

## “THE HEIDELBERG CATHECHISM — AN ECUMENICAL CREED?”

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The four-hundredth anniversary of the most widely used Reformed catechism has been celebrated recently. The Heidelberg Catechism was commissioned by Frederick III, elector of the Palatinate, and published by him on January 19, 1563. Its chief authors were Zacharias Ursinus, a twenty-eight year old professor of theology at the University of Heidelberg, and Caspar Olevianus, a gifted young court preacher of twenty-six.

In an editorial the *Christian Century* has spoken of the anniversary of this Catechism as “more than a memorial” and called attention to the present-day ecumenical significance of the Heidelberg Catechism. This editorial is both challenging and perplexing to one who as minister and professor in a church which requires of its ministers at least once per Sunday “to explain 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.”<sup>1</sup>

“Two young men,—one 28, the other 26—may have written the confession of faith which can serve as the doctrinal basis for denominational reunion.”<sup>2</sup> Thus begins the editorial. Asserting that it was ordered by Frederick III to “mediate Lutheran and Reformed views in a controversy which was tearing Germany apart and inflaming much of Europe,” the editorial goes on to imply that the catechism reflects the advice of Melancthon that such an agreement should be “based on biblical simplicity, moderation, and peace” and should avoid “extremes and scholastic subtleties in theological positions.” Noting that the Catechism was a landmark in its day, the editorial states that “it remains the most attractive, ‘the most sweet-spirited’ of the confessions of faith that came out of the Protestant Reformation. Written at a time when Christendom was falling apart, the Heidelberg Catechism survives as the most ecumenical of the Protestant Confessions of faith.”

The editorial refers also to James I. McCord, President of Princeton Theological Seminary who called the catechism “a living symbol that is accomplishing in its 400th year that for which it was first prepared in the 16th century.” Mention is also made of the fact that Eugene Carson Blake in his famous San Francisco proposal for church union (December 1960) had suggested the Heidelberg Catechism as a good doctrinal basis

1. Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church, Article 68.
2. “More Than a Memorial,” *The Christian Century*, Vol. LXXX, No. 7 (February 13, 1963), p. 198.

for agreement among the four denominations he hoped would unite. The editorial concludes with this challenge: "One of the oldest Protestant confessions in point of time and one of the newest in spirit, the Heidelberg Catechism deserves the careful study of all ecumenical-minded Protestants."<sup>3</sup>

Time does not permit an analysis of the inviting statements of this editorial. One would be gratified beyond words if the biblical teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism were generally accepted today so that this catechism could actually serve such an ecumenical function. That the present characteristics displayed by the ecumenical movement or by the *Christian Century* itself provide a basis for that hope, is, to say the least, very doubtful. Whether Roswell P. Barnes' judgment that 1963 marks "the end of the romantic period"<sup>4</sup> in ecumenical affairs, is true, remains to be seen. Even though the Faith and Order Conference at Montreal last summer showed the mountains that had to be scaled, there was no evidence of a turning to the kind of doctrine set forth so beautifully in the Heidelberg Catechism. Let us, however, continue to hope and pray and work for the reformation of Christ's church throughout the world!

I am, indeed, convinced that the admonition that "the Heidelberg Catechism deserves the careful study of all ecumenical-minded Protestants" is true. I may even add—of all non-ecumenically minded Protestants as well, if there be any who prefer that designation. In this brief paper I shall attempt to assess the so-called ecumenical character of this catechism. I believe that this catechism is eminently worthy of the careful scrutiny especially of those who as members of this society subscribe to "the Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs."

### The Heidelberg Catechism — Its Ecumenical Character—Historically Considered.

A brief survey of the historical background of the Heidelberg Catechism will indicate the various strands of Reformation thought that influenced it. The publication date, 1563, at once alerts us to the relative lateness of the Catechism in the Reformation period—a lateness which was all to the advantage of this unique catechism.

The first noteworthy historical element is the tardiness of the Reformation's penetration of the Palatinate. Although Martin Luther visited Heidelberg in 1518 and held a colloquy at the Augustinian cloister on such questions as good works and Aristotelian philosophy, the Reformation did not gain prominence in Heidelberg until 1545 and the distinctly Reformed emphasis did not take over until the reign of Frederick III from 1559 to 1576.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Spoken in the aftermath of the Faith and Order Conference of Montreal, July, 1963.

Luther's visit did have noticeable effects, but these were like seeds waiting for more favorable conditions for germination. Among Luther's hearers in 1518 were John Oecalampadius, later the Reformer of Basel, Switzerland, and also Martin Bucer, whose reformatory work at Strassburg was to have a significant influence upon the exile John Calvin. But under the elector Louis I, surnamed the Pacific, who was more interested in hunting and building, the Reformation made little progress in the Palatinate. Although Louis remained a moderate Roman Catholic, his pacific nature did not permit harm to befall those who inclined to the evangelical faith.

During the reign of his successor, Frederick II, surnamed the Wise (1544-1556), the Reformation broke forth into public when during a December 20 mass in the Heilige Geist Kirche, the people burst forth in singing the hymn "Es ist das Heil uns Kommen Her." This public emergence of Lutheranism was short lived, for the defeat of the Schmaldalcidic League in 1547 again brought Roman Catholicism to power. But under the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, with its principle of the ruler's right to choose the faith of his realm (*cuius regio, eius religio*) Frederick the Wise openly chose for Lutheranism again and this now became the official religion of the Palatinate. The Augustine cloister was then opened as a training school for ministers and was called the Collegium Sapientiae (the college of wisdom). Under the next elector, Otto Henry (1556-1559), the cause of Lutheranism continued to advance under the *Augustana Variata* as the creed. But under the cousin of Otto Henry, the next elector, Frederick III, surnamed the Pious (1559-1576), the Reformed branch of the Reformation became dominant in subtle but natural ways and was crowned by the production of the Heidelberg Catechism—a beautiful Reformed catechism developed on German soil and unique in numerous ways. Although Frederick III remained loyal to the Augsburg Confession and was genuinely convinced that he simply held the biblical faith, and was not disloyal to the Peace of Augsburg and never called himself a Calvinist, he did endorse the Second Helvetic Confession of Henry Bullinger in 1566.

Secondly, we note that when the Heidelberg Catechism was published, in 1563, the Reformation had come to full bloom and the influence of the major Reformers had been clearly enunciated in their various writings. This was one year before Calvin's death and so the definitive edition of the *Institutes* (1559) had had ample time for circulation. Even before Calvin, Luther, Melanchthon and Zwingli had, of course, passed from the earthly scene. Hence their mature writings were also available to the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism. Numerous other second-generation Reformers were available personally or through their writings.

Creedally the Heidelberg Catechism had many forerunners. The Augsburg Confession of 1530 had undergone Melanchthon's revision in the *Augustana Variata* of 1540. Tensions among the Lutherans were growing and the need for the Formula of Concord was becoming increasingly evident; the Stuttgart Confession itself provided an important intermediate

step. Many Reformed confessions had also come into being, reflecting the national variations on the same Reformed theme: the French or Gallican Confession of 1559, the Scotch Confession of 1560, the Belgic or Netherlands Confession of 1561 to name only the most enduring ones. Thus, the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism had the opportunity to benefit from a multitude of prior Reformation creeds and treatises. They did, in fact, make use of these materials, and their end product proves that they learned wisely.

A third factor in the ripe Reformation developments which influenced the Heidelberg Catechism is to be seen in these same influences upon the two men largely responsible for its composition. Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) was born in Breslau in Silesia. For seven years he had been a student of Melancthon at Wittenberg, and both teacher and student thought highly of one another. Ursinus was also personally acquainted with Bullinger, Beza and Calvin, the latter having presented him with copy of his works. After serving as rector in the Elizabethan Gymnasium in his hometown, Ursinus was charged with crypto-Calvinism and forced to leave. He chose Zurich as his new home and from there, after Peter Martyr had himself declined the appointment to Heidelberg and recommended his student, Ursinus was called to Heidelberg. Thus the various strains of Reformation thought and influence were known to Ursinus first hand. Although his own basic sympathies were clearly Calvinistic, as his Major and Minor Catechisms as well as his Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism clearly indicate, the advantage of a first-hand acquaintance with Wittenberg, Zurich and Geneva is not to be underestimated in assessing the ecumenical character of the Heidelberg Catechism.

No less significant were the experiences and training of Caspar Olevianus, co-author of the Heidelberg Catechism. Born in Trier (Treves) on August 10, 1536, he studied law at Paris, Bourges and Orleans. In an attempt to rescue the son of Frederick III from drowning, Olevianus himself almost drowned. Then he vowed that if he were saved he would study theology and preach the gospel in his native city. He pursued theological study in Geneva and Zurich and came into personal friendship with Calvin and Farel, Peter Martyr and Beza at Lausanne. After beginning a Reformation movement in Trier, he was exiled from the city of the Holy Robe and called to Heidelberg about 1560 where he taught at Sapienz College, then at the university and later became Frederick's court preacher at the Heilige Geist Kirche. (It is reported that the city of Trier still celebrates the ouster of Olevianus on Whitmonday).

Thus the training and the experiences of the two main authors of the Heidelberg Catechism were such that they could and did benefit from the ripe fruit of the well-developed Reformation. Although they largely followed Calvin, they also had first-hand contact with all the other musicians of the Reformation symphony. The ecumenical character of the Heidelberg Catechism is unexplainable apart from this factor.

A fourth element in assessing the ecumenical character of the Heidelberg Catechism is closely allied to the above. The authors of the Heidelberg Catechism had access to a rich library of catechisms and creeds. In addition to the catechisms of Luther, there were also numerous other Lutheran catechisms in circulation during this period. The catechism of Brenz and that of Moibanus have left their impact upon the Heidelberg Catechism. But there were also a large number of Reformed catechisms that had an influence. Calvin's catechism of course deserves mention. But there were many others as well. Professor Gooszen and Professor Lang<sup>5</sup> have long ago demonstrated the major influences here to have been four families of Reformed catechisms:

1. The Strassburg catechisms of Capito (1527), Bucer (1534) and Zell (1535 & 1537).
2. The Zurich catechisms of Leo Juda (1534, 1535, 1538) and of Bullinger (1559).
3. Calvin's catechisms (1537 & 1541). Also the *Institutes*.
4. The Lasco catechisms, Lasco (1551), Micronius (1552), the London compend (1553), the Emden catechism (1554).

Recently Professor Walter Hollweg<sup>6</sup> has called attention to the two confessions of Beza as two until now unnoted sources of the Heidelberg. From biographical and historical study one can readily understand how such influences came to bear in the drafting of the Heidelberg Catechism. But a careful analysis of the Catechism itself will demonstrate the nature and extent of such influence. Sometimes the influence is so subtle that it is barely noticeable. At times the division or principle of division is derived from various predecessors. In many questions the wording and phrasing of the earlier catechisms are clearly present. Thus the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism were able to benefit from the amazing amount of catechetical work that had preceded them. And learning from them and borrowing from them, while avoiding a mere synthesis or patchwork effect, they were able to produce a catechism of amazing unity and beauty.

In this historical survey we have seen those elements which contributed to the so-called ecumenical character of the Heidelberg Catechism. The late penetration of the Reformation into Heidelberg and the Palatinate is one factor. The ripe fruit of Reformational development by 1563 is a second consideration. The personal contacts of the main authors, Ursinus and Olevianus, with all major Lutheran and Reformed theologians of the Reformation period is a third point to note. And the use made of the rich variety of the catechetical literature produced in the decades preceding 1563 is another. If these factors warrant the designation "ecumenical,"

5. M. A. Gooszen, *De Heidelberg Catechismus*, 1890. A. Lang, *Der Heidelberger Catechismus*, 1907. The latter work has not been available to me. For the following summary of sources see James I. Good, *The Heidelberg Catechism in Its Newest Light*. (Philadelphia: Reformed Church in US, 1914), p. 42.
6. *Neue Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Lehre des Heidelberger Catechismus*. (Neukirchen: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1961).

we must attempt to describe that ecumenical character of the Catechism more precisely. What is the doctrinal character of the Heidelberg Catechism? In what sense is it "ecumenical" and what are its merits and possibly demerits in the ecumenical situation of our day?

### The Heidelberg Catechism. Its Ecumenical Character — Doctrinally Considered.

In the light of the current ecumenical popularity of the Heidelberg Catechism, it is instructive to observe that when it was first published Roman Catholics as well as Lutherans vigorously attacked it. That opposition continued for a long time. Roman Catholic opposition to anything Protestant was understandable in the age of the Reformation as well as in the period of the Counter-Reformation. News of the decisions of the Council of Trent which concluded its eighteen-year history in 1563 may have been the occasion for the addition of the 80th question in the second edition of the Heidelberg Catechism and its enlargement in the third edition which still appeared in 1563, the year of publication. At any rate the reference to the Roman Catholic sacrifice of the mass as "a cursed idolatry" was certainly calculated to demonstrate that this Catechism did not have the ecumenical aim of placating Rome. In addition to this outspoken opposition to Roman doctrine, the entire Catechism and specific sections more clearly were in evident conflict with Roman Catholicism. Hence the violent opposition of Rome to this Catechism was no mystery.

The Lutheran opposition must be seen in the broader context of political involvement as well as in doctrinal differences. Many Lutherans looked upon the Catechism as a composite of Zwinglianism and Calvinism and denounced it as dangerous to sound doctrine and true piety. The three true Lutheran princes who addressed Frederick III on May 1563 expressed themselves in this way:

We know by the gracious help of God, that Zwinglianism and Calvinism in the article on the Lord's Supper are seductive and damnable error; in direct contradiction to the Holy Scriptures, the Apostolic Church, the true Christian understanding of the Augsburg Confession, and the commonly accepted and defended religious Peace of Augsburg.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, there have been scholars of a later period who have contended that the Catechism reflects the clear influence of the Lutheran, Philip Melancthon. Heinrich Heppe expresses this as his considered judgment as does Philip Schaff.<sup>8</sup> While it is historically clear that Frederick

7. Cf. G. W. Richards, *The Heidelberg Catechism: Historical and Doctrinal Studies*. (Philadelphia: Publication Board of the Reformed Church in US, 1913), p. 61.

8. Cf. Richards, *op. cit.*, p. 95; Good, *op. cit.*, p. 173; August Lang, "Der theologische Charakter des Heidelberger Katechismus" in *Reformation and Gegenwart*, (Detmold: Weyersche Hofbuchhandlung, 1918), pp. 254-271; Lothar Coenen, editor, *Handbuch zum Heidelberger Katechismus*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins GMBH, 1963), pp. 3 ff.

III did seek the advice of Melancthon, and Ursinus had himself been a student of Melancthon, the evidence for a Melancthonian character in the Heidelberg Catechism is lacking. This view receives little credence today.

Another suggestion has been made by Professor Gooszen who has made an exhaustive study of the sources of the Catechism. He contends that the spirit which really predominates is that of Henry Bullinger, the successor of Zwingli at Zurich. Again, the influence of Bullinger is beyond dispute. But the response of Karl Müller in his *Symbolik* is probably correct when he states that,

Gooszen's one-sided predilection to find Bullinger's type of doctrine in the Heidelberg is historically no more trustworthy than Heppé's contention that it is Melancthonian. The theories of both these men are shaped largely by their personal inclination to the doctrinal views of their respective heroes.<sup>9</sup>

Professor Lang's argumentation also refutes the thesis of Gooszen for he shows that the Catechism is really Calvinistic in its spirit and tendency. Lang adds, however, that it is a unique German Reformed spirit which the Catechism displays—one which reflects Calvin mainly, but which has been enriched by the influence of other Reformed theologians as well and even by certain Lutheran influences. Professor Lang makes this point emphatically when he contends that,

specifically German-Reformed Protestantism has, with the exception of Bucer, brought forth none of the great Reformers, none of the powerful war heroes and men of state such as Coligny or the Oranges, none of the original religious characters such as Cromwell. Upon the development of the political or economic life she has not exerted so decisive an influence as have the Huguenots, or the Netherlands, or above all the Pilgrim fathers—but German Reformed Protestantism has created the Heidelberg Catechism and with that at least proved the worth of her existence.<sup>10</sup>

What is there, then, in this German Reformed catechism that aroused immediate Roman Catholic and Lutheran opposition, when scholars have variously assessed its predominate spirit to be that of Melancthon, Bullinger, Calvin or German Reformed Protestantism and when contemporary theologians hail its present ecumenical significance? Or does it perhaps possess something from each of these movements, as one writer has lyrically expressed it?

It has Lutheran inwardness, Melancthonian clearness, Zwinglian simplicity, and Calvinistic fire, harmoniously blended together.<sup>11</sup>

While it is true that its authors learned from each and all of these, the Heidelberg Catechism is not a doctrinal mosaic nor a theological patchwork. Nor is its doctrinal emphasis so vague that almost anyone can read

9. Quoted from Richards, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

10. *Op. cit.*, p. 255 (translation mine).

11. Cf. Richards, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

it as he likes. Although benefiting from a variety of predecessors, this Catechism was a new creation with its own unique strength and beauty, a work of art and a book of doctrine in one stroke. It displays an organic unity and coherence. In seeking to express its doctrinal character and its ecumenical merits for our day, I shall now indicate that this Catechism is distinctly *Protestant* rather than Roman Catholic; that it is distinctly *Reformed* Protestantism, furthermore, rather than Lutheran, Melancthonian or Zwinglian; and finally that it is *uniquely* Reformed or Calvinistic in its irenic expression, its warm personal approach and its biblical simplicity. This constitutes its ecumenical appeal in our day.

That this Catechism is distinctly Protestant should be beyond dispute. It is certainly not ecumenical in the sense that it could be embraced by Roman Catholic and orthodox Protestant churches at present, unless Rome radically modifies her doctrine and life to conform to biblical norms. The entire Catechism is cast into the mold of the comfort of the Christian who is redemptively united to Jesus Christ as his only Saviour. That emphasis upon comfort was foreign to Roman Catholicism as Luther and Calvin knew from anxious experience. Also the *sola gratia* is evident from the Catechism's emphasis upon justification by faith alone, while it clearly emphasizes the necessity of the believer performing good works unto the glory of God to express his gratitude for full salvation wrought by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. That is still a distinctly Protestant, even Calvinistic, emphasis in the 20th as it was in the 16th century. In addition to the clear opposition to the Roman view of the mass in the 80th question, there is a more subtle rejection of Roman Catholic doctrines in other parts of the Catechism. Question 57, for example, rejects the doctrine of purgatory without even mentioning the word when it asserts that "my soul, after this life, shall immediately be taken up to Christ, its Head." Again questions 30 and 98 speak against veneration of saints and image worship. And obviously the lengthy section on the sacraments (questions 66-82) presents a view that is incompatible with that of Rome. Thus we see just a few of the more obvious features which demonstrate that this Catechism is distinctively Protestant. Its ecumenical character is thereby indicated in part.

Furthermore the Heidelberg Catechism is distinctly Reformed rather than Lutheran, Melancthonian or Zwinglian. Questions 5 and 8, for example, emphasize the depravity of man's nature and his proneness to evil which is in conflict with any synergistic tendency such as was present in Melancthon after 1548 and in some later Lutheranism. The view of the communication of attributes (*communicatio idiomatum*) with respect to the person of Christ and his two natures as reflected in questions 47-48 is clearly Calvinistic. The so-called "extra-Calvinisticum" doctrine found in this Catechism has recently called forth opposition from an ecumenical admirer of the Catechism, Professor Hendrikus Berkhof of Leiden, the Netherlands. The doctrine of the Lord's Supper is certainly Calvinistic rather than Lutheran or Zwinglian, as is the entire doctrine of the sacra-

ments. The important question of the relation of law and gospel is also decidedly Calvinistic. The summary of the law is employed in the first section of the Catechism to show man's sin and misery while the Ten Commandments themselves are fully explained in the third section expressing the way of gratitude and thanksgiving for pardon from the guilt of sin and the curse of the law through the salvation of Jesus Christ. The suggestion of B.B. Warfield<sup>12</sup> that a comparison of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Shorter Catechism, especially with reference to the first question of each, leads to the conclusion that the Heidelberg Catechism displays a more Lutheran, anthropocentric approach, does not stand up under careful scrutiny. Although the Heidelberg Catechism emphasizes the believer's comfort in Christ and the assurance of faith, it also emphasizes the Christian's chief end which is to glorify God, so beautifully stressed by the Shorter Catechism in harmony with Calvin's Genevan Catechism of 1541. But the Heidelberg includes in its first question the assertion that the Christ who fully saves and comforts and assures me of eternal life also "makes me heartily willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him." Thus question 2 indicates that the Christian's comfort involves the three-fold knowledge of "how great my sins and misery are; . . . how I am delivered from all my sins and misery; (and) . . . how I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance." This is explained in the significant third part on gratitude with which the Catechism concludes. In all of this the Catechism is certainly Reformed or Calvinistic. But the subtle blending of the emphasis upon the glory of God and the comfort of the believer in the assurance of faith calls attention to the unique combination of elements in this distinctly Reformed Catechism.

We turn now to consider the unique character of this Reformed or Calvinistic emphasis of the Heidelberg Catechism. Why does this particular Reformed catechism developed on German soil have such ecumenical appeal today? Structurally the Catechism is unique in the way in which it has woven the customary elements of a catechism—the Apostle's Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the doctrine of the sacraments—into a beautiful organic unity. With comfort as its central emphasis, it has brought these elements together under the meaningful divisions of misery, deliverance and gratitude (also expressed as sin, salvation, service; or guilt, grace, gratitude). Beautiful structure and organic unity, however, do not alone explain the Catechism's uniqueness.

In this Catechism the Reformed or Calvinistic position is expressed in an irenic, pacific, sweet-tempered manner. Recognizing that they were writing a catechism, and a catechism to be used in the instruction of children as well as the entire church, the questions and answers are expressed in a warm and personal but also simple, confessional manner. Although the total emphasis of the Catechism is Calvinistic, one must observe that there is little *express* mention of some features of Calvinistic doctrine. There is

12. *The Princeton Theological Review*, Vol. VI, No. 4 (October, 1908) pp. 565 f.

clear reference to the total depravity of the fallen sinner, to the irresistible grace of God's Spirit in regeneration and to the comfort and assurance of faith intimately related to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. However, it has been said that this Catechism does not commit itself to Calvin's doctrine of the decrees or to the doctrine of predestination. It is true that these matters do not receive consideration in express questions and answers. However, these doctrines are implicit throughout the Catechism and especially in such questions as 26-28 on providence, in question 52 and in 54 on the church. The latter, for example, speaks of "a Church chosen to everlasting life" and of the confessor's conviction "that I am, and forever shall remain, a living member thereof." Similarly the doctrine of limited atonement is not expressed in so many words, and on first reading question 37 may even appear to go in another direction. But this doctrine is implicit in numerous statements of the Catechism.<sup>13</sup> The covenant of grace is mentioned only in passing at various points, but it too constitutes the matrix for an understanding of the personal emphasis and comfort of the Catechism. That the authors saw these implications is evident from Ursinus' *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*. There is not adequate time here for the evidence for each of these considerations. But let it be remembered that this is a catechism, and a catechism is not the same as a more elaborate confession of faith and certainly not the same as a theological treatise. One need only compare Calvin's Genevan Catechism of 1541 with the French Confession of 1559 and the definitive edition of the *Institutes* of the same year.

One quite different possibility must be considered briefly. Is there a certain theological vagueness about this Catechism in wording or in brevity of exposition? And if so, is that what constitutes its ecumenical appeal today? The thought can not be banished since the writer heard a competent Presbyterian scholar express an opinion with such implications. It was said that the Shorter Catechism was theologically too precise and that was why the Heidelberg Catechism could better serve as an ecumenical creed for our day. The considerations adduced above conflict with the contention that the Catechism is theologically imprecise, while taking account of its unique features. One can only assert here that if the Heidelberg Catechism were to be used in ecumenical endeavors to foster doctrinal ambiguity and theological latitude, it would be better to leave the Catechism alone and not prostitute it to such ecumenical activity.

Rather, I believe it is because the Heidelberg Catechism is so genuinely Reformed, that is, Biblical in character, and so warmly and winningly expressed that it has its appeal still today. Since genuine ecumenicity must be based upon a recognition of the Scripture as God's authoritative Word, normative for faith and practice, and not upon some least common denominator, this Catechism should be of vital concern to all of the mem-

13. Cf. Roger Nicole, "A Modest Contribution on the 400th Anniversary Year of the Heidelberg Catechism" in *Torch and Trumpet*, Volume 14, No. 6 (July/August, 1964), pp. 10-12.

bers of this Society. If this Catechism is ecumenical in the biblical sense, then a good test of its ecumenical serviceability in our day will be the response of you, the members of this Evangelical Theological Society, and the churches you serve. Therefore I recommend to you for your study and stimulation the Heidelberg Catechism—an ecumenical catechism of the highest order!

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