of being foreknown or fore-loved by God will all end up enjoying the last link as part of the company of the glorified.

Not everyone agrees with this positive conclusion. Some simply deny it. Others fudge on it, suggesting that the believer is secure as long as he does not sin too much or too long. Still others caution that only those who persevere will reach the final station called glory. By persevering they mean achieving this goal by human effort fuelled by human energy.

But what did Paul say? That a true believer is secure because God is on his side: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31). The apostle had many enemies opposing him. The Jews were against him. The false teachers were against him. The devil and all his demons were against him. His own sinful heart opposed him. His old nature was still resisting the new nature in him, causing him to cry out at times, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24). Yet these enemies did not conquer him. They could not discourage him to the point where he lost sight of who he was in Christ. His condition was often miserable. But his position was safe and secure. Why? Because God was his God and Father for the sake of Jesus Christ in whom Paul had learned to put his trust. All the opposition against him is insignificant and inconsequential when set against the fact that God is for him.

It is all a matter of perspective. Twelve men went to spy out the land of Canaan. All twelve saw the same facts. Ten came back with a report about giants and grasshoppers: the enemies were giants and they themselves were grasshoppers in comparison. Two brought a minority report that said, “No problem. God is for us.”

We also face opposition from many sources. From adverse circumstances, Satan, ourselves, and the world. This opposition is significant. It cannot be ignored. But let us also give full weight to what Paul is saying here. If we are believers, God’s favour rests upon us. That is a fact and those who can lay hold of this fact by faith can overcome all opposition with His power.

The question is, do we really believe this? Are we convinced that God is for us and that all things that happen to us will turn out for our good? If so, what can possibly go wrong?

In the next months, we hope to study in some detail this biblical *Order of Salvation*, the process that explains how God saves us and for what purpose, namely the glory of His Son and our participation in that glory, as we are increasingly being conformed to His image by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18). ¹¹

Dr. C. Pronk is an emeritus pastor and member of Grace Free Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario.

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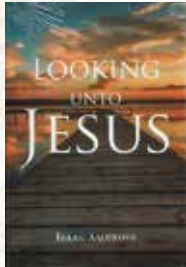
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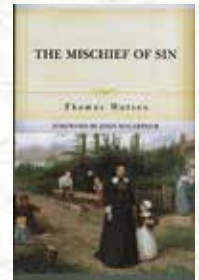
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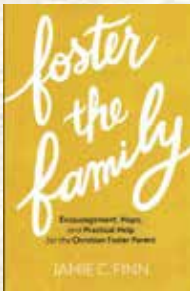


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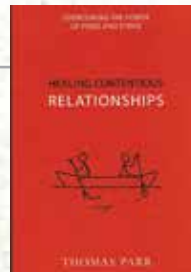
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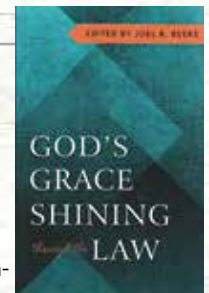
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CULTURE & CATECHISM

Context is everything. Or so it is said. For many, the first responsibility of the Church is to listen to its surrounding culture. We need to get their pulse, walk a mile in their shoes, understand what makes them tick. Only then can we ‘speak into’ their situation.

To be sure, each particular culture will present the Church with its own set of questions, some of which we might consider ‘honest’ (cf. Acts 17:32). As stewards of the mysteries of God, we should wisely parcel out God’s truth to them, given their own particular histories, needs, and temptations. Context is surely not everything, but it is something.

Further, the Reformed confessions and catechisms were certainly birthed in a context distinct in many ways from our own. Particular issues of the day pressed on our forebearers, conditioning their confessions and catechisms accordingly. Like the men of Isachaar, they “understood the times” (1 Chron. 12:32) and spoke winsomely to their generation.

Catechism as Enculturation

Yet it must be stressed that the Reformation confessions and catechisms enshrined more than the Christian thought of one or two generations. They contain the collected, mature judgment of the universal Church throughout the ages. Much content and even the very language of our Reformed symbols were simply borrowed from earlier documents, especially the ecumenical creeds. Further, they aimed to articulate that form of sound words – or what Irenaeus called ‘the rule of faith’ – embodied in the Scriptures. *That truth is timeless.*

But perhaps even more to the point about our catechisms’ questions. Not all questions we ask are on the mark, as the thick-headed disciples bare witness. “Lord, and what shall this man do?” “Lord, wilt thou at this time again restore the kingdom to Israel?” And some are just downright nasty; or worse, blasphemous. “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” “Why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?” What did our forebears do in their catechisms? They didn’t just give the right answers – they also told us the right questions to ask! They didn’t just listen to their generation’s questions in each instance, though they certainly did that. But they told them the right doors to knock on.

Reformed catechism is biblical pedagogy. God has given us the deposit of truth, a timeless truth for each generation. Our catechisms furnish us with the right questions. True, they are not the only right

questions that can be asked. But they are the *main* ones. Our culture may at times ask honest questions of the Bible. But our culture on its best day is yet a world at enmity with God and hardly the best judge of relevance. The blind should trust only the true Guide implicitly. The ignorant should take a seat in Christ’s school, “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

Catechism as Counterculture

But we must pivot even further. Reformed catechesis does more than listen to the culture, answer it, and then tell it the *right* questions to ask. Our catechesis must be polemic. We must challenge our culture, call for its unconditional surrender, and martial our baptized youth to be fighters for the faith, “terrible as an army with banners” (Song 6:4, 10). Reformed catechesis does precisely that. “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled” (2 Cor. 10:5-6).

The very character of catechism, this art of Christian training, makes it clear enough. Consider briefly the following features that go against the grain of our Western, post-Christian culture.

1. *Catechesis is an authoritative discipline.* It deals not with opinions, but with dogma. Not with suggestions, but with commandments. Not tips and hints, but with divinely mandated means of grace.
2. *Catechesis is churchly in orientation.* It is by the church and for the church. It presumes that membership in the Visible Church – nothing less than the Kingdom of God on earth – is a high privilege, and involves serious preparation.
3. *Catechesis is rigorously intellectual.* While seeking to reach those of the smallest capacities, even the “little ones” without



offending them, it yet pushes everyone under its influence to think and think deeply.

4. *Catechesis is thoroughly covenantal.* It has always had the next generation of the church in view, preparing baptized children to lay hold of the promise that is their birthright (Acts 2:39). While catechesis leaves regeneration to the sovereignty of the Spirit, it does not leave children to cut their own religious path. It cuts the path for them. We do not blush to say that in catechism, the church indoctrinates its children.
5. *Catechesis is catholic.* By catholic, I mean that it does not deal with secondary matters, much less the novel, but with the faith once delivered to the saints. The things “most surely believed among us” (Luke 1:1). It is not provincial, pedaling its own idiosyncratic theology (African theology, feminist theology, etc.), but it holds forth what unifies all true believers in all ages. There is “one body, and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Eph. 4:4-6).
6. *Catechesis is confessional.* Contra biblicism, catechesis affirms that the Spirit leads his Church into all truth, and that the Church has a responsibility to articulate that truth using its own words. Further, it delimits what we must believe from what we must not – heresy.
7. *Catechesis is biblical.* “To the law and to the testimony.” If one seriously studies the great catechisms of the Reformation, one will be confronted not only with lengthy footnoted proof texts undergirding each proposition. He will also see how their very language is shaped by the Scriptures.

Relevance & Responsibility


The lust for relevance has bewitched many in the modern Church. Yet by courting relevance at every turn, the Church has made itself irrelevant. Catechism, however, is relevant, inasmuch as it summarizes the Bible’s teaching which is perennial truth. “Thy word is truth.”

But let’s not retreat into our subcultures either when the world around us is perishing. Let us meet culture head-on, finding its Mars Hills and engaging the

heathen. Let’s give our culture answers. If they are honest, let us answer them. But the teacher knows what is best. And, all the while, let us prepare our future soldiers, arming them with “the faith once delivered.” With the Spirit’s blessing, they will join with us at the gates, contending with our foes. And they’ll help us teach the nations all things that He commanded us (Matt. 28:18-20). ①

Rev. Michael Ives serves the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Rhode Island. In preparing this article he drew on two of his blog posts at westportexperiment.com (23 October 2009; 12 October 2011).

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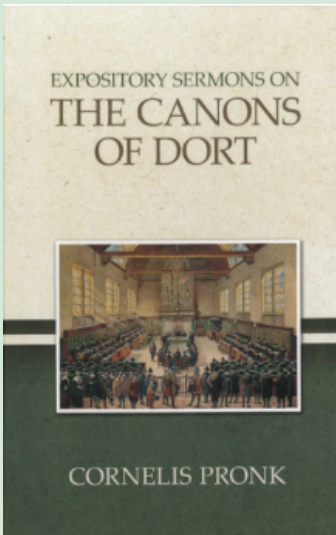


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THE IMPORTANCE OF CATECHISM TEACHING



Since the time of the Reformation, Reformed Churches – including our own denomination – have placed great emphasis on the need to catechize covenant youth. In most cases, this instruction begins around 12 years of age and continues throughout their teenage years, usually until they turn 18 or 19 years old.

The primary object of study during these years is and always has been the Heidelberg Catechism. In fact, one of the reasons why Elector Frederick III commissioned the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism was in order to indoctrinate the youth of his realm in the basic doctrines of the Reformed faith.

But after over 450 years, the question may well be asked: should we continue to do this? And if so, how should we do it?

In this article let us consider the first question. Should we continue to teach the Heidelberg Catechism? The answer to this question is a resounding yes. There are several reasons for this. First, we live in a day of great doctrinal confusion. There are many different churches today, each with their own beliefs and style of worship. How can we tell which of these churches are true and which are false? How can we distinguish between truth and error? One important way is to teach our children the Heidelberg Catechism. The Heidelberg Catechism sets forth in a very simple

way the main teachings of holy Scripture. As such, it is a powerful weapon in the battle against doctrinal error and confusion.

Second, the Heidelberg Catechism helps us answer the big questions in life – questions with which every young person struggles. These include why we are here, how we should live, why we are the way we are, and what can and must be done about it.

Third, the Catechism offers guidance on a whole range of practical matters – matters with which many young people struggle. These include sex, marriage, forgiveness, swearing, revenge, dating, cheating, sickness, money, and submission to authority – to name only a few – and it deals with these matters openly, honestly and biblically.

Fourth, and most importantly, the Heidelberg Catechism teaches us the way of salvation. It teaches us why we must be saved, how we can be saved, and how we should live in response to this salvation. It is, to borrow the title of a well-known Puritan work, a “sure guide to heaven.”

Not everyone, however, agrees with this. Some argue that the Catechism is outdated. It deals with issues that were current during the 16th Century, but not anymore. For example, it contains questions and answers refuting the Lutheran view of the presence

of Christ at the Lord's Supper; the Anabaptist objection against infant baptism; and especially the Roman Catholic view of the church, the sacraments, the worship of Mary and other saints, the mass, the place of good works in salvation and the doctrine of justification. If we are going to indoctrinate our youth, we should use something that is more contemporary and relevant – something that speaks to young people where they are at.

There is some truth to this. The Heidelberg Catechism is very much rooted in the 16th Century. But just because these matters were current during the 16th Century does not mean they have no relevance to us today. They do. The issues that divided the church in the past still divide the church today. We should be aware of these issues and know how to respond to them. The Heidelberg Catechism helps us do that. It teaches us what errors to avoid and how to respond to them.

Others point out that the Heidelberg Catechism is not the Bible. This begs the question: would it not be far better to teach our children the Word of God rather than the words of men?

There is some truth to this objection as well. The Catechism is not the Word of God, but it is a faithful summary of the Word of God. As such, it should be studied. In his book, *The Heidelberg Catechism – A Study Guide*, G.I. Williamson compares the Catechism to a road map. He writes "Why bother to study a map? Why not just go out and study the surface of the earth instead? The answer, of course, is ...that life is short and the earth is very big. One person working by himself could only map a small portion of the earth's surface. That is why maps are so valuable. They exist because many people over many years have made a study of the earth. And while these maps are not perfect, they are accurate... It is much the same with the Bible. The Bible contains a great wealth of information. It isn't easy to master it all – in fact, no one has ever mastered it completely. It would, therefore, be foolish to try to do it on our own, starting from scratch. We would be ignoring all the study of God's Word that other people have done down through the centuries. That is exactly why we have creeds... They are a kind of spiritual 'road map' of the teaching of the Bible, already worked out and proved by others before us."

For hundreds of years, Reformed churches around the world have emphasized the importance of teaching the Heidelberg Catechism. In our day, let us redouble our efforts to teach it and instil its truths into the minds of the younger generation. The Puritan preacher and theologian Richard Baxter once said, "The chief part of church reformation that is behind [accomplished], as to means, consisteth in it [catechizing]...O, brethren, what a blow may we give the kingdom of darkness by the faithful and skilful managing of this work!" May God give us grace to see and do this work today and until Christ comes again in glory! 🕊

Rev. J. Schoeman is pastor of the Emmanuel Free Reformed Church of Abbotsford, British Columbia, and author of a two-year program for teaching the Heidelberg Catechism published by Free Reformed Publications.



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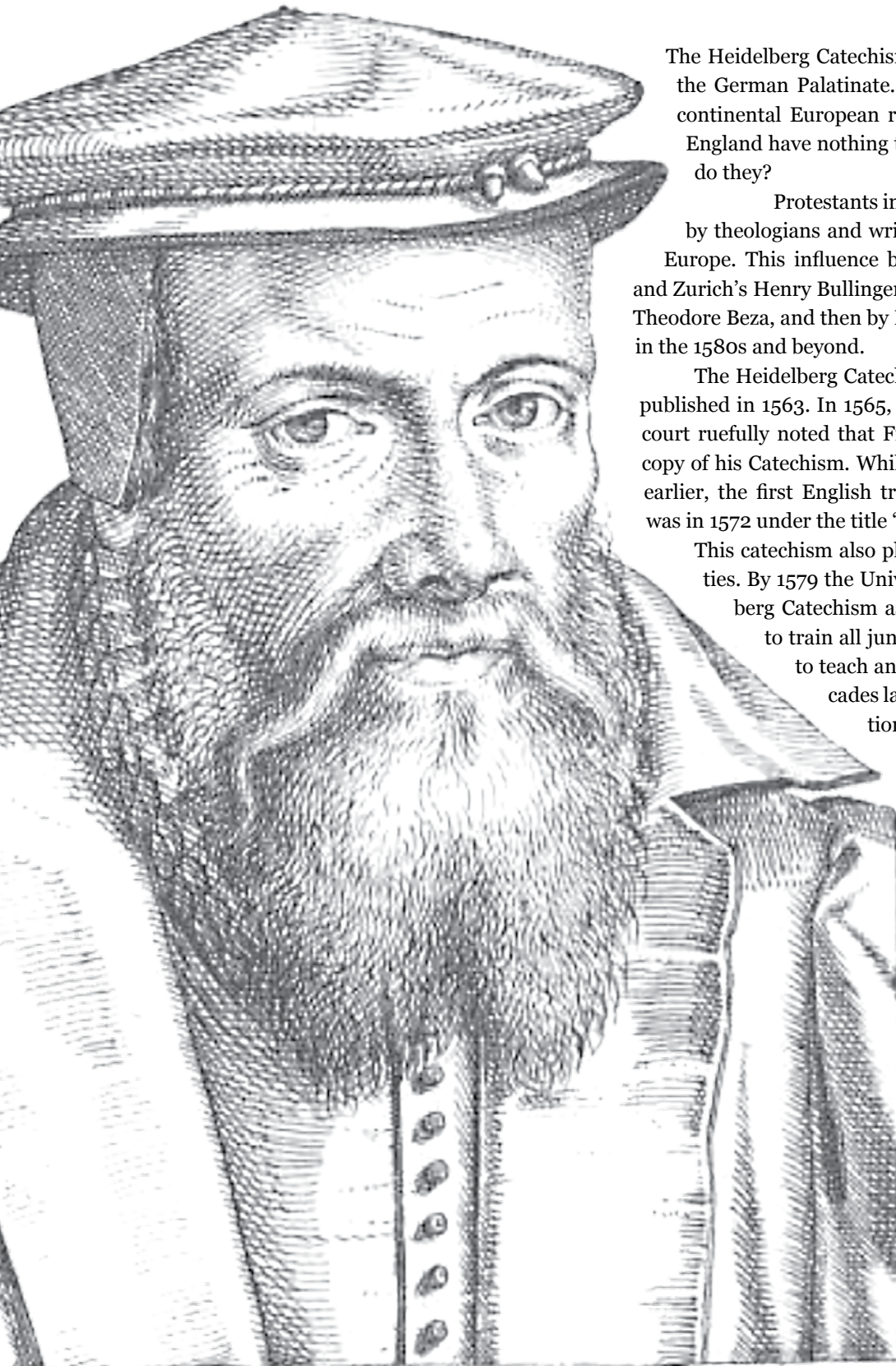


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THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, A BRITISH CATECHISM?



The Heidelberg Catechism was written in Heidelberg, a town in the German Palatinate. It has been adopted by churches with continental European roots. Churches rooted in Scotland and England have nothing to do with the Heidelberg Catechism, or do they?

Protestants in the British Isles were deeply influenced by theologians and writings from the continental mainland of Europe. This influence began with Wittenberg's Martin Luther and Zurich's Henry Bullinger, followed by Geneva's John Calvin and Theodore Beza, and then by Heidelberg's theologians and Catechism in the 1580s and beyond.

The Heidelberg Catechism reached England soon after it was published in 1563. In 1565, the Spanish ambassador to the English court ruefully noted that Fredrick III had sent Queen Elizabeth a copy of his Catechism. While Latin copies may have been available earlier, the first English translation of the Heidelberg Catechism was in 1572 under the title "Catechisme for children and others."

This catechism also played an important role in the universities. By 1579 the University of Oxford prescribed the Heidelberg Catechism as one of the standard works to be used to train all junior students. Catechists were appointed to teach and examine students on its contents. Decades later the puritan, Thomas Goodwin, mentioned that it was common practice for tutors in Cambridge University to guide their students in the study of the Heidelberg Catechism during Saturday evening devotions. It was the only catechism to run through the official Oxford University press. The popularity of the Heidelberg Catechism was furthered by the availability of Zacharias Ursinus's commentary and Jeremias Bastinguis's sermons on it. Ursinus's commentary became a standard university textbook. It was printed in English between 1587 and 1643 more frequently than was Calvin's Institutes. Both English universities used this catechism and its commentaries.

Some wanted the Heidelberg Catechism to be used in all the churches. Its 1588 edition included a fascinating 80 page preface by Thomas

Sparke and John Seddon, entitled: “A Treatise to Prove, That Ministers Publicly, and Householders Privately, are Bound to Catechise Their Parishioners and Families: and That Parishioners and Families, are Likewise Bound, Carefully and Willingly to Submit Themselves Thereunto.” In this preface they expressed the desire that the Heidelberg Catechism would be “generally received and used, both privately and publicly, in this church of England.” They argued that this should be done because “the principles of religion therein plainly and fully are contained, [and] every answer is fortified with the aptest and fittest testimonies of scripture.” Furthermore, it was “one amongst all other...most likely to get general allowance amongst us” (p.4). This point is a valid one because the Heidelberg Catechism is a wonderful blend of theological clarity and irenicism, such that it can be adopted by those who differ on “lesser” points of difference within Protestantism.

The Heidelberg Catechism also had significant influence in Scotland. The Royal Printer based in Edinburgh published a 1591 edition which stated it was “authorized by the Kinges Maestie, for the vse of Scotland.” In 1615 it was again given “semi-official” status when it was published with the (contested) Book of Common Order for the church. The same year another title page stated it was “appointed to be printed for the use of the Kirke of Edinburgh.”

When King James of Scotland headed south to gain the throne of England, the Hampton Court Conference was held with representatives of the churches. The value of having one catechism was discussed, and a puritan spokesmen said the two main native English catechisms were not suitable. Thomas Sparke, who advocated for the use of the Heidelberg Catechism in its preface, was present at the conference, but we do not yet know whether he proposed the Heidelberg Catechism at this conference. From one of the delegates of the Synod of Dort, Jacobus Trigland, we do have the report that King James himself urged the Dutch church to retain “the confession of Heidelberg...which is received and acknowledged by the unanime consent of all the reformed churches.”

The influence of the Heidelberg Catechism was also great among the many home-grown puritan catechisms. Many followed or referenced the Heidelberg three-part structure of misery, deliverance, and gratitude. A key structural question in William Whitaker’s catechism is: “Q. How are these Elect recovered? A. 1. By being convinced of their owne damnable naturall estate. 2. by being taught the matter and chiefe grounds of their salvation. 3. By having wrought in them all graces necessary to their salvation.”

Others picked up on the theme of comfort. For example Gervase Scarbrough ends his Catechism with:

“Now in the last place, tell me what is the scope and end of Catechism and Christian doctrine? A. The scope, and end of it, is the enlightening of our understand-

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ings, informing our judgements, reforming of our lives, comforting of our consciences here, and assuring our hearts of our eternal salvation hereafter: That whether we live or die, we are not our own, but belong only to our most faithful Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: who by his most precious blood hath fully satisfied for all my sins. And hath delivered me from all the powers of darkness. And so preserveth me daily, that not an hair shall fall from my head without his special providence; making all things to serve for my good and safety. And lastly, he assureth mee by his blessed Spirit more and more of everlasting life, preparing me daily in some holy measure, that I may only live unto him, and die unto sin, and to this wicked world, &c. FINIS.”


Many others include paraphrases of parts of the Heidelberg Catechism. For example concerning the fruits of faith, Thomas Wilson asks: “Of these works which do ye hold chief? Fervent prayer unto God the Father in the name of Iesus Christ,” echoing Lord’s Day 45.

These are only a few of many English catechisms influenced by the Heidelberg Catechism.

The use of the Heidelberg diminished in the mid-17th century for several reasons. When anti-puritanism strengthened in the 1630s, the Heidelberg Catechism became increasingly linked with the puritanism that was being discarded. Furthermore, when the English King Charles failed to support the Elector of the Palatinate (as the territory to which Heidelberg belonged), showing appreciation for things Heidelberg could be construed as an implicit attack on royal policy. Finally, when those who most loved the theology and piety of the Heidelberg Catechism wrote their own Westminster Standards, their attention was drawn away from the Heidelberg Catechism.

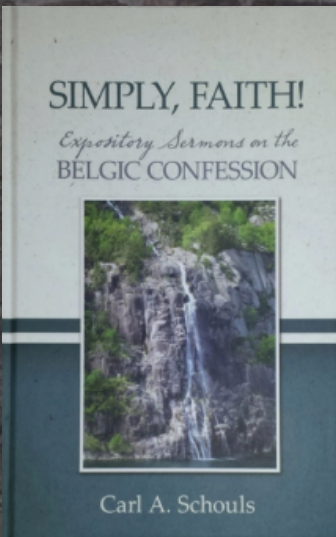
This history shows us that the British Presbyterian and the Dutch Reformed families of churches are closer historically than at times imagined. While the Westminster Standards are distinct from the Three Forms of Unity, the former were written in a theological and spiritual context that was influenced by the Heidelberg Catechism. Had the Heidelberg Catechism been adopted by the Church of England, a Westminster Shorter Catechism might never have been written and the Heidelberg Catechism might have served as a form of unity among British and Continental churches. But especially some of us even in continental Reformed churches would consider not having the Shorter Catechism a great impoverishment because we have benefited from its rich, concise, clarity. Leaving dangerous “might have’s” aside, this history shows that pastors and church-members in England and Scotland benefited from the Scriptural and spiritual beauty of the Heidelberg Catechism. Their descendants are welcome to do so today.

That made it heart warming to visit a young presbyterian family and see on a stand several laminated sheets with Heidelberg Catechism question and answers in beautiful handwriting. Before they were married, the husband gave it to his wife to cherish. I wondered: how many Free Reformed couples have done the same? Some-

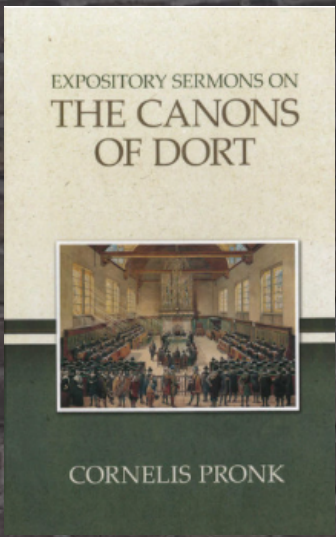


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times we need to learn about the riches entrusted to us from those who have more recently discovered them and have experienced their preciousness by grace. ^M

Sources:

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"Let the people praise Thee, O God; let ALL
the people praise Thee" Psalm 67:5



The (Sunday School) Teacher's Aim

The aim of any exertions should be distinctly understood if they are to have success. Any confusion on this point will be ill calculated to ensure failure.

Insufficient Aims

There is reason to fear that many who are engaged in the work of Sunday School instruction are but imperfectly acquainted with its ultimate end. Some are satisfied to enable children to read and have some knowledge. Others give considerable attention to habits of order, industry, and morality. They are most laudably anxious to form the character of the children, so as that they may rise into life an industrious, orderly, and sober race. This is of vast importance, and subordinate only to what I shall afterwards propose as the ultimate end of all your endeavors. Much of the peace, comfort, and safety of the community depend upon the character and the habits of the people. It should be your ceaseless effort to reform the vices, to heal the disorders, and exalt the whole character of society.

Yet, higher even than this, you must look for the summit of your hopes. A man may be all that I have represented; he may be industrious, orderly, moral, and useful in his habits, and still after all be destitute of "that faith and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

Addressing you as believers in all that revelation teaches concerning the nature, condition, and destiny of man, I must point your attention to an object which stands on higher ground than any we have yet contemplated. Consider that every one of the children, which are every Sabbath beneath your care, carries in his bosom, a SOUL as valuable and as durable as that which the Creator has lodged in your own bosom. Neither poverty, ignorance, nor vice can sever the tie which binds man to immortality. Every human body is the residence of an immortal spirit, and however diminutive by childhood, or dark by ignorance, or base by poverty, or filthy by vice the hovel might appear, a deathless inhabitant will be found within. Every child that passes the threshold of your school on a Sunday morning carries to your care and confides to your ability a soul, compared with whose worth the sun is a bauble, and with whose existence time itself is but as the twinkling of an eye.

And as these children partake in common with you in the dignity of immortality, so do they also in the degradation and ruin

of the fall. The common taint of human depravity has polluted their hearts as well as yours. They, like you, in consequence of sin, are under the curse, and stand equally exposed to everlasting misery. To them, however, the gracious scheme of redeeming mercy extends its blessings. Denied neither the privileges of immortality, nor the opportunity of eternal happiness, neither are they exempt from the obligations of religion. Faith, repentance, and holiness; or in other words, regeneration, justification, and sanctification, are as indispensable in *their* case as in yours. Their danger of losing all the rich blessings of salvation, unless great exertions be made to instruct and interest their minds, is imminent and obvious.

Such are the children which flock every Sabbath to the schools where you are carrying on the business of instruction. Look round upon the crowd of *little immortals* by whom you are constantly encircled every week; view them in the light which the rays of inspired truth diffuse over their circumstances; follow them in imagination not only into the ranks of society, but follow there down into that valley, gloomy with the shadows of death, and from which they must come forth, "some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2), and while you see them plunging into the bottomless pit, or soaring away to the celestial city, say, what should be the ultimate *object of a Sunday School teacher's exertion?*

Salvation and godliness.

You are now quite prepared to assent to my opinion on this subject, when I thus state it. The ultimate object of a Sunday School teacher should be, in humble dependence upon divine grace, *to impart that religious knowledge; to produce those religious impressions; and to form those religious habits in the minds of the children, which shall be crowned with the SALVATION of their immortal souls.* Or, in other words, *to be instrumental in producing that conviction of sin; that repentance towards God; that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; that habitual subjection in heart and life to the authority of the scriptures which constitute at once the form and power of genuine Godliness.*

Here then you see your goal, and you perceive that it includes every other in itself. To aim at anything lower than this, as your last and largest purpose; to be content with only some general improvement of character, when you are encouraged to hope for an entire renovation of the heart—or merely with the formation of *moral* habits, when such as are truly *pious* may be expected, is to conduct the objects of your benevolence with decency down into the grave without attempting to provide them with the means of a glorious resurrection out of it. To train them up in the way of sincere and undefiled religion is an object of such immense importance that, compared with this, an ability to read and write, or even all the elegant refinements of life, have not the weight

The salvation of the immortal soul, a phrase than which one more sublime, or more interesting, can never drop from the lips or the pen of man, describes your utmost and noblest purpose.

of a feather in their destiny. The truth must be told that wherever a religious education is neglected, the mere tendency of knowledge to the production of moral good, is, in most cases, very lamentably and successfully counteracted by the dreadful power of human depravity.


Sunday Schools, to be contemplated in their true light, should be viewed as *nurseries for the church of God*, as bearing an intimate connection with the *unseen world*, and as ultimately intended to point people to the realms of glory with "the spirits of just men made perfect." To judge of their value by any lower estimate, to view them merely as adapted to the perishing interests of

mortality is to cast the institution into the balances of atheism, to weigh them upon the sepulcher, and to pronounce upon their value without throwing eternity into the scale.

The salvation of the immortal soul, a phrase than which one more sublime, or more interesting, can never drop from the lips or the pen of man, describes your utmost and noblest purpose.

Means to pursue the aim

In what way this object is most likely to be obtained remains now to be considered.



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If you or your (grand)parents have materials that may be of interest to the centre, please contact:

Rev. D. Kranendonk (secretary)
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1. *Labor to impart to the children, as speedily as possible, a very correct method of reading. [Sunday schools in his day were often for poor children who had little education.]*
2. *Seek the great object of your labors, by a course of religious instruction, judiciously adapted to the capacity of the children.*

Here I think it right to remark that, as the very groundwork of religious instruction, it is of vast importance to produce, even from the class's commencement, a *deep reverence for the authority of Scriptural revelation*. From the time a child is capable of receiving a sentiment on religion, he should be made to feel the obligation of the word of God upon his understanding and conscience. The first idea which should be communicated to his mind, and which in every subsequent stage of education should be nursed and nurtured into a conviction inseparable from all his moral feelings, is that *the Bible is and must be true*; and that however singular, however beyond the range of our experience, or however miraculous any of its facts might be, and however incomprehensible are some of its doctrines, still they are *all to be believed, because they are declared in the word of God*—so that one of the earliest and strongest associations of their minds shall be formed between truth and everything contained in the holy scriptures.

What, therefore, I enjoin, is to endeavor that the children's minds may be so rooted and grounded in the conviction of the truth of revelation that when a profane and artful opposer of the scriptures shall attempt insidiously to shake their faith by ridiculing any of the facts or sentiments of the sacred volume, they may shudder at the insinuation and retire instinctively to the shelter of this immovable prepossession, *that the Bible must be true*.

Let it be an object of solicitude with you to impart in your pupils a correct view of the *leading truths* of revelation. You know how to treat the insinuation that the doctrines of the gospel are quite unnecessary in the instruction of children and that their attention should be exclusively confined to its moral precepts. Explain to them the moral attributes of the great GOD: His holiness as opposed to all iniquity; His truth as manifested in the accomplishment of His word; His mercy which inclines Him to pity the miserable. Teach them the purity of His *Law* as pronouncing condemnation on a sinful thought. Endeavor to make them understand the exceeding sinfulness of *sin*, as breaking through all the obligations imposed upon the conscience by the majesty and goodness of God. Strive to lead them to a knowledge of the total corruption of their nature, as the source and spring of their actual transgressions. Unfold to them their situation, as under the wrath of God on account of their sins. Show them their inability, either to atone for their guilt or renovate their nature. Lead them to *Calvary*, and develop the design of

the Savior's death as a sacrifice for sin, and teach them to rely upon His merits alone for salvation. Direct them to the *Holy Spirit* as the fountain of grace and strength for the renewal of their hearts. In connection with this, lay before them all the branches of Christian *duty*; those which relate to God, such as faith, repentance, love, obedience, and prayer; and those which relate to man, as obedience to parents, honesty to their employers, kindness to all. Enforce upon them the obligations of public worship. Particularly impress upon them that genuine religion, while it is founded on a belief of God's word, does not consist merely of abstract feelings or occasional duties, but in a principle of submission to the revealed will of Jehovah,

implanted deep in the human heart, pervading the conduct, and spreading over the whole character, so as to form a holy, moral, useful, happy man.

3. *Labor to produce religious impression, as well as communicate religious instruction. Very many know the theory of divine truth without feeling its influence on the heart or exhibiting it in the conduct; they see the right way without walking in it.* I know only God can reach the heart, but then He does it generally by pouring out His Spirit on judicious and well adapted means. Direct all your efforts to awaken the conscience, to interest the feelings, and to engage the whole soul in the pursuit of salvation and the business of religion. Let your

aim be visible in your conduct, so that the children may be convinced that until they are brought to fear God and serve Him in truth, you do not consider yourself to have attained the object of your labors.

Let all you do be characterized by an impressive solemnity. Take care of treating sacred subjects with lightness. Never allow the holy scriptures to be read but with the greatest reverence. Mingle a devotional spirit with all you do. Endeavor to awe them by the terrors of the Lord and melt them by His mercies. Roll over them the thunders of Mount Sinai and display to them the moving scenes of Mount Calvary. Remind them of their mortality and encircle their imagination with the scenery of the judgment day. Seize every event that the dispensations of divine providence may furnish to aid your endeavors. Relate to them instances of early piety and, at other times, cases of sudden and alarming death. Watch for the appearance of religious concern, as that which can alone reward your labors or satisfy your desire. When fruits begin to show themselves, hail the first buds of genuine religion with delight, shield them with a fostering care, and with a skillful hand direct their growth. ①

Condensed from John Angell James, The Sunday School Teacher's Guide (1816); available on www.gracegems.org.

Here I think it right to remark that, as the very groundwork of religious instruction, it is of vast importance to produce, even from the class's commencement, a deep reverence for the authority of Scriptural revelation.

**I WILL
INSTRUCT THEE AND TEACH
THEE IN THE WAY WHICH THOU SHALT GO:**

**I WILL
GUIDE THEE WITH MINE EYE.**

PSALM 32:8

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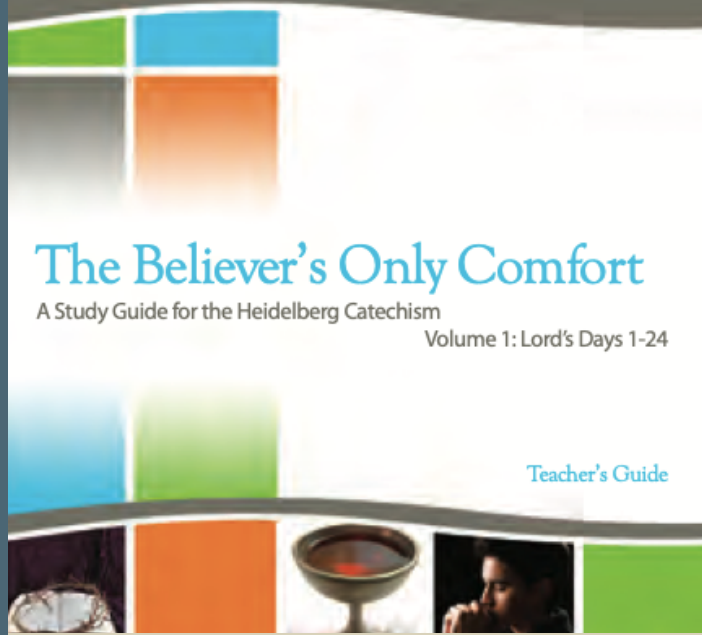
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ANNOUNCEMENTS

OBITUARY



JOHANNA "DIANE" RUESSINK

March 9, 1935 – July 14, 2022

In His perfect timing, the Lord took unto Himself our beloved wife, mother, Oma, and great-Oma at the age of 87 years. Although dementia took away many of her memories, she was able to confess "[the Lord] is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust" (Psalm 91:2).

Beloved wife of Gerhard for 61 years

Dear mother to:

Joanne and Donald Fraser

*Garret and Amy Fraser (Willem and Rhys)
Kyle and Joylyn Fraser (Elliott)
Josh Fraser*

Evelyn and John Roffel

*Trevor and Natasha Roffel (Joey)
Jordan Roffel
Courtney Roffel
Matthew Roffel*

Brenda and Gary Neven

*Mark and Maegan Neven (Louis and Blaise)
Brandon and Jillian Neven (Sophie)
Alexandra Neven*

Daniel Neven and Myra Altwasser

Eric Ruessink

Brian and Lori Ruessink

*Kelsey Ruessink
Connor Ruessink
Maggie Ruessink
Trent Ruessink*

Pre-deceased by 6 brothers, survived by her oldest brother John (Mary) Vreman

The funeral service was held on July 20, 2022, in Strathroy ON, with **Rev. H. Bergsma officiating.**

She will be missed.

OBITUARY



RENEE MEINEN

(nee Kroesbergen)

October 21, 1935 - July 16, 2022

Peacefully at home, the Lord took unto Himself our beloved mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother at the age of 86 years. **Beloved wife of the late John Meinen (2001).**

Dear mother of:

Angela and John DeWeerd

Joanne and Ed Salverda

Fran and John Timmermans

Arlene and Brian Bouwmeester

Brenda and Doug Diehl

Ian and Cheryl Meinen

Marilyn Meinen (and Kris)

Brad and Sharon Meinen

Dave and Jenny Meinen

Helen and Chris Elliott

Sharon and Rob Leegstra

Beloved grandma to 41 grandchildren and 24 great grandchildren.

She was predeceased by her parents John and Johanna (Janssen) Kroesbergen, granddaughter Tanya Bouwmeester, grandson Jabin Meinen, brother Henk, sisters Aartje Van Holland and Joanne Otten, and sister-in-law Bertha Kroesbergen.

Dear sister of John Kroesbergen, Brand Kroesbergen (Aafke) and Gerald Kroesbergen (Johanna). Dear sister-in-law of Jane Kroesbergen, Breunis Van Holland and Chris Otten. Also surviving is the Meinen family and many nieces and nephews.

The funeral service was held on July 20, at Mitchell Free Reformed Church with

Pastor L.J. Bilkes officiating.

Psalm 130