Beacon Lights

Magazine of the Protestant Reformed Young People

November 2013

Editor's Notes **Page 2**

Essay Contest Winners

In God's Providence: Comfort for His People **Page 3**

My Life in All Its Perfect Plan: From the Perspective of Frederick III **Page 4**

Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus: Birth of the Heidelberg Catechism **Page 6**

The Heidelberg Catechism: Necessary for Instruction **Page 8**

The Heidelberg Catechism: To Teach Covenant Children in the Fear of the Lord **Page 10**

The Heidelberg Catechism: A Necessary Confession **Page 12**

The Heidelberg Catechism: A Trustworthy Guide **Page 15**

The Beauty, Simplicity, and Order of the Heidelberg Catechism: Lovable and Practical for the Elect of Every Age **Page 17**

The Heidelberg Catechism—A Well-Loved and Practical Confession **Page 20**

Devotional Watching Daily at My Gates—November 9–December 8 **Page 23**

Little Lights A Turn of Events: From Chaos to Comfort—A History of the Heidelberg Catechism (Part 1) **Page 27**

Church News **Back Cover**

www.beaconlights.org

Volume LXXII Number 11

Editor's Notes

Mark H. Hoeksema

By the time you receive this issue of *Beacon Lights*, the Heidelberg Catechism conference marking the 450th anniversary of this confession will be history.

As part of this celebration, the Protestant Reformed Theological School sponsored an essay contest on various aspects of the Catechism, which was divided into five categories: Junior High School (Grades 6–8); High School I (Grades 9–10); High School II (Grades 11–12); Post-high/College (Ages 18–25); and Adults. Each group was asked to write on the Catechism from a specific perspective. The length requirements for these essays increased in each category, and the top three submissions in each category carried with them some very respectable monetary prizes.

The response was overwhelming both in quality and quantity. Those in charge of judging these writings had a difficult time picking the top three (times five). This speaks well not just of the level of writing among us, but especially for the spiritual climate in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The Catechism is obviously not a dead letter among us, as it is in most allegedly Reformed churches, but is still known, valued, and loved. Especially the participation of our young people bodes well for the future.

Beacon Lights has been asked to publish the three winning essays in the first three categories mentioned above (the *Standard Bearer* will publish the essays in the last two categories). We are happy not only to comply with this request, but also to devote this entire issue to the subject. Only the Devotional, Little Lights, and Church News will appear as usual.

An observation: as in any type of contest, there are winners, and they have to be picked. That's fine—there is nothing wrong with a little competition, and good performance deserves good results. This competition was no exception. I would like to think, however, that there were no losers. Everyone who participated was a winner just because he or she took the time and put forth the effort to contribute. Thanks to all!

EDITOR
Mark Hoeksema
Email: editor@beaconlights.org

CONTENTS COMMITTEE
Ryan Kregel (Associate Editor)
Email: ryankregel@gmail.com
Monica Koole (Contributing Editor Correspondent)
Email: monica@kleynelectric.com
Matt Kortus (Contributing Editor Correspondent)
Email: mgkortus@umich.edu
Laura Kaptein (Business Manager)
Alex Thompson (Promotions)
Lenora Bodbyl (Secretary)

BUSINESS OFFICE
Beacon Lights
Laura Kaptein
3074 Hudson Street
Hudsonville, MI 49426
Phone: (616) 292-8029
Email: subscriptions@beaconlights.org

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BOOK SALES
Laura Kaptein
3074 Hudson Street
Hudsonville, MI 49426
Phone: (616) 292-8029
Email: subscriptions@beaconlights.org

BEACON LIGHTS ON TAPE
A free service to the legally blind. Contact
Brad Vander Veen
11395 Hunters Meadow
Allendale, MI 49401
Phone: (616) 291-0465

CHURCH NEWS ANNOUNCEMENTS
Melinda Bleyenberg
Email: dmbleyenberg@tds.net

EXECUTIVE FEDERATION BOARD
Brian Feenstra (President)
Matt De Boer (Vice-President)
Erika Schipper (Secretary)
Joe Holstege (Treasurer)
Lydia Koole (Librarian)
Lynette Kleyn (Vice-Secretary)
Brad Ophoff (Vice-Treasurer)
Dan Van Uffelen (Youth Coordinator)
Rev. Carl Haak (Spiritual Advisor)
Rev. Bill Langerak (Spiritual Advisor)

PROTESTANT REFORMED SCHOLARSHIP FUND
A function of the YP Fed Board. Funds for this Scholarship should be sent to the treasurer,
Mr. Jon Pastoor
7137 Rolling Hills Drive
Hudsonville, MI 49426
Phone: (616) 821-8165

Beacon Lights is published monthly by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies. Subscription price is $15. Please send all business correspondence, address changes, and subscriptions to the business office.

EDITORIAL POLICY
The articles of *Beacon Lights* do not necessarily indicate the viewpoint of the Editorial Staff. Every author is solely responsible for the contents of his own article.

Beacon Lights encourages its readers to contact the business office with any questions or comments. Letters may be edited for printing. We will not publish anonymous letters, but will withhold names upon request.

All submissions should be sent to the editor six weeks prior to the publication date and must be written in Microsoft Word format.

If any material of *Beacon Lights* is reprinted by another periodical, we will appreciate your giving the source and forwarding the printed periodical to the business office.

BEACON LIGHTS ON THE INTERNET
www.beaconlights.org
Cover Photo courtesy of
Liquid Moonlight Studios

In God's Providence: Comfort for His People

The church of the sixteenth century was in shambles. The people were distraught and fearful of a God they barely knew, and had little or no comfort that they were saved. The Roman Catholic heresy of salvation by works was creeping back into the church, and the people had no confidence in going to heaven or assurance of salvation. The people were left with no comfort.

It was during this time that Frederick III of Heidelberg, Germany was convinced that the people needed a confession that would serve as a basis of unity to the people of the Palatinate (Hanko, 1999). God guided him to Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, two men who spent their lives in the service of the church.

God raised up Zacharias Ursinus to be a fighter and defender of the faith, even through his quiet nature. God shaped Zacharias, as a potter shapes clay, to be a vessel unto honor, to fight for and defend the truth, and to call together and comfort God's people during these apostate times. Zacharias had been a stout Lutheran his whole childhood, but studying under Philip Melanchthon caused him to alter his views. Ursinus' Calvinistic views were not accepted in his hometown of Breslau because most people there were Lutherans. On account of these views, he resigned his position as teacher and left his beloved city. Affliction and persecution often lead God's people to a stronger conviction of their faith, and this was true for Zacharias as well. He continued to seek the truth in all that he did as he continued his life's journey.

When Zacharias heard that his friend and advisor, Melanchthon, was dead, he was distraught, and sought the peace and quiet of study in Zurich with other theologians. Zacharias and Melanchthon had shared a deep love and respect because of their shared Calvinistic beliefs. In the past, when Zacharias had been weighed down by the burden of his calling, he would go to Melanchthon for advice. Now that his friend had been called home, Zacharias felt that he must leave his fatherland, "since it does not permit the confession of the truth, which I cannot with good conscience give up. If my teacher Melanchthon still lived, I would go nowhere else but to him. But as he is dead, I will go to Zurich where there are pious, great and learned men" (Hanko, 1999, p. 204). God was molding him to carry the burden of the gospel as the longsuffering, patient servant that he would use to write the catechism. And so he pressed on.

When Frederick III, the elector of the Palatinate, requested that Zacharias Ursinus help to write a confession for the people, Zacharias knew that it had to be done. This was perhaps the most crucial moment in which God used Zacharias to become the unique vessel he needed to bring the Heidelberg Catechism into existence. Zacharias saw the Roman Catholic and Lutheran heresies leaking back into the church. He also saw how small the remnant of the true church had become, and God used him at this precise time in history to write the Heidelberg Catechism. Had not God directed Frederick III to instruct Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus to write the catechism *at this time*, the church would have continued to dwindle and apostatize under the false heresies then flowing into the church.

Caspar Olevianus completed his studies in Trier at a very young age. From Trier, he planned to go to France to study law. This was a time of consideration for Caspar. From earliest youth, he was surrounded by one religion—Roman Catholicism. However, in France he came into contact with other religions such as Lutheranism and that of the Huguenots, and he began to consider their views. He attended the secret Huguenot meetings even though his life was in danger. In this way, God began to train a man who would be zealous for the work of his church.

One event in Caspar Olevianus' life was es-

pecially influential in leading him to the ministry. Caspar and his friend were invited to go boating on the river with some drunken men. Caspar refused, but his friend accepted. In the middle of the river, the young men began to rock the boat, and it capsized. Caspar jumped in to save his friend, but the current prevented him from doing so and also endangered his life. At this moment of trouble, Caspar made a solemn vow that if he lived, he would become a minister and preach his new-found truth in his hometown of Trier. Caspar was rescued, and the promise was not forgotten (Hanko, 1999, p.210).

After completing his studies of law in France, he sought a place where he would prepare himself for the task that he was about to undertake, namely, the preaching of the gospel according to the views of Calvin. God brought Caspar Olevianus to Switzerland to prepare him for his coming ministry. He studied under Calvin and met other reformers such as Theodore Beza and Peter Martyr. I can imagine the discussions and debates were many! These were perhaps the most important years in Caspar's life for the preparation of the Heidelberg Catechism. God was raising from a Roman Catholic family a man who could preach the Reformed doctrines in a way the people not only understood, but also loved.

After two years of studying in Switzerland, Caspar went to Trier to proclaim the word. For a while he was permitted to preach, and he brought many people to the truth. The leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, however, despised Caspar and testified against him. Caspar was thrown into prison for ten weeks. This was a trying time for him, but God used it for good to bring him to Heidelberg. Frederick III paid an enormous ransom to bring Caspar to Heidelberg to help with the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Frederick III requested Caspar Olevianus to write a catechism with Zacharias Ursinus, to which they willingly and readily agreed. They wrote this creed to bring the church back to the truth of salvation by grace alone. They also wrote the catechism to assure believers of God's promise of salvation during this troublous time.

God had shaped both men differently through the events of their lives. Each event was governed by God's sovereign will, and when God put these men together, they produced a catechism that we still use today. The Heidelberg Catechism was shaped in God's providence by the precision of a theologian and the passion of a preacher to be a confession for the people. Not only is it an easily understood summary of the doctrines of scripture, but it is also a beautifully crafted confession to bring the wonder of salvation, by Christ's work alone, to the hearts of the people. God used the events in the lives of Zacharias and Caspar to prepare them for the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism in order that the Church might be unified and comforted. "My life in all its perfect plan was ordered ere my days began" (The Psalter, #383).

Works Cited

Hanko, H. (1999), *Portraits of Faithful Saints*. (Grandville: Reformed Free Publishing Association).

The Psalter, #383. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing).

Essay contest winner. Junior High category. First Place. Brett is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

Essay Contest—2nd Place Junior High (Grades 6–8) — Jori Baas

My Life in All Its Perfect Plan: From the Perspective of Frederick III

My name is Frederick III. I write you this note to show you how God used me and three other men to bring the Heidelberg Catechism into existence. This is to show you how God could take a person, and even through his childhood guide him in the truths to prepare him for the later

work that he would have as a man. During the time I write about, the church needed instruction. It was separating! So I had two gifted men write an outline to instruct the church in the truths of the Bible for the fifty-two weeks in a year. This catechism also guides the ministers in their work, so that they are able to cover the aspects of the Christian faith in one year. Maybe to you it seems that I did something special that made God pick me to commission the Heidelberg Catechism, but that is not true at all. God chose me to be his instrument in the creation of the Heidelberg Catechism. Here is the story of how God directed my life in preparation for the commissioning of the Catechism.

I, Frederick III, grew up with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. My two brothers and I were educated in the courts of famous Roman Catholic rulers. Five of my sisters were nuns. It bothered me how the holy church of Go d could be ruled by men so greedy for land and money. My mother died in the early spring of 1535 at the age of 43. Soon after her death I met Maria, who was the princess of Brandenburg-Kulmbach at this time. Maria was a Protestant. She would not marry me unless I made a promise to her that I would read the Bible every day and study the writings of Martin Luther. I think God used Maria to lead me to the truth. As I read the Bible and studied the writings of Martin Luther, God opened my eyes to know that what I had been taught as a child was not exactly the full truth. By keeping my promise to Maria, I learned a lot and the Bible showed me that through faith I could find forgiveness of sin.

God blessed Maria and me with children, and then God chose to take two of them to their eternal home. Alberta was one of them. She died two weeks before she turned 15. Herman Louis was the other. He died in a river accident. A man named Caspar Olevianus tried to save him, but he himself almost drowned. I believe God brought him into my life in this awful way for the purpose of someday writing a catechism under my commissioning.

In the summer of 1557 I moved back to the castle of my boyhood to take on the titles and duties of my father. Less than two years after moving to this castle, I moved again. This time it was to Heidelberg to take on the elector's crown as successor of Otto Henry. A year after I arrived in Heidelberg, I paid a large ransom to have Caspar Olevianus released from prison. Remember him? He was the one who had tried to save my boy from drowning in the river accident. Caspar had been put in jail for ten weeks with twelve others because they had refused to open the city gates for Archbishop John. God worked through me and several other princes so that we might plead for the release of this God-fearing man. I sent a man out with a trunkful of money to have Caspar released, and with a message that Caspar would never return. That is how my friend Caspar Olevianus came to Heidelberg; the only way he got there was through God's work.

Another man who came to Heidelberg was a professor by the name of Zacharias Ursinus. He had been studying with Peter Martyr. This man Peter was used by God to lead Ursinus to see more clearly the truths that would later be written in the Heidelberg Catechism. By the hand of God, Peter Martyr sent Ursinus on his way to the city of Heidelberg. I myself had requested Peter Martyr to come to Heidelberg, but Peter said concerning Ursinus, "Send for him instead of me, for he has the brilliance of a great scholar and the piety of a great servant of God." That is the story of how my other friend Zacharias Ursinus arrived in Heidelberg.

During this whole time there were many arguments between the Lutherans and the Calvinists. In January of 1561 all of the princes of the German states met to sign the Augsburg Confession. There were two different Augsburg Confessions, and we had to choose which one was the right one to sign. One of the Augsburg Confessions was leaning toward the Roman Catholic beliefs and had many of Luther's writings in it. The other leaned toward the Calvinistic beliefs, with which Calvin himself agreed in 1541. I believe that God, our Almighty Father, worked in me to show me which of the confessions to sign, and through him I signed the Augsburg Confession with which Calvin himself agreed. All my life I believed myself true to that signature.

Soon after this an idea grew strongly in my mind that God had a purpose for the two great men, Caspar Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus, and that it was my responsibility to carry out an assignment for them. So I set to work and assigned them to write a catechism that would teach the people of Palatinate the truths of the Bible with proof from the Bible, so that no one could argue against this catechism. This catechism was also written to reunite the people of Palatinate. Ursinus and Olevianus worked hard so that my request might be fulfilled. God worked in

them so that the catechism might be thorough and might correct errors with love for the brother, so that he might also be turned to the correct and sound belief. Although Olevianus and Ursinus did much of the work, there was also a group of men that looked over the Catechism to make sure that all their writing was correct. Ursinus, Olevianus, and I wrote the Heidelberg Catechism. I was the commissioner, but I give credit to my friend Ursinus for his wisdom and for writing it, and to my other friend for adding his personal feeling into it. Ursinus and Olevianus I came to know quite well, and I thank the Lord for these God-fearing, knowledgeable men.

I conclude this note with some words you may recognize from Psalm 139, which later became a familiar song for the church: "My life in all its perfect plan was ordered ere my days began." Why can I say this? I can say this because I know that the Lord of Hosts guided my life from my birth to this time, and even after that, for the purpose of glorifying his name. Have you not seen in the Heidelberg Catechism question and answer 27 on providence? Here are some of the words, which I think are very fitting with this note. "What dost thou mean by the providence of God?" Here is the answer: "The almighty and everywhere present power of God, whereby, as it were by his hand, he upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures." A little farther we read this: "Yea, and all things come not by chance, but by his fatherly hand." I am thankful; I am humbled by his almighty and eternal plan.

Works Cited

VanHalsema, Thea B. *Three Men Came to Heidelberg*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1963.

Essay contest winner. Junior High category. Second Place. Jori is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan.

Essay Contest—3rd Place Junior High (Grades 6–8) — Allen Kalsbeek

Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus: Birth of the Heidelberg Catechism

During the Reformation period, God used men of great intellect and spiritual maturity to develop the reformed doctrines. Many great works were written during this time, including the three creeds that we use today: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordrecht. Here we take a look into the lives of the men God used in the making of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Timid. Cautious. Hesitant. Moody. This was Zacharias Ursinus. Yet he was brilliant, dedicated, and gifted as well. He was a tool created and fashioned precisely into the man that God needed him to be, a tool to cut, chisel, and sculpt the Protestant church of the 1500s into the church that God would continue to reform down through the ages.

Zacharias Ursinus used his God-given abilities wisely. Throughout his whole life, he was learning more and more about God. He was brought up from his early years to be a fighter and defender of the faith, even with his Lutheran upbringing. As a young man, he began to study under Philip Melanchthon. Through Melanchthon he came to understand that the teachings of Calvin aligned closely with the teachings of scripture, and when he was still quite young, he wrote a catechism based on comfort.

Zacharias was one of the great fighters of the faith in his time, and he constantly defended the faith wherever he went. He had to rely heavily on his faith when as a young man, his preaching was rejected by the people of Breslau. His Calvinist views of the Lord's Supper were despised. The Lutheran people of his birthplace hated him for his views, and they wanted to get rid of him.

When he heard of the death of Melanchthon, Zacharias decided he wanted to study in peace without the worries of preaching for a people who would not receive him. He left Breslau and sought refuge in Zurich, where he could study with the great theologian Peter Martyr. Of the theologians in Zurich he wrote, "They are pious, learned, great men in whose company I am inclined henceforth to spend my life. As regards to the rest, God will provide" (Van Halsema, 1982, p.30).

The death of Melanchthon, his teacher and friend, greatly influenced Zacharias. Melanchthon was known to love peace and unity in the church, and Zacharias, his friend, sought that peace as well. Yet God chose him to take a stand in this time of doctrinal upheaval. Zacharias, the shy yet determined teacher, was the theologian whom God prepared to take the place of Melanchthon and to eventually write the Catechism for the people. God used his quiet nature and staunch personality to make him a fighter for the truth.

Diligent. Loyal. Dedicated. Faithful. This was Caspar Olevianus, who from his earliest years was surrounded with Roman Catholicism. He then learned Lutheranism and became convinced that the Roman Catholic Church was wrong. He then became influenced by the French Calvinists, the Huguenots, and realized that Calvin agreed with the teachings of scripture more than Luther. He began to explore the teachings of Calvin even more.

When Caspar was a young man, through a boating accident God worked in his heart to be a minister. Caspar and his friend, a German prince, were walking next to a river when they came across some men in a boat. The men invited them aboard, but Caspar refused because the men were drunk. His friend, however, agreed. The men in the boat were rocking the boat so much that it tipped and Caspar's friend fell out. Caspar immediately dove in to save his friend, but the current was so strong that it prevented him from saving his friend and endangered his life. He made a vow to God that if he made it out alive, he would proclaim the gospel. He was rescued and he did not forget his promise (Hanko, 1999, p. 210). He went to Geneva for the purpose of talking to Calvin and preparing for the ministry.

Caspar Olevianus was an eloquent preacher. He was warm-hearted and the people loved his preaching so much that they locked their Roman Catholic leader out of the city. Their leader attacked the city, threw Olevianus in prison for ten weeks, banished those who upheld Protestant views, and restored Roman Catholicism in the city. In this too God was good, because it made Caspar stronger and even more zealous for the faith.

Strong. Ardent. Brave. This was Frederick the Pious (III), the Protestant ruler of the Palatinate. He saw the confusion and doubt of his people and began to look for a good confession that would serve to unite his people spiritually. He had read Zacharias' earlier catechism based on comfort and knew that the people needed a catechism that they could easily understand and use—a catechism that would comfort them by showing them their sin, their deliverance, and how to live a life of gratitude for that salvation. They needed to be assured that they received their salvation by grace alone. The more Frederick studied the reformers' ideas, the more he leaned toward them, their ways, and their doctrines from the word of God.

Frederick decided to have the reformers write a catechism. He brought Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus to Heidelberg and asked them to write the Heidelberg Catechism. He wanted them to write the catechism with proof texts from the Bible so that no one could say that it was not true. They readily agreed to do it. So it was that both a professor gifted in theology, Ursinus, and a preacher eloquent and faithful in the preaching, Olevianus, were in God's providence chosen to write the Heidelberg Catechism (Hanko, 1999, p. 213). Frederick was a great spiritual leader who loved the truth and wanted his people to love it also.

God shaped these three men differently, but for the same purpose, by his sovereign hand. Here we see that God governs and controls all things. We still sit under the preaching of the Heidelberg Catechism today to test and strengthen our faith. It is a confession and a summary *for the people* of the doctrines of scripture. It can be easily understood, yet it speaks of the deep truths of scripture. Romans 8:28: "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." Here Paul states that God uses all things for the good of his church. God used Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, through trials and triumphs, to write the Heidelberg Catechism for the good of his church, not only in the sixteenth century, but through the ages. He also

used Frederick III to watch over the writing and to see it through to its completion. How perfect is God's plan! Praise be to God!

Works Cited

Hanko, H. (1999). *Portraits of Faithful Saints*. Grandville: Reformed Free Publishing Association

Van Halsema, T. B. (1982). *Three Men Came to Heidelberg*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House

Essay contest winner. Junior High category. Third Place. Allen is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

Essay Contest—1st Place High School I (Grades 9–10) — Lorraine Smit

The Heidelberg Catechism: Necessary for Instruction

Four hundred fifty years ago, God's church desperately needed to be taught the doctrines of scripture. Today the church has the same urgent need. The Heidelberg Catechism was written as a tool to instruct the people in the teachings of the Bible. It has beautifully accomplished its aim with clear and logical questions and answers that have been used throughout the ages to teach youth and adults alike.

To appreciate fully the necessity for the Heidelberg Catechism, we must first understand the history behind it. At the time of its writing, the Protestant Reformation was taking strong root in Europe. Many of the great reformers were working at this time, including Peter Martyr, Philip Melanchthon, and John Calvin. But even among the Protestants there was disunity, especially concerning the Lord's supper. This was especially true in the city of Heidelberg, Germany, the capital of the Palatinate. The church and government were divided two ways. On the one hand, there were the Lutherans, holding to the idea of consubstantiation—that Christ is *bodily* present in and around the bread and wine, and therefore that the partakers of the Lord's supper literally eat and drink Christ's body and blood. This led to an idolatrous worshipping of the Lord's supper. They were led by Dr. Tilemann Hesshus, an arrogant and violent preacher in the Holy Ghost Church. On the other hand, there were the Calvinists and Zwinglians, who maintained that those who partake of the Lord's supper eat and drink of Christ *spiritually*, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, and that the bread and wine are simply signs pointing to a spiritual reality. This group, who called themselves *Reformed*, were led by Deacon William Klebitz. There was often extreme hatred and strife between these two parties. In this disunity there was the question, What should the people be taught?

Amidst this conflict, God in his providence raised up Frederick the Pious to be elector over the Palatinate. He dismissed both Dr. Hesshus and Deacon Klebitz after the two fought in front of the church while serving the Lord's supper. After carefully studying the scriptures, Frederick became convinced that the Reformed doctrine was correct. Concerned with both the Palatinate's temporal and eternal welfare, he realized that the church sorely needed to be unified and taught the right doctrine. To accomplish this, the church needed a strong confession that clearly stated the true doctrine of salvation. Thus he called upon two men to write a catechism: Zacharias Ursinus, a brilliant yet reserved and peace-loving professor and theologian from Breslau, and Caspar Olevianus, an eloquent preacher from Trier. Although these two men were very young, God had equipped them with the great wisdom and insight that was necessary for this task.

These two men wrote a catechism intended to

give statement of the Reformed faith so that all the people could be taught in this way and thus be unified. Therefore it was written as a teaching tool. This was necessary because the people had to be taught what the Bible said about all the essential doctrines concerning such things as sin, redemption, God's law, prayer, and especially at this time, the Lord's supper. It provided a logical, fixed format for instruction in doctrine that could be used to teach the youths in catechism and all of the church in the preaching.

This purpose for the catechism is manifest in its question and answer format. The questions in the Heidelberg Catechism take the voice of a teacher instructing his student, and the answers ring out confidently like a student well-versed in and convicted of the many doctrines in the catechism, who is professing his faith before his teacher. The questions and answers of the catechism are organized into 52 Lord's Days, so the whole catechism can be preached over the course of one year. This is beneficial because it can be repeated and reviewed many years over.

The logical order of the Heidelberg Catechism also helps it serve this purpose as a teaching tool. It starts at the beginning of the path to salvation for a Christian: man's fall and the wicked nature, helplessness, and hopeless state that ensued. Quickly the catechism moves on to man's deliverance from sin by the suffering of Christ, the only possible mediator, and the glory that is the believer's, shown over against the terror and punishment that is deserved. Then the Catechism outlines man's duties—good works and prayer—as acts of thankfulness to God. This order leads the catechumen to see his need for salvation and Christ as the worker of it, thus preventing him from viewing his own works as any kind of merit for salvation.

The clarity and simplicity of the Heidelberg Catechism aids greatly in its use to teach doctrine. The catechism is very easy to understand. All the cardinal doctrines are stated simply and explained thoroughly, so one need not be already trained in doctrine to comprehend the catechism's message. The clear wording makes the catechism easy to apply to practical situations.

The Heidelberg Catechism still today answers the need for a means to teach doctrine in the church. It is used in catechism classes to teach doctrine to the youth. It is used in the preaching, with a sermon on the catechism every Lord's Day. These uses have manifold benefits for the church.

First, its use in teaching the children is important. Giving the children a good, strong background in Reformed doctrine is effective in warding off the spiritual dangers that threaten the church. The Catechism guards the church against apostasy, because its well-instructed members will not be easily fooled by false teachers who arise. It also keeps the youth from the irresponsibility, rebellion, and disregard for God that society desires so much to teach them. With instruction in the Heidelberg Catechism, the youth are well prepared to give a good confession of their faith when they mature.

Second, the Heidelberg Catechism's use in the preaching is of great value to the church. The people of the church are re-taught and reminded of these great doctrines and are prepared to defend them if necessary. Such powerful quotations as, "Why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God?" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q 62), "the mass, at bottom, is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry" (A 80), and "I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor" (A 5), can be used to strengthen God's children against some of the greatest errors that can arise in nominal Christianity. The entirety of the Heidelberg Catechism is based on scripture, and every part of every answer has Biblical proof to support it, so no one can say it is not right and true. At this time, as the world is being won over by humanism, immorality, and rebellion against authority, we need more than ever to have a strongly antithetical catechism to display God's truth over against worldliness.

The church was torn between two ideas. The youth were careless with respect to doctrine. The people did not know what to believe. In His love and care for his church, God worked through men to provide a catechism for their edification. The Heidelberg Catechism has served the church well throughout the ages, and continues to teach God's children now, 450 years later. "And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children" (Isaiah 54:13).

Bibliography

Hanko, H. (1999). *Portraits of Faithful Saints*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: RFPA.

Hoeksema, H. (1976). *The Triple Knowledge* (Vol. II). Grand Rapids, Michigan: RFPA.

Ursinus, Z., & Olevianus, C. (1563). *The Heidelberg Catechism*. Heidelberg, Palatinate, Germany.

Van Halsema, T. B. (1963). I. Christian Reformed Publishing House.

Vreugdenhill, J. (1991). *God's Care and Continuance of His Church* (Vol. II). Sioux Center: Netherlands Reformed Book and Publishing Committee.

Essay contest winner. High School I (Grades 9–10) category. FIrst Place. Lorraine is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, Califormia.

Essay Contest—2nd Place High School I (Grades 9–10) Kelsey Kuiper

The Heidelberg Catechism: To Teach Covenant Children in the Fear of the Lord

Six thousand years ago, God commanded Adam and Eve to bear children. All throughout the Old Testament, God commanded his people to tell their children of his wonderful works. In the New Testament, Christ commands that fathers teach their children the Scriptures and raise them in the instruction and discipline of God. Those commands come to all of God's church through all of time. Four hundred fifty years ago, the need for something to help parents, teachers, and ministers carry out this command was recognized. Elector Prince Frederick III of the Palatinate in Germany commissioned Reformed men to put together a "clear, concise, and popular statement of the doctrines of salvation in catechetical form" ("Introduction"). Zacharias Ursinus, one of the theologians in charge of the writing, also recognized the need for a simple yet comprehensive collection of the fundamental truths of Scripture to teach the people. The Christian's indisputable calling to rear covenant children in the fear of the Lord, and the need for a means to help fulfill this calling prompted certain men of the church of the sixteenth century to write a summary of the gospel and its doctrines in the form of a catechism, which itself has proved to be an invaluable tool for the instruction of Christian youth, not only then, but even until today. This Catechism is truly "one of the finest fruits of the Reformation, tried and proven in the furnace of affliction" ("Introduction").

To instruct children from the very first days of understanding in the truths of God and of his word, and to teach them that they must live in them every day is so important. This is not something that can be started a few years after understanding begins. These truths are not only the most important knowledge they will ever gain, but it is undoubtedly the essence of their lives, "for in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28, KJV). God's people have their identity in him because he created them and bought them; everything they are comes from God, so they strive to do all for his glory because he saved his people from their sins. Parents have been entrusted with the children of God for a little while as the covenant children of Jehovah. In the vow taken at baptism, parents must promise to see that their children are taught the truths of the gospel as soon as they are able to comprehend simple teachings, complicating the doctrines as they grow and mature. This shows how important it is, as parents of the church cannot receive the sign of the covenant towards their children without vowing before God to raise them in the knowledge of the Lord and the gospel of salvation.

God promises to save in generations, so the children of the believers are in the covenant of God. To believe, they must know who they are believing in. One simply cannot believe in something or someone he does not know about. "How then shall they

call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10:14). They need to be taught about God and what he has done. "Our faith must be grounded in knowledge, not mere emotion, feeling, and experience" (denHartog). Faith may not be seeing, but it is not only feelings either. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for" (Heb. 11.1): and a person only hopes for something he knows a little something about; otherwise there would be no reason to hope for it.

This next generation is the future church, and one that must be preserved. God has preserved his saints through many difficult years, and will continue to do so until Christ returns, but parents of the church must teach their children, for they are the means through which God chooses to carry out the keeping of his church.

The men who instigated and composed the Heidelberg Catechism acknowledged and addressed a very important issue of instruction for the children. With the grace of God they put together this Catechism, which was used not only in church, but also in the seminaries and universities, as well as in the teaching of the home and lower schools. In November of 1563, preaching on the Catechism was made mandatory in the Reformed Church of the Palatinate when it was adopted into the Church Order. Even the state government required that the Heidelberg Catechism be taught in all schools and churches of the Palatinate.

Using the Heidelberg Catechism, the church of that day fulfilled the calling to "train up a child in the way he should go" (Prov. 22.6a), because these children are the next generation of the church. Parents must teach them in this way so that, "when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22.6b). The need to preserve the church was obvious back in the days of Noah, Moses, Ezra, Paul, Calvin, and Ursinus, and will always be. The devil is always in the world trying to destroy the church.

As the church in sixteenth century Germany used the Heidelberg Catechism to instruct the children, so also does the church today. The Protestant Reformed Churches, along with many others, still hold the Catechism as a binding creed. Younger children are taught the truths of Scripture more simply. As they get older and become more able to understand more complex doctrines, they are explained in greater detail. Much of this instruction is based on the Heidelberg Catechism, and students will eventually memorize the Catechism itself. This will equip them with knowledge and lead them to a greater love of their heavenly Father because the Heidelberg Catechism shows them their sin and misery, how they have been delivered, and how to show thanks to God for that deliverance. Not only do the youth learn from the creed in catechism classes outside of Sunday worship, but they also hear the preaching from the Catechism nearly every Sunday. The writers of the Heidelberg Catechism organized the creed into fifty-two Lord's Days, meant for one Lord's Day to be taught each Sunday so that a church could potentially get through the Catechism in a year. Since all the essential doctrines of scripture and salvation are summarized in the Catechism, none will be missed when sermons are consistently preached based on the questions and answers through all of the Catechism (Kamps).

The Heidelberg Catechism is also embedded into the Christian school system. Teachers are required to connect what they teach to the word of God, and they often use the Heidelberg Catechism to do that. Students are taught and often reminded that all that happens in history is part of God's providence as stated in Lord's Day 10. Through faith they can see in the science classes how God "of nothing made heaven and earth, with all that is in them; who likewise upholds and governs the same by his eternal counsel and providence" (Heidelberg Catechism, A 26, p. 7). With the Bible, the Catechism, and other creeds as the bases of the education system, Scriptural truths pervade all that is taught. As long as this is being done, steps are being taken to prevent the falling away from the truth of the next generation and to preserve the church (Engelsma, "Scripture").

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4.4–6). The church is one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Together, all believers of all time make up the body and bride of Christ. One faith binds us together, and the Heidelberg Catechism sets before us as Christians the faith that has been believed by all of God's church—latent, militant, and triumphant (Kamps). As the children are members of the covenant and part of the body of Christ, they must be taught and shown this. To teach the children of God his wondrous works and ways is to

obey the calling of the Lord. Based on Psalm 78 the calling is given: "Let children learn God's righteous ways and on him stay their heart, that they may not forget his works nor from His ways depart" (Psalter 215, v. 6). Set before us in Scripture is the necessity of instructing the children of the church in His ways. Among many reasons, the Catechism was written to assist parents, teachers, and ministers in this calling. And assisted it has, and will continue to do, so long as it is taught and applied. At the Synod of Dordt (1618–19), where the Catechism was approved, many agreed that there had never been a better Catechism written. It was stated, "Our Reformed brethren on the continent have a little book whose single leaves are not to be bought with tons of gold" (quoted in "Introduction").

Thanks be to God for providing for us and for preserving by his providence such a means to instruct the children of believers in the fear of his name for four hundred fifty years and, Lord willing, unto the end of time.

"We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (Ps. 78, vv. 4, 6–7).

Works Cited

denHartog, Rev. Arie. "Excerpts from: "Catechism Instruction" by Rev. denHartog." *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 June 2013.

Engelsma, Rev. David J. "The Necessity of Good Christian Schools." *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*. N.p., 26 Apr. 1998. Web. 6 June 2013.

Engelsma, Rev. David J. "Scripture in the Schools." *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*. N.p., 26 Apr. 1998. Web. 6 June 2013.

"Form for the Administration of Baptism" in *The Psalter*. p. 86-88. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.

"The Heidelberg Catechism" in *The Psalter*. p. 3-27. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.

"Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism." *RCUS: Reformed Churches in the U.S.* N.p., n.d. Web. 6 June 2013.

Kamps, Marvin. "Heidelberg Catechism Preaching: Our Reformed Heritage." *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*. N.p., 16 July 2000. Web. 6 June 2013.

King James Version. BibleGateway.com, n.d. N. pag. Web. 25 June 2013

"Religious Training" (No. 215) in *The Psalter*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.

Ursinus, Zacharias. Excerpts from: "What is Catechism?" by Zacharias Ursinus." *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 June 2013.

Essay contest winner. High School I (Grades 9–10) category. Second Place. Kelsey is a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.

Essay Contest—3rd Place High School I (Grades 9–10) — Rachel Rutgers

The Heidelberg Catechism: A Necessary Confession

The Heidelberg Catechism is well loved by members of the Reformed church for its personal approach, for its practical use, and for the comfort it brings. It has been preserved over the years as a precious document that sets forth the pure doctrines of the word of God. It is used not in place of the holy

scriptures, but as a summary of what they teach. I will mention a few of the objectives for the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism, focusing on its purpose of instructing the young people of the church.

To understand the purposes for the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism, it is important to consider the circumstances surrounding its inception. The Reformation was started in Germany in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg, and it spread quickly. This Reformation divided Germany, as some sided with Luther and others held fast to their Roman Catholic beliefs. There was much religious disputing and strife in Germany. The Roman Catholics attacked the Lutherans with the sword. Meanwhile, the Lutherans, who hated the Calvinists just as strongly as they loathed the Catholics, fought vigorously to defend their beliefs.

The Lutherans were split after Martin Luther's death in 1546, some radically maintaining Luther's teachings and others following Melanchthon, who leaned toward Calvinist stances. A contentious issue at this time was disagreement concerning the Lord's supper, particularly Christ's presence in the sacrament. The ultra-Lutherans, radical followers of Luther, believed that Christ was bodily present in the sacrament, while the followers of Melanchthon held to Calvin's teaching of Christ's spiritual presence.

Due to the religious struggle, the Peace of Augsburg was signed in 1555, giving each of the German princes the right to decide the religion of his own province. In 1559, Frederick III, often referred to as Frederick the Pious, became elector of the Palatinate, a region of Germany. As the son of Count John II, previous elector of the Palatinate, Frederick III had been brought up in the Roman Catholic faith and later adopted Lutheranism. However, after diligently studying the scriptures to find an answer concerning the Lord's supper controversy, Frederick III was convinced that Calvinism was the position that was in keeping with the word of God. He then committed himself to defending this Reformed position. He did this by having Roman Catholic shrines removed from the churches, introducing Psalm singing in the German language, and replacing heretical teachers and ministers with those whom he deemed to be qualified. Frederick III declared the Palatinate to be Calvinist, becoming the first elector to do so. His declaration caused controversy, as Calvinists and Anabaptists had been excluded from the freedom granted by the Peace of Augsburg.

Frederick III recognized that a document was necessary to unite the people of his realm spiritually. There were many catechisms in use at the time, which caused confusion among the people. Thus he commissioned Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus to write a catechism that would clearly and completely expound the truth of the scriptures. This catechism was also intended to be used for instruction of the young people and as a guide in the preaching.

Following its publication in 1563, the Heidelberg Catechism spread rapidly and became widely popular, despite fierce opposition from the Lutheran and Catholic princes. As recognition of the Catechism continued to grow, other churches in Europe adopted it, and it was translated into many different languages. The Heidelberg Catechism was effective in fulfilling the purposes for which it was written. As intended, it was a valuable tool for teaching and became a personal confession for many believers. It was useful for instruction in the home, school, and church, and also became the basis for theological training.

Elector Frederick III saw the importance of properly training the young people in the truth of God's word. Thus the Heidelberg Catechism was written in such a way that children could understand it. The question and answer format of the Catechism effectively instills the truths of the Bible into the minds of the young people. This knowledge is an important tool for their spiritual growth and understanding, that in due time they may confess these doctrines to be "the true and complete doctrines of salvation." (Form for Public Confession of Faith)

The Heidelberg Catechism addresses issues that were being disputed at the time that it was written, such as the Lord's supper controversy. The scriptural truth concerning this matter is clearly set forth in the Catechism. Lord's Day 28 and 29 are about the proper view of this sacrament, and Q&A 78 specifically addresses the presence of Christ in the sacrament, stating the Biblical truth that Christ is not bodily present, but that his body is signified by the bread. The Catechism also points out similar errors such as the idolatry of the Roman Catholic mass.

We are thankful that we have the Heidelberg Catechism as one of the means of instruction in the word of God. It is a consistent tool for teaching in the home, in Christian schools, in catechism classes,

and in the preaching. The Heidelberg Catechism is important as a confession of our churches because "it gives them (children) the same doctrinal foundation as their parents" (Kleyn). The Catechism is valuable in helping parents bring up their children in the word of God, so when the young people grow up, they too will endeavor to uphold the truth. III John 1:4 says, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." As the next generation, and thus the future church, it is crucial that children are taught to view matters through the eyes of scripture. Learning the Heidelberg Catechism at a young age helps children, as they grow, to know and understand the Bible, so that they may readily confess and defend the truth scripture teaches.

Parents also desire that their covenant children will personally experience the comfort that the Catechism brings. The heresies in the sixteenth century, as well as those today, have no comfort; many teach that salvation depends on man's works. The Catechism tells us of our total depravity and helplessness apart from God, and it assures us of our full and free salvation earned for us by Christ's sacrifice. Only when we know our misery and sincerely repent of our sins can we truly be thankful to God for forgiveness and strive to live in obedience to His law. The Heidelberg Catechism is also comforting because of its personal nature. When we study the Catechism, we are assured that in all the circumstances of our lives, God's promises are true for each of us individually. It is also personal because those who hold to it as their confession are thereby agreeing with the doctrines it teaches and defends. This confession is full of comfort, and as they develop spiritually, young people of the Church grow to treasure it.

Though the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism was prompted by heresies in the church at the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, it still defines the truth concerning false doctrines that we struggle against in our lives, and it continues to help protect the church against error. As many around us are falling away from the truth, we must treasure the Heidelberg Catechism more and more. It is still valuable for us today for so many reasons. It is still used as a teaching tool and a guide in the blessed truths of the gospel; it is a very important part of the preaching in our churches every Sunday. It continues to unite us as the members of the church because we share a common confession of our faith in our Savior Jesus Christ.

We see God's hand in history and how he works all things for the good of his people from generation to generation. He led Elector Frederick III to realize the necessity of having a document expressing the pure teachings of scripture, so that the truth was preserved even in the times of heresy and controversy. He calls us to hold fast to this truth and to teach it to our children. We are thankful for the precious Catechism that helps us better understand and uphold God's word. "For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

Works Cited

"Brief History–Reformed Church in Germany." 2004. *RCUS*. Web. June 2013.

"Brief History of the Heidelberg Catechism." n.d. *Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics*. Web. June 2013.

Göbel, Ernst and Richard D. Thiessen. "Friedrich III, Elector Palatine of the Rhine (1515-1576)." April 2007. *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Web. June 2013.

Good, J. I. *Aid to the Heidelberg Catechism*. Cleveland, OH: Central Publishing House, 1904. Print .

Hanko, Herman. *Portraits of Faithful Saints*. Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1999. Print.

Kleyn, Rev. Rodney. "The Heidelberg Catechism: Its History, Character, and Value." *Standard Bearer* 15 November 2008. Web.

Lambert, Tim. "A Brief History of Germany." 2012. *A World History Encyclopedia*. Web. June 2013.

RCUS. I*ntroduction to the Heidelberg Catechism*. n.d. Web. June 2013.

—. *Our Heidelberg Heritage*. n.d. Web. June 2013.

Essay contest winner. High School I (Grades 9–10) category. Third Place. Rachel is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

The Heidelberg Catechism: A Trustworthy Guide

When I got my driver's license two years ago, I considered buying a GPS. I have never been the best with directions, often relying on "turn left at the gas station" rather than "go north 6 miles." I worried about getting lost, but looking back, I am glad I did not make the purchase. A GPS bought two years ago would have lost much of its value by now. Roads and rest stops have changed, and now I could buy a single device that does much more than give directions. But soon that device too will be outdated. New technology is constantly refilling the shelves, leaving yesterday's marvels in the dust. In contrast to these tools and devices, I have a guide for my spiritual life that remains trustworthy after 450 years: the Heidelberg Catechism. With its simple, orderly style, the Heidelberg Catechism provides a practical and personal guide in our ever-changing, truth-denying world.

According to Lord's Day 7, faith is first "a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word." In order to love and serve God, I must know him. To know God, I must read his revelation in scripture. Only the Bible is infallible and inspired, but the Heidelberg Catechism helps me understand scripture by laying out the essential doctrines of faith in a structured manner. It clearly summarizes the ideas taught by multiple verses throughout scripture, and scriptural proof lies behind every Lord's Day. The truths taught in the Heidelberg Catechism form the foundation of my faith.

The Heidelberg Catechism is structured in order to teach me this crucial knowledge of God. From early childhood to adulthood, humans learn by asking questions. Anyone could attest to the fact that children love to ask, "Why?" Or take the scientific method for example; step one is, "Ask a question." With its question and answer style, the Heidelberg Catechism is uniquely fit for instruction.

Each article of the Catechism brings forth a new question that I may face, and each question logically follows the next. For example, Q 20 asks if all men are saved in Christ. The answer is, "No, only those who are ingrafted into him, and receive all his benefits, by a true faith." The next obvious question is, "What is true faith?", and this is precisely the next question and answer given in Q&A 21. From question to question, Lord's Day to Lord's Day, the catechism follows a logical progression of questions and answers that lead me to a more complete knowledge of God.

In addition to the logical flow of questions, the overall structure of the Heidelberg Catechism is orderly. The Catechism is divided into three main parts. The first convicts me as a sinner. The second gives me the comfort of salvation from this sin in Christ. The catechism teaches the blessings of our salvation through the articles of the Apostles' Creed, explaining the role of each member of the Trinity. The second part also teaches me about the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper as the means by which God confirms the promise of my salvation. The third part tells me how to live a life pleasing to God: the natural response to the salvation described in the second part. The third part also teaches the requirements of God's law and the necessary parts of proper prayer. By teaching guilt, grace, and gratitude, the Heidelberg Catechism thoroughly sets forth the essentials of faith.

Another outstanding characteristic of the Heidelberg Catechism is its timelessness. The Catechism was first published in 1563 after a commission from Elector Frederick III (The Confessions and the Church Order of the PRC). Four hundred fifty years later, the truths it teaches remain applicable, and the style remains understandable. I think I can safely say that no other guide or tool made 450 years ago remains practical today. Although the Catechism certainly reflects the time period in which it was written (for ex-

ample, the Roman Catholic practice of mass is dealt with extensively because it was a weighty issue at the time), the truth remains the same, and the priniciples presented can be continually applied to whatever new issues arise. The simple and beautiful instruction of the Heidelberg Catechism has preserved the truth for 450 years, and Lord willing, it will continue to do so for many generations to come.

With its practical format and style, the Heidelberg Catechism provides an invaluable resource for teaching God's word through the preaching. According to the Heidelberg Catechism, the Holy Spirit works faith in my heart "by the preaching of the gospel" (Q&A 65). The Canons of Dordt also teach that God begins working his saving grace in me by the preaching (Canons 5.14). The Heidelberg Catechism provides an orderly approach to this essential preaching. By preaching one Lord's Day each week, our churches can systematically go through all the necessary doctrines of scripture over a year or two. In this way, the structure of the Heidelberg Catechism helps preserve the church in the doctrinal truths of scripture.

Without the Heidelberg Catechism and our other creeds, the church would be lost in the ambiguous atmosphere of the world today. Many churches today have lost their foundation because they have replaced doctrinal sermons with entertainment and "short messages" about Christ's love. Of even greater concern are the postmodern movements that proudly declare that there is no absolute truth. The idea of a structured set of doctrine is almost unheard of in today's culture, in which acceptance replaces morality, and tolerance is the greatest virtue.

The truths of scripture as they are clearly set forth by the Catechism are essential. Despite the ideas of the world today, the many questions of life must have only one answer, and they all can be found in scripture. The Heidelberg Catechism aids me in the search for and defense of this truth by setting forth the Biblical answers in an easy to understand and logical manner. I can find immense comfort knowing that I have the Catechism as a guide against the many false teachings of the world.

Clearly the Heidelberg Catechism helps provide the knowledge necessary to know God, but we also must remember that "the knowledge of faith is not simply a collection of facts which one cognizes, categorizes, and debates like armchair theology. The knowledge which is the Reformed faith is known and lived" (Smidstra). According to Q&A 21, true faith is also "an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart." I can know a lot about God and his works, but I also need to believe and confess these truths from my heart. The Heidelberg Catechism helps make this possible with its personal perspective.

Every question and answer in the Catechism is worded as a personal confession. In Q&A 1, the Catechism does not say, "Christians belong unto their faithful savior Jesus Christ." It says "*I* belong unto *my* faithful Savior Jesus Christ." By using first person pronouns, the Heidelberg Catechism makes me apply each doctrine to my life personally so that the words come from my heart, not just my head.

The focus of the catechism is also personal. It is not just a cold list of doctrinal principles to be memorized. Lord's Day 1 could have begun with the hard, condemning truth of total depravity. Instead the Heidelberg Catechism begins with a comforting answer to the meaning and goal of my life: I belong to Christ, my Savior, and "without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head" (Q&A 1). From the first Lord's Day to the last, the Catechism teaches the gospel, the "good news" of my salvation in Christ.

Another aspect of the personal nature of the Heidelberg Catechism is that it applies to me throughout my life. I distinctly remember the sound of tapping pens as I wrote out that week's memorized Lord's Days with my Heidelberg Catechism class. I had heard the Heidelberg Catechism preached every Sunday since I could first sit quietly in church, but it was then that the importance of the Catechism began to take shape in my mind. In class they were memorized answers, but as I mature, I grow in my understanding of the meaning and application of each Lord's Day. Each new sermon and each new year brings new meaning to the things taught in the Heidelberg Catechism. The Catechism provides comfort and understanding to every member of the church, from the children to the elderly.

Some could argue that the weekly preaching of the Catechism is repetitive, but each series on the Catechism provides a different perspective, and those listening find new ways to apply it to their ever-changing lives. Herman Hoeksema eloquently states this idea in the preface to his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, *The Triple Knowledge*. He says that when the Catechism is faithfully preached,

"so that with every new series the preacher enters upon his task with new zeal…neither he nor his congregation ever grow weary of this form of doctrinal preaching, but rather grow in their appreciation of it and, of course, increase in their capacity to receive it" (Hoeksema). The questions and answers of the Heidelberg Catechism are simple enough for a child to understand, yet deep enough to delve into for a lifetime.

The Heidelberg Catechism is a better guide and tool than any device or gadget this world can provide. Its order provides clarity. Its teachable instruction aids the preservation of doctrine, and its timeless truth and personal perspective lead me to confess my faith from the heart. Amid the turmoil of this life, the Heidelberg Catechism provides practical and personal instruction essential for faith and a godly life. As I go forward to college, the workplace, and the rest of my life, I am thankful that I have the orderly Heidelberg Catechism as my guide.

Works Cited

Hoeksema, Herman. *The Triple Knowledge*, Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1970. Print.

Smidstra, Justin. "Walking by Faith (2)." 25 June 2013. *Young Calvinists*. web. 26 June 2013.

The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005. Print.

Essay contest winner. High School II (Grades 11–12) category. FIrst Place. Elizabeth is a member of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Essay Contest—2nd Place High School II (Grades 11–12) — Gwen Van Baren

The Beauty, Simplicity, and Order of the Heidelberg Catechism:
Lovable and Practical for the Elect of Every Age

The Heidelberg Catechism has been a major source of comfort in the past five hundred years for believers all over the world. On the occasion of the 450th birthday of the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism, it is fitting that we explore the history behind the catechism, and the beauty, simplicity, and order of the catechism, for these three things make it well-loved and practical for all believers of every age.

A brief history of the Heidelberg Catechism is first necessary. Before 1563, in Palatinate Germany there was an internal struggle between the Protestant Calvinists and Protestant Lutherans. When Frederick III came into power in 1559, he sided with the Calvinists and their view of the Lord's supper, and established a seminary. He hired Zacharius Ursinus to be the head professor at his seminary and Caspar Olevianus as his court preacher. Frederick III was aware that a cohesive confession of the Reformed faith was needed at this time. Although there were many confessions written before the Heidelberg Catechism, they were not all-encompassing, and the church needed a well-thought-out layout of the Reformed doctrine. On top of that, the struggle between the Calvinists and Lutherans was tearing Frederick III's Palatinate apart.

Shortly after the hiring of Ursinus and Olevianus, Frederick III decided to follow up on his conclusion that the church needed a catechism. He put the task of writing a fully Reformed catechism on Ursinus and Olevianus, who were both brilliant and youthful men still in their twenties. These two young men

used previously written catechisms, such as those written by Calvin and Bucer, as backgrounds for their catechism. However, Ursinus and Olevianus did not use only catechisms written by other men; they also had great theological minds that had been formed by great Reformed men—Olevianus by Calvin, and Ursinus by Melancthon and Bullinger. These two men eagerly set to writing the Heidelberg Catechism that we know today. They struggled in their writing, but finally published the complete Heidelberg Catechism.

When the Heidelberg Catechism was first published in 1563, it was extremely popular because of its practicality, simplicity, and the comfort it provided. The Reformed saints of the day understood the importance of a confession that covered the basics of Reformed doctrine, though the doctrine was still being developed. The Heidelberg Catechism spurred the development of Reformed doctrine and brought attention to the issues of the day. Reformed churches recognized this and decided to take it as their own. Many synods acknowledged it as a good summary of Reformed doctrine and declared it agreeable to scripture, including the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618–1619.

Since the Synod of Dordt adopted the Heidelberg Catechism as an official creed of the church, many people have torn it apart or rewritten it to fit their own means. But we as Christians of the Reformation can and should see the beauty of the catechism.

The catechism is beautiful in two ways. First, it is beautiful in that it is practical. It applies to every aspect of our salvation. It describes how we were depraved sinners, fallen in Adam, unable to do any good whatsoever. The catechism then joyously proclaims our salvation in Christ, how he came to earth in the incarnation, became fully man, yet still remained fully God, like us in every way except sin. It depicts how he went to the cross because he loved us first, not because we deserved anything at all. It goes on to say that God decreed before the foundation of the world the election of certain people, but not because we were any better than the reprobate.

The catechism also applies to our every area of life. The third section of the catechism, our thankfulness, describes how we show our thankfulness for salvation in Christ. In Lord's Day 32 the Catechism lays out beautifully how we are to behave in our godly walk: "Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit after his own image; that so we may testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God for his blessings, and that he may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof; and that by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ" (Q&A 86).

This question leads us to consider if what we do is proper behavior for a child of God and a good witness to those who do not believe in God, rather than wondering what people will think of us if we do this thing or that thing. The beauty of Q&A 86 is that God in his infinite grace does not forsake us as we would forsake him every day and every hour, but forgives us, as Matthew 18:22 says, "seventy times seven." We each personally know that we cannot keep the law of God perfectly or witness to our neighbors perfectly. God reassures us of his infinite grace and comforts us in this in the catechism.

Second, and most importantly, the catechism is beautiful because it is deeply personal. It is not just cold, hard doctrine. It speaks with the personal "I" as if we ourselves formulated the words of the catechism. It does not merely speak to the church as a whole. The catechism also has a warm personal aspect. Instead of condemning us at every turn, it reminds us that we were sinful and totally depraved, but now we are saved in Christ's shed blood, and must therefore walk in a "new and Godly life."(Form for the Profession of Faith) If we are feeling depressed or doubting our salvation, all we have to do is read and ponder Lord's Day 1: "That I in body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ" (Q&A 1). We belong to Christ! Is that not wonderful and beautiful?

Not only is the catechism beautiful in form, it is also well-known because of its simplicity. First, it is simple in that it is easy to understand. If I would go out and hand a copy of the Heidelberg Catechism to people on the street, they would be able to comprehend it. Many choose not to comprehend it, pretend they do not understand it, or ridicule God's people for it, but God knows these people's innermost hearts. In the final judgment, those wicked people who ignore all the ways God reveals himself in the world, including the Catechism, will be condemned to hell without an excuse.

The Catechism is also simple in form. The writers did not use flowery terms, large, incomprehensible words, or interminable sentences, but concise, simple, and precise language. God worked through the circumstances around the writers so they would

write a catechism that was simple and easy to comprehend, spanning the centuries of the modern church. Also, it does not mince words in condemning false doctrine, but simply refutes it. We can see this in the condemning of the Romish mass, where the catechism calls the mass a "denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Christ," and "an accursed idolatry" (Q&A 80).

Second, the catechism manifests its simplicity because it reflects the basics of the Reformed faith. All that we need to know and apply to our salvation can be found in the Heidelberg Catechism. Even today, we use the Catechism as a guideline for a godly life.

There is also simplicity in the order of the Heidelberg Catechism. The catechism follows the logical progression of our salvation: from the knowledge of our misery in a fallen world, to the knowledge of our salvation in the death and sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and finally to the knowledge of the debt of gratitude we owe to God for his mercy and grace towards us. Paul designed Romans to flow in the same logical progression. Perhaps the writers of the catechism identified this and devised the catechism in the same way. The ministers and elders at the Synod of Dordrecht wanted to recognize the truth of the catechism, and the writers of the Church Order followed close behind. Also, Frederick III asked Ursinus and Olevianus to design the catechism so that it could be preached once a Sunday, fifty-two times a year.

The Church Order, Article 68, lays that out: "The ministers shall on Sunday explain briefly the sum of Christian doctrine comprehended in the Heidelberg Catechism, so that as much as possible the explanation shall be annually completed, according to the division of the catechism itself for that purpose." Even today our ministers follow this as much as possible. It is not always easy to do, and does not always happen, but this displays the church as the church of all ages. The fact that men of the Reformation could write a church order and a Catechism still confessed today shows God's covenant faithfulness throughout all of history.

In conclusion, the question, What makes the Heidelberg Catechism a well-loved and practical confession? must be answered. The catechism is well-loved because of the comfort it presents to God's people. It reassures us in our salvation, strengthens us in our godly walk, and helps us to grow in the faith. The Catechism is practical in its layout. It is not hodgepodge, bits of doctrine here and there, with some comfort thrown in, but a cohesive document, full of edification for the church of all ages.

Works Cited

Kamps, Marvin. Heidelberg Catechism Preaching: Our Reformed Heritage. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000. prca.org. Web. 12 June 2013. <http://www.prca.org/pamphlets/pamphlet_34.html>.

Strong, James, and McClintok, John. *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*. pag.reformed.org. Web. 13 June 2013. <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/heidelberg_intro.html>.

The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005. 120. HC, LD 32, Q&A 86. Print.

The Bible. Matthew 18:22. Print.

The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005. 83. HC, LD 1, Q&A 1. Print.

The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005. 116. HC, LD 30, Q&A 80. Print.

The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Grandville, MI: The Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005. 399. Church Order, Article 68. Print.

The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Grandville, MI: The Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005. 266. The Form for the Public Confession of Faith.

Essay contest winner. High School II (Grades 11–12) category. Second Place. Gwen is a member of Crete Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois.

The Heidelberg Catechism—— A Well-Loved and Practical Confession

Four hundred fifty years ago the first edition of the Heidelberg Catechism was written by Zacharias Ursinus and his faithful helper, Caspar Olevianus. The two men had been commissioned by Elector Frederick III who aimed to influence both the temporal and the eternal life of his subjects. He wanted to teach them what it meant to live in the fear of the Lord, as well as promote a peaceful and civil life. Frederick's goal was met and the Heidelberg Catechism has been republished by the millions since then. In fact, there are few other books that have gone through more editions than the Catechism. Throughout the years it has been translated into almost every spoken language.

The question arises, How did this catechism become so well loved and so admired? There are many other catechisms; why are they not as well-received as the Heidelberg Catechism? There are several reasons for this. One reason that could account for the popularity of the Catechism is that as Christians were persecuted, they traveled and brought it with them, spreading it farther. Another contributing factor could have been that the Catechism was almost always published in the context of church use, and in many churches it was stipulated to be preached every Sunday. These factors are reasonable explanations; they definitely helped in the spread and popularity of the Catechism. But I believe there is an even better explanation. The Catechism not only has a very logical and well thought out order, making it easily accessible to everyone, but is also a confession that is practical for believers everywhere, and is based solely on scripture, making it a reliable confession.

The logical order of the Catechism has contributed greatly to its popularity over the years. The memorable alliterations that have been often stated sum up the entirety of a Christian's life: "Sin, Salvation, Service" or "Guilt, Grace, Gratitude". The Catechism follows these three sections in order. The first Lord's Day summarizes these three sections, stating that though we have sins and have been in times past under the power of the devil, Christ has made us his own through his saving work on the cross and has delivered us from the power of the devil. Christ also has made us sincerely willing and ready to live unto him, which speaks of the thankfulness we ought to show in response to such a gracious deliverance. Lord's Days 2–4 speak of our debt—the debt of our original guilt and sin, of our old man within us, and of our actual sins. It speaks of our misery, where we got it, and how we come to know this misery. Lord's Days 5–31 speak of the salvation that Christ provides for his elect. Lord's Days 32–52 speak of the thankfulness we owe to God for such a deliverance and elaborate on the different ways God's people can show this thankfulness—through keeping his commandments and through prayer. Since any piece of scripture relates to one or more of these three headings, it is fitting that the catechism has these three sections.

The logical order the catechism follows makes it easy for its readers to follow along and get a better grasp of what the Christian life is all about. Just as a good sermon has different points that flow into one another in a logical fashion, such that the audience is able to listen without getting lost, so the Catechism has these three sections that logically flow into one another and complete the picture. When one's thoughts and ideas are written down in a jumble on paper, no matter how intellectual or erudite the thoughts are, the reader will be unable to follow the author's points and easily handle the subjects placed before him. The catechism's logical flow and the three divisions have aided readers and thus led to the catechism's being so well-loved and popular.

This is not the only factor that led to the catechism being so admirable, however. The confession that Ursinus and Olevianus wrote is also practical. It is

practical not only because it teaches us the doctrines of the Reformed faith, but also because it tells us how to apply these doctrines to our lives; the concern of the catechism is not the doctrines themselves, but the doing and use of these doctrines. For example, Lord's Day 10 speaks of the doctrine of providence. It could simply state the definition of providence and stop with that; instead it tells us how this truth affects us as Christians: knowing the doctrine of providence allows us to be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and able to trust in God as we look to the future.

Another example of the practicality of the catechism can be found in Lord's Day 12, which speaks of the offices of Christ. The catechism does not finish by merely stating that Christ serves in the office of prophet, priest, and king. It goes farther. We read that as our prophet, Christ speaks the word of God through the preaching, the word, and through his Holy Spirit. This applies to us today. One of the most obvious applications of this doctrine is how we approach going to church on Sunday, and how attentive we are through the sermons. We listen differently knowing that Christ as our prophet is speaking through the minister. The catechism expands on Christ's being our priest, speaking of the sacrifice he made for us, his people. It tells us how he consecrates us so we can serve him, and how today Christ prays and intercedes for us. What a comfort! Christ's office of king is also practical for us today, and the catechism expands on this as well, teaching how Christ as our king rules us by his word and Spirit, and how Christ defends and cares for us in the battle against sin and Satan.

All these things are practical and are comforting to believers, yet the catechism gives even more practical teaching on the offices of Christ. It teaches us that we too are called to serve in these offices just as Christ did. Christ was our example. We must be prophets by confessing his name and speaking to and encouraging others. As priests, our calling is to present our bodies living sacrifices of thankfulness. We present our bodies as living sacrifices every day of our lives. How could this not be practical? The thoughts we think, the actions we do, the lives we live—in all we do, we are to give glory to God. As kings, we are called to fight against sin, Satan, and the old man that is within us. This is a constant battle, one that we go through every single day. As kings, we also will reign with Christ in eternity. This gives us something to look forward to here on earth as we go through many challenges and trials. These doctrines apply to us every day of our lives!

The catechism's instruction on the ten commandments application also provides substantial application for believers today. With each commandment, we are instructed how that commandment affects how we act in certain circumstances: what we think, and even the positive applications of them. For example, in Lord's Day 36 we are taught that keeping the third commandment not only means that we must not use God's name rashly, but we are also taught that we must not commit perjury, curse, or even be part of this sin through silence or connivance. Positively, the catechism states we are to fear and reverence God and his name, rightly confess and worship him, and glorify him through all our words and works. The catechism again gives practical instruction. We could go through Lord's Day after Lord's Day and see the practical applications that are brought forward over and over.

In addition to being practical in its teachings, it is also practical in its choice of words and syntax. The Heidelberg Catechism is easily understandable to readers of every age. Younger readers—and even older ones at times—may need some things explained; but for the most part, the catechism is written in a way that it is beneficial to all believers. That the catechism is easily understandable does not in any way mean that it is a watered down summary of the Bible, taking away key truths of the Reformed faith for the sake of aiding the young or uneducated. Rather, it is a confession that preserves all the important truths that scripture teaches and at the same time remains a confession that is easily understood.

Though the Catechism is simple, it is also exceptionally beautiful and rich. It is beautiful and rich because it is a personal confession. This is one of the reasons why this catechism has flourished among so many. The beginning of the Heidelberg Catechism is striking and attractive because it is personal. Our only comfort in life in 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; who, with his precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all *my* sins, and delivered *me* from all the power of the devil; and so preserves *me* that without the will of *my* heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from *my* head; yea, that all things must be subservient to *my* salvation, and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures

me of eternal life, and makes *me* sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him.

What a personal confession!

We could look at other catechisms that approach humanity abstractly from the perspective of its status as God's creation. In contrast, the Heidelberg Catechism focuses on how the individual believers *belong* to Christ—have a living bond to him—rather than addressing them as mere creatures. The way that the Heidelberg Catechism starts off is an indication of its practical character as a whole. Over and over again we are told what the use of different spiritual events in salvation history are, what use the knowledge they provide is to us, and how it relates to us as Christians.

The Catechism is also beautiful because it is based solely on scripture. Unlike most literary works, we don't see a list of people who contributed their own ideas, at the end of the Heidelberg Catechism. Instead, along with each question and answer, numerous scripture references are provided. For example, when we read in the Catechism that true conversion consists of two parts, namely the mortification of the old and the quickening of the new, we can look at Ephesians 4:22–23 and read the very same thing, "That ye *put off concerning the former conversation the old man*, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be *renewed in the spirit of your mind*." Scripture is the basis of the Catechism; it is not based on ideas that man came up with, formulated to make enjoyable reading—what Ursinus and Olevianus wrote is a beautiful summary of *God's* Word.

This beautiful summary has stood the test of time, first and foremost, because it is based on God's word. The Heidelberg Catechism is so well loved because it is a faithful and reliable confession. It is also so well loved because of how well put together it is, how organized, and yet how personal it is to the readers. As we continue to hear sermons from the Heidelberg Catechism with scripture as its foundation, when we read the Heidelberg Catechism in our devotions, or as we discuss it in catechism class or in Bible studies, stop to think about what a wonderful gift God has given us—what a wonderful summary of his word he has given us. Most importantly, thank God for the greatest gift of all—his Son—who has with his precious blood fully satisfied for all our sins and delivered us from all the power of the devil, who so preserves us that without the will of our heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from our head, and who makes all things subservient to our salvation. Thank him for the assurance of eternal life he has given us and his work within us!

Bibliography

Selderhuis, H. "The Heidelberg Catechism: The Secret of Its Success—See More At: Http://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/en/resources/speeches.html#sthash.phcCpfBY.dpuf." Heidelberg Catechism. 28 June 2013. Lecture.

Strong, James, and John McClintock. "Historic Church Documents at Reformed.org." *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological And Ecclesiastical Literature*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. *Historic Church Documents at Reformed.org*. CRTA. Web. 28 June 2013.

Van Vliet, J. "Interview: Catechism Preaching." Interview. *Heidelberg Catechism*. Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, n.d. Web. 28 June 2013. <http://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/en/resources/speeches.html#>.

Heidelberg Catechism in *Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*. Grandville, MI: PRCA, 2005.

Essay contest winner. High School II (Grades 11–12) category. Third Place. Leah is a member of First Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta.

Q. 1 What is thy only comfort in life and death?

A. That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1

Watching Daily At My Gates

November 9 ***Read Jeremiah 38***

In spite of many objections and threats upon his life, Jeremiah continued to preach the word of the Lord. He was sentenced to death in an illegal court, but he was delivered by wicked king Zedekiah. This king then took the time to listen to Jeremiah, and even though Jeremiah's words predicted a certain doom, Zedekiah allowed Jeremiah a certain freedom. This illustrates the verse in Proverbs that states "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord." While we may see not much solace for God's faithful prophet, he knew that in this way he would carry out Jehovah's will. Is this our desire? Sing Psalter 391.

November 10 ***Read Jeremiah 39***

A prophet was known to be a true prophet if the words of his prophecy came true. Every one in Jerusalem had to know that Jeremiah was a true prophet according to the words of this chapter. While the book is not finished, its purpose is. God used the faithful Jeremiah, who trusted in Jehovah, to warn and condemn those who did not walk in his law. The captives had seventy years to contemplate Jeremiah's words. In those years God's faithful were gathered unto him, and the reprobate were further condemned. May we heed God's word as we look until the end prophesied in Scripture. Sing Psalter 379.

November 11 ***Read Jeremiah 40***

Jeremiah's work did not extend to his personally being in Babylon. Other prophets, such as Daniel and Ezekiel, would bring the word of Jehovah in that place. Jeremiah's work was with those who were to be left in Judah to care for the land. We will see that they would rebel against the authority that God through Babylon placed over them. This rebellion would be punished, as they would end up in Egypt for the rest of their lives. Even in this, God cared for his faithful prophet, and he will care for us until the final day of judgment. Sing Psalter 107.

November 12 ***Read Jeremiah 41***

This chapter tells the little-known story of some of those who remained in Jerusalem after the main body of Judah was taken to Babylon. What we see is a group of people who had not learned the lesson of obedience. God through Jeremiah had instructed these people to stay in Judah and live peaceably under the rule of Babylon. Ishmael and others did not obey, killed the man Babylon had set over them, and then were going to leave the land. Do we know the lesson of obedience? If we live in obedience to God's commands, we can rest assured of his blessing as we live our lives on this earth. Sing Psalter 105.

November 13 ***Read Jeremiah 42***

The new leader, Johanan, and his friends came to Jeremiah requesting that he ask God what they should do. As the end of the chapter shows, they really did not care what God's word was for them. They wanted to go to Egypt, and they were hoping that they could receive God's blessing on their act of disobedience. Jeremiah tells them that God's blessing would only rest upon them if they remained in Judah. In Egypt they would die and would lose all hope of returning. Do we want to tell God what to do? If we do, we should know that there will be no blessing in that way. Sing Psalter 106.

November 14 ***Read Jeremiah 43***

The faithful prophet's message from Jehovah was disregarded and a large group of people was taken to Egypt to the capital city. Jeremiah's word about Babylon and now about Egypt was declared false, even with the destruction of Jerusalem all around them. God used this journey to bring a word of destruction to Egypt at Babylon's hand. Nebuchadnezzar would punish Egypt for all of their idolatry and other sins. As we read this history, let us know that God is true, and his word will come to pass. Let us live in obedience to that word even when it is not our desire. In this way we will receive Jehovah's blessings, which never fail. Sing Psalter 88.

November 15 ***Read Jeremiah 44***

We might be wont to shake our heads as we read through this chapter. The Jews who had gone into Egypt brazenly shake their fists at Jehovah and his prophet for reproving them of idol worship. Jeremiah preaches a sermon against their wicked behavior and then leaves them with a concrete sign. Egypt's king will be taken by Babylon, and only a very few would return to Judah. Are we any different? Are we part of the remnant? Sing Psalter 23.

November 16 ***Read Jeremiah 45***

Baruch had to bring Jeremiah's words of condemnation to the royalty in Jerusalem. He too was of the royal family and had an important position of being a scribe. God does not forget his faithful servant. This short missive is meant to comfort Baruch and all of God's people who endure affliction as they carry out the word of the Lord. We must not be weary in doing God's work. We must not quail before wicked men. We must persevere, knowing that God's grace is sufficient for all of his people. Sing Psalter 216.

November 17 ***Read Jeremiah 46***

In 1 Peter 4 the apostle states that judgment will begin in the house of God. He goes on to wonder how the wicked will stand. The three large prophecies, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, all report on the judgment of the wicked. In this chapter we see two parts to that judgment on Egypt. The chapter ends with a word of comfort to the faithful. We must not gloat over the wicked's condemnation; that is what they do. Rather we must know that in the way of their judgment comes our redemption. Sing Psalter 206.

November 18 ***Read Jeremiah 47***

Sometime God uses the heathen for his purposes. In this chapter the sword of the Lord is Babylon and its king Nebuchadnezzar. God sends him to Philistia and Phoenicia. These two nations had troubled God's people in different ways. Philistia had long been a thorn in Israel's flesh, and Phoenicia had influenced Israel with Baal worship. The chapter is short, but its message of judgment is sure. The captives could hear the prophecy, see its fulfillment, and know that God would deliver them from Babylon. We too must see in this prophecy the truths that Scripture holds to be true. Sing Psalter 201.

November 19 ***Read Jeremiah 48***

In this prophecy, which foretells in great detail the destruction of Moab, the telling verse is verse 7. Moab and all wicked peoples trusted in their own works. They thought that in their power, riches, and gods they would find salvation. We must be instructed not to fall into that trap. As a hymn states, "Not what my hands have done can save my guilty soul." As we live in this world that is becoming riper for judgment each day, we must see that our only help is in Jehovah's name. As soon as we rest upon our accomplishments, we will fall. May God give to us the grace to rest in his name forever. Sing Psalter 160.

November 20 ***Read Jeremiah 49***

The nations that are mentioned in this chapter and the preceding chapter are all close neighbors of Israel and Judah. Moab, Ammon, and Edom are also related to Israel by blood. They also have one more thing in common. They have participated in extreme wickedness, and they have persecuted the people of God. Jeremiah makes these prophecies not to gloat, but rather he makes them at God's command to comfort and to show Israel that they will be redeemed by the judgment of God upon the wicked. God's people do not deserve deliverance, but by Jehovah's grace they and we will be delivered. Sing Psalter 151.

November 21 ***Read Jeremiah 50***

This chapter and the one that follows contain a prophecy concerning Babylon's destruction. There are several things to note in this chapter. First, Babylon is only a picture of antichrist. In Revelation some of the ideas in this prophecy are used to portray the final manifestation of antichrist. Second, we see God's sovereignty. Babylon would not stay as the world power; it would be destroyed by another kingdom yet to come. Finally, we see comfort for God's people, for in Babylon's destruction would come their release. May we look for the destruction of antichrist's kingdom as the way of our deliverance into our eternal glory. Sing Psalter 152.

November 22 ***Read Jeremiah 51***

When Jeremiah finished making this prophecy, he gave instructions that the prophecy was to be read in Babylon, both to the Babylonians and to the people of God. For the people of God the prophecy served as comfort as their release was foretold. For Babylon they would know that their earthly kingdom would not last, but would fade away just as the prophecy, weighted by a stone, sank into the waters of the Euphrates. People of God, read the word of God and know that all that is contained in it will come to pass. In this way we will be comforted as we live in this evil world. Sing Psalter 361.

November 23 ***Read Jeremiah 52***

The book of Jeremiah ends with grace. Some might say, How? If you compare Jeremiah 52 with Matthew 1, you will find Jehoiachin (Jechonias). This man was in the line of David and therefore of Christ. The sovereign God moved Babylon's king to take Jehoiachin from prison and give him the freedom to marry and bring forth a child. That is grace shining through the wickedness of the world. That is the grace that gives to us the blessed salvation that we have. Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift! Sing Psalter 198.

November 24 ***Read Lamentations 1***

Each chapter of Lamentations is written in acrostic form. Notices the multiples of twenty-two—the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. In this first chapter Judah bewails her misery. We see the sad condition into which Jehovah has led them because of their sin. Notice the words of verse twelve. Not only do they portray the deep sorrow of Jerusalem, but also they portray the sorrows that would be ours if Christ had not taken our sins upon him. The final verses of the chapter are a prayer that we would do well to take on our lips. Sing Psalter 141.

November 25 ***Read Lamentations 2***

The prophet continues his lamentation over the devastation Babylon has wrought in Judah and especially Jerusalem. However, Jeremiah knows that Babylon was only an agent in God's hand. God sovereignly used Babylon to carry out the chastisement of his people. Noticed the number of verses that begin, "The Lord hath…" Once again the chapter ends with a prayer of deliverance from the evils that brought the church into this state. May we make this prayer ours every day. Sing Psalter 386.

November 26 ***Read Lamentations 3***

In this chapter the prophet adds his own sufferings to the nations as he carried out Jehovah's work. In the midst of the darkness of the first third of the chapter, the sun breaks forth in verses 21–23. Jeremiah and the church can know by grace through faith that God's mercies are sure. Every morning we can call those mercies ours and rest assured that Jehovah will keep us throughout the day. No matter what God brings upon us, in his mercy he will deliver us from all trouble. Sing Psalter 241.

November 27 ***Read Lamentations 4***

There are three parts to this acrostic. In the first eleven verses, Jeremiah recounts the severe miseries that Judah suffered. In the next nine verses the cause of the suffering is stated. Israel has sinned, and these sufferings are the chastisement on account of that sin. The final two verses state that without a doubt Judah would be restored to the promised land. The nation that mocked her while going into captivity, Edom, would be punished. Once again we see the beautiful grace of God showered forth upon his people. Sing Psalter 83.

November 28 ***Read Lamentations 5***

This chapter does not follow the acrostic style of the first four, but the thought and arrangement is similar. Judah's sad condition is shown as Babylon troubled them. The reason—their sin—for the sad condition is exposed. Finally, a prayer for their restoration is lifted up to almighty God. Notice verse twenty-one, in which the prophet says that the work of restoration is wholly God's. Like Judah we can do nothing to deliver ourselves from the misery of our sins. Like Judah we depend wholly upon the grace of God for such a great salvation. Sing Psalter 220.

November 29 ***Read Ezekiel 1***

While Jeremiah was prophesying to the people of God in Judah, Ezekiel had been carried away captive with the first group of captives along with Jehoiachin. God called him to his work near the river Chebar, which is in northern Mesopotamia. His work was to prepare the early group of captives for the seventy years that they would have to endure in Babylon. The fantastic vision that he saw was not only the announcement of his call, but also an indication that his prophecy would concern more than just the immediate future, for from this vision and others we have a glimpse of what the new heaven and earth will be like. Sing Psalter 373.

November 30 ***Read Ezekiel 2***

In this chapter and the one that follows we find the prophet's commission to his work. He is given the name "Son of man." The name Ezekiel means "strength of God." Son of man would remind him that he is but a man. That fact makes the encouragement found in the chapter necessary. All office bearers must remember not to be afraid. Their work is from God who will strengthen them in it. All of the congregation must know that their work is from God and must be accepted as such. Sing Psalter 223.

December 1 ***Read Ezekiel 3***

Even though the roll that Ezekiel was compelled to eat was sweet, it would bring bitterness into his life. The people to whom he was instructed to go would not accept him or the prophecies that he would bring. However, God encourages him in the days before his

announcement to those people who were already languishing as captives. That encouragement is for all of us as we live in this Babylon awaiting our deliverance into the new Jerusalem, which is not of this earth. Sing Psalter 376.

December 2 ***Read Ezekiel 4***

The captives in Babylon still looked for Jerusalem to throw off Babylon, so that they could return. God commanded Ezekiel in a very graphic way to show that Judah would fall even as Israel did, and that conditions in the city would be very bad. God gives to us signs of Christ's return. Some of them are becoming extremely graphic. Are we paying heed to those signs? Or, as Lot's wife, do we look back upon an earth that pleases our flesh? Sing Psalter 407.

December 3 ***Read Ezekiel 5***

Ezekiel continues to bring the word of Jehovah to the captives along the river Chebar. That word continues to be, "Jerusalem will be destroyed, and its inhabitants will be carried away captive." The captives who saw Ezekiel cut and destroy his beard knew what these signs meant, but in the last verse we see that God makes sure they know it when he adds, "I the Lord have spoken it." God has spoken what will happen before Christ returns. We know what the signs mean; are we paying attention to them? Sing Psalter 397.

December 4 ***Read Ezekiel 6***

There are three items of note in this chapter, and they are all related. First, Ezekiel prophesies the final destruction of all of Israel because of her idolatrous ways. Second, God's grace is shone to a remnant that will return to the promised land. Finally, all of this is done because "I am the Lord." As we view events in this world's history, we too must know that Jehovah is God. It is quite easy to see causes for things in the news and forget that our sovereign God rules every act of every man and nation. "I am the Lord" is comforting to the believer because he can know that nothing can separate him from the love of God. Sing Psalter 392.

December 5 ***Read Ezekiel 7***

This is a continuation of the previous chapter. The description of Israel's destruction is very graphic. The call is to repentance. It is a call that would go unheeded by most in Israel, but by God's grace there would be a remnant who would heed the call and return to Jehovah. There are many signs that Christ is coming as judge. There is a call to repentance today as well. Will we heed that call? Will we pray for grace to return unto the Lord, knowing that in him and only in him we will find that grace to repent? Sing Psalter 143.

December 6 ***Read Ezekiel 8***

The book of Ezekiel now turns to a different description of Judah. In the previous chapters Judah's miseries are shown to Ezekiel, and he makes them known to his fellow exiles. Those listeners seem unwilling to hear God's prophet. Now in the audience of these exiles, God gives to him a vision that shows him why Judah would be taken into captivity. The sin portrayed here is idolatry in many forms. Judah had sought other gods and had forsaken Jehovah. Whom do we worship? God's fury would be upon us except for the blood of the lamb. Sing Psalter 308.

December 7 ***Read Ezekiel 9***

After seeing the multitude of evils in Jerusalem, Ezekiel now sees God's judgment upon those who committed such sins. Yet we see grace for those who had been chosen from eternity. They were spared the executioner's weapons. The mark of grace saved them from destruction. This mark of grace could only come from God, because even Ezekiel's plea for mercy is ignored. The two classes of people in the world are shown, and the respective ends of those classes are sure. Pray for grace, people of God, and pray for it unceasingly. Sing Psalter 365.

December 8 ***Read Ezekiel 10***

The vision of God's judgment upon Jerusalem continues in this chapter. Ezekiel sees what should be a horrifying sight to God's people. The glory of the Lord as pictured in the Shechinah cloud leaves the temple. God's presence is gone out from a sinful nation, especially for their disregard of the proper worship of Jehovah. We could properly title this chapter Ichabod, "The glory is departed." As we worship from week to week in God's house, let us remember to worship him in spirit and in truth, and not after our own or any other man's designs. Sing Psalter 313.

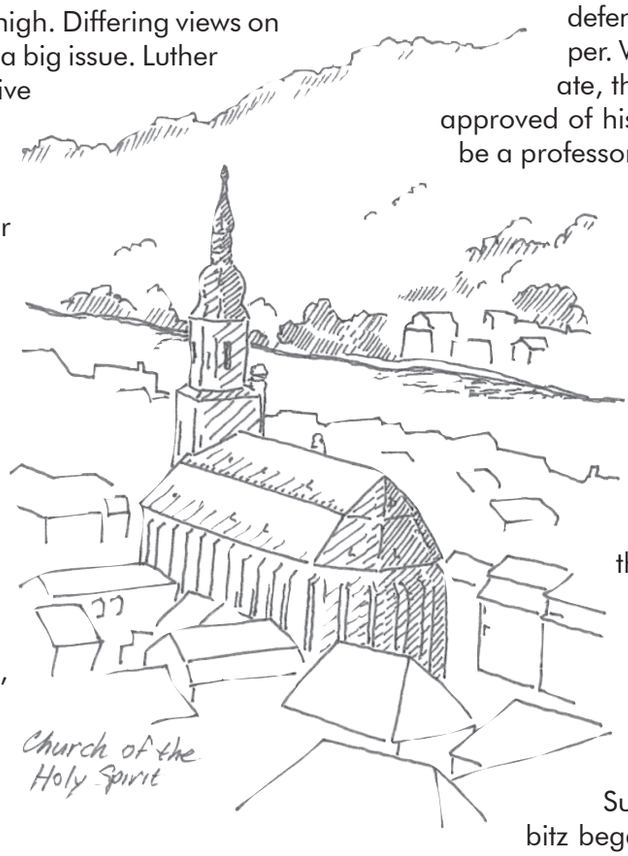
December 9 ***Read Ezekiel 11***

While yet in the vision in Jerusalem, Ezekiel is told to prophesy against certain leaders of the nation. He knows two of those leaders, and one of them dies during the prophecy. The event fills Ezekiel with concern for the entire nation. God assures him that there is a remnant that he will save by giving them a new heart. Those people will he save and redeem even as he has condemned the others. This is the heart for which we must pray for ourselves and for those whom we know are walking in an evil way. Sing Psalter 310.

A Turn of Events: From Chaos to Comfort

A History of the Heidelberg Catechism (Part 1)

He was a man of great intellect and strong opinions, but where would his opinions lead? Dr. Thieleman Hesshuss taught at the new seminary in Heidelberg, Germany in 1560. Professors holding to various religious opinions taught at this school at this time, and Hesshuss held his Lutheran views on the Lord's Supper very high. Differing views on the Lord's Supper were a big issue. Luther had nailed his ninety-five theses on the door of Wittenberg only forty-three years before. People were not yet clear on all the doctrines of the Reformation, especially doctrines about the Lord's Supper. Calvin held different views on it than Luther did. On top of that, in most of Europe the tides of persecution were swelling and many a Protestant, whether Lutheran or Calvinist, was dying for his faith. For the time being Heidelberg was a safe haven from this flood. But if such persecution could not be brought to Heidelberg, the devil would find a crack from within to let a tide of trouble seep in. Hesshuss was his man.



Dr. Hesshuss was also minister of a large and important church in Heidelberg, the Church of the Holy Spirit. Hesshuss had the opinion that the Psalms ought not be sung in worship because they were too "Calvinistic," and that eating bread in the Lord's Supper should be done with a napkin lest someone drop a crumb. Hesshuss' views were so strong that even Luther would not have approved of them.

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

Wilhelm Klebitz was a student under Dr. Hesshuss at the seminary, as well as a deacon in his church, and Klebitz was a young man who also freely voiced his opinions. Klebitz wrote a thesis paper defending Calvin's view on the Lord's Supper. When it was time for Klebitz to graduate, the professors at Heidelberg not only approved of his paper, they also appointed him to be a professor there. All this happened while their fellow professor, Dr. Hesshuss, was out of town. Hesshuss was furious when he returned.

Hesshuss immediately preached against Klebitz and his views. Klebitz fired back with equal venom. The mayor of Heidelberg tried to calm the situation, but to no avail. The tide of trouble was rising. The following Sunday Hesshuss announced from the pulpit that both the mayor and Klebitz were excommunicated from the church.

Now Elector Frederick III, the ruler of the land, became involved. He called Hesshuss and Klebitz to silence, but neither would give up. The very next Sunday during Lord's Supper, Dr. Hesshuss and Deacon Klebitz began to physically wrestle and fight in front of church!

A flood of chaos had come. What was the result? Hesshuss and Klebitz were thrown out of Heidelberg, Germany, and now Heidelberg needed another pastor and professor. Who would fill these important places without causing more trouble? The devil took glee in the chaos he had caused, but God was in control of it all for the good of his church. Such would be the turn of events…

Connie is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

BEACON LIGHTS
3074 Hudson Street
Hudsonville, MI 49426-1518

PERIODICAL
Postage paid at
Jenison, Michigan
(UPSS046-840)

Church News

Melinda Bleyenberg

BAPTISMS

"But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children."
Psalm 103:17

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:

James Timothy, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim & Amy VanTil—Byron Center, MI
Kate Annetta, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric & Christa Phelphs—First, MI
Claire Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mitch & Julie Feenstra—Grace, MI
Regan Danielle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. John & Lorinda Tolmsa—Loveland, CO
Willah Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan & Margaret Schipper—Providence, MI
Allison Jeanette, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ed & Sarah Hoksbergen—Randolph, WI
Macie Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Travis & Kayla Feenstra—Redlands, CA

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses."
I Timothy 6:13

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:

Leah Marcus—Edmonton, CAN
Macy Dykstra—Trinity, MI
Elizabeth Ensink—Trinity, MI
Carli Gritters—Trinity, MI

MARRIAGES

"Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it…."
Psalm 127:1

United in the bond of holy matrimony were:

Mr. John Kalsbeek and Miss Lynn Holstege—Hope, MI

Kids' Page (continued)

FIND THE UNDERLINED WORDS FROM THE FOLLOWING PART OF LORD'S DAY 9 IN THE PUZZLE AT THE RIGHT:

Q. 26. What believest thou when thou sayest, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth?"

A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ…is for the sake of Christ his Son, my God and my Father; on whom I rely so entirely, that I have no doubt…that he will make whatever evils he sends upon me, in this valley of tears turn out to my advantage; for he is able to do it…and willing…"

F	N	V	L	L	I	W	Y	E	T
D	O	U	B	T	C	H	G	V	U
B	P	R	H	E	L	A	O	I	O
M	U	I	W	G	T	T	F	L	V
Y	S	K	A	N	D	E	Y	S	L
P	E	O	A	I	E	V	A	H	N
E	N	V	A	L	L	E	Y	R	E
K	D	B	I	L	B	R	U	T	S
A	S	O	H	I	A	T	H	A	T
M	R	I	N	W	F	M	E	O	R