

COMMITTEE ON TRANSLATION HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

To the General Synod of the  
Canadian Reformed Churches  
to be held at Smithville, Ont.,  
1980.

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[18 pages]

Hamilton, June 27, 1979

Esteemed Brethren:

1. The Committee on Translation Heidelberg Catechism received the following mandate:

- a) to revise the second draft translation, taking into account the comments received, including those of the Advisory Committee for this Synod, and to use the following guidelines:
  - I. to adhere closely to the original German text (third edition, 1563);
  - II. replace difficult and archaic words and expressions if proper equivalents are available in today's English;
  - III. restructure sentences which are too complicated into positive, separate sentences which directly answer the question;
  - IV. provide reasons when deviation from the German text is necessary on theological grounds.
- b) to submit this revised draft together with reference notes to the Churches and to invite comments to be submitted to the Committee by January 1980;
- c) to submit their report with recommendations to the Synod 1980;
- d) to arrange for publication of this revised draft without comments in booklet form for use in the Churches on a trial basis by November 1978;
- e) to establish what the original proof texts are and to see whether the selection of Scripture references can be improved by replacing, deleting and/or adding to the original ones and to include them in the publication, if possible;
- f) to provide an index to cross-reference the Three Forms of Unity.

2. The Committee is in the sad situation that it has to report that it was unable to fulfil its mandate.

In order to explain this situation, we relate the history of our Committee. Two members had been involved with the preparation of the first draft, presented to Synod Toronto, 1974, one member had occupied himself with the second draft, prepared for Synod Coaldale 1977. The work method of the two drafts had been different, especially in two respects:

- a) the basis for the new English translation;
- b) the restructuring of complicated sentences into positive and independent (or separate) sentences which directly answer the question.

ad a. Synod Coaldale 1977 did not make an informed and well argued choice for the one or the other method, although it may be argued that, as far as the basis for the translation is concerned, it built on the second draft translation. Our mandate was "to revise the second draft translation" and "(to) provide reasons when deviation from the German text is necessary on theological grounds."

The members of the Committee who had prepared the first draft were not willing to carry out this mandate.

They refer to the following facts:

- i) Although the German text is the original and in its third edition of 1563 can be called the Textus Receptus, the Latin translation was already published before April 3, 1563, "op last van de keurvorst". When the National Synod of Dordrecht judged the contents of the Heidelberg Catechism (in the sessions 147 and 148), it used a Latin text.
- ii) As far as the Dutch text is concerned, the Synod of Dordrecht accepted in session 179 an Act of Approbation concerning Confession and Catechism. In the line of A. Kuyper, F. L. Rutgers, and H. H. Kuyper the most recent study of J. N. Bakhuizen van den Brink remarks: "Alles wijst erop, dat de Nationale Synode met de Catechismus tekst van Richard Schilders, bezorgd door Herman Paukelius, 1611, heeft gewerkt . . . Hij is, als men zich zo kan uitdrukken, de meest authentieke van 1619 en neemt daarom zijn plaats in onze uitgave in." (De Nederlandse Belijdenisgeschriften In Authentieke Teksten . . ., 2nd Ed. Amsterdam: Bolland, 1976, p. 40, see p. 56).
- iii) The Synod of Homewood-Carmen 1954 noted that the Dutch text is an authentic text in the Canadian Reformed Churches (see Acts Coaldale 1977, p. 27: "No General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches has yet declared an English translation of the Doctrinal and Liturgical Forms adopted and the Churches are, according to Synod 1954, bound to the Dutch Texts.")
- iv) The present English text in our Book of Praise has been used for decades now and is the text that is used in Catechism preaching, teaching and often for the Form of Subscription for office bearers. Although it has not officially been adopted, it has by its use obtained an ecclesiastical character. This English text, like the Dutch text which the Synod of Dordrecht used (the text of 1611), is close to the Latin translation of 1563. Preference for the German text will, therefore, lead to an unnecessary deviation from the Latin and Dutch translations but also from the present English text.
- v) While the First Draft following the selective method is close to the new Dutch version, provisionally accepted by our sister churches in the Netherlands and based on the same method, the Second Draft gives a rather widely divergent rendition. This brings about an unnecessary chasm between the Dutch and the English text.
- vi) Although the mandate allows deviation from the German text when it is "necessary on theological grounds", it does not really do justice to the work method of the First Draft and to the character of the Latin, Dutch and English texts.

ad b. As far as the restructuring of complicated sentences is concerned, the Second Draft stated, "The question is not repeated in the answer as the first draft translation did in many cases. The reasons are as follows: - we have no mandate from Synod for this . . ."

The members of our Committee who wrote the First Draft are of the opinion that this mandate was implied in the guideline that spoke of "positive and independent (separate) sentences which form a direct answer to the question." To start long answers with 'that' is cumbersome and not according to (English) grammar. These members, however, are of the opinion that this guideline should be followed discriminately and not slavishly. Also in this respect Synod Coaldale 1977

did not make a clear and well argued choice between the two work methods.

Because our Committee did not want to do nothing, we accepted the following work method: We started from the Second Draft, compared it to the First Draft and to the present English text and tried to reach a compromise on the basis of the German and Latin texts of 1563 and the Dutch text of 1611 (1619). It means more deviation from the German text than is necessary on theological grounds. Therefore we decided not to finish this attempt, but give a proof of the result and to ask for a clearer mandate that can be carried out with good conscience by all Committee members.

4. The Committee would like to draw your attention to the following details:

When the text of the Apostles' Creed, proposed by the Committee on Translation and Revision Confessional and Liturgical Forms, is accepted by Synod, it will have consequences for the text of the Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 7 - 22. The most important material change will be the acceptance of "Hades" instead of "hell" (L.D. 16). In order to maintain the Scriptural content of A. 44 the churches could add a question to Lord's Day 15:

New Question 40:

What further comfort do you derive from Christ's crucifixion?

A.: In my greatest sorrows and temptations

I may be assured and comforted

that my Lord Jesus Christ,

by His unspeakable anguish,

pain, terror, and agony,

which He endured

throughout all His sufferings,

but especially on the cross,

has delivered me from the anguish

and torment of hell.

A new question 42 could read as follows:

What do you confess when you say, He was buried and

He descended into Hades?

A.: Christ had really died,

and He continued in the state of the dead,

under the power of death till the third day.

So He became the Victor of death and Hades,

in order that He might lead us through the grave

to the new earth.

The old Questions 40, 42, and 43 would become Questions 41, 43, and 44. In this manner the historical meaning of the clause of the Apostles' Creed "He descended into Hades" is honoured, while the Scriptural content of Answer 44 is kept and transferred to the place where it belongs.

The Committee on Translation  
Heidelberg Catechism

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Draft Translation, 1979

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

(Lord's Days 1-23)

Lord's Day 1

1. Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?
  - A. My comfort is that I, with body and soul,  
both in life and death,  
am not my own,  
but belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.  
He has, with His precious blood,  
fully paid for all my sins,  
and delivered me from all the power of the devil;  
and He so preserves me  
that without the will of my heavenly Father  
not a hair can fall from my head;  
indeed, that all things must work together  
for my salvation.  
Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me  
of eternal life.  
and makes me heartily willing and ready  
from now on to live for Him.
2. Q. What do you need to know  
in order to live and die in the joy of this comfort?
  - A. First, how great my sins and misery are;  
second, how I am delivered  
from all my sins and misery;  
third, how I am to be thankful to God  
for such deliverance.

The First Part

OUR SIN AND MISERY

Lord's Day 2

3. Q. From where do you know your sin and misery?
  - A. From the law of God.
4. Q. What does God's law require of us?
  - A. Christ teaches us this in a summary in Matthew 22:  
You shall love the LORD your God  
with all your heart,  
and with all your soul,  
and with all your mind.  
This is the great and first commandment.  
And a second is like it  
You shall love your neighbour as yourself.  
On these two commandments depend  
all the law and the prophets.
5. Q. Can you keep all this perfectly?
  - A. No, I am inclined by nature  
to hate God and my neighbour.

Lord's Day 3

6. Q. Did God, then, create man so wicked and perverse?

A. No, on the contrary.  
God created man good and as His image,  
that is, in true righteousness and holiness,  
so that he might rightly know God his Creator,  
heartily love Him,  
and live with Him in eternal blessedness  
to praise and glorify Him.

7. Q. From where, then, comes this depraved nature of man?

A. From the fall and disobedience of our first parents,  
Adam and Eve, in Paradise.  
There our nature became so corrupt  
that we are all conceived and born in sin.

8. Q. But are we so corrupt  
that we are totally unable to do any good,  
and inclined to all evil?

A. Yes, unless by the Spirit of God we are born again.

Lord's Day 4

9. Q. Is God, then, not unjust by requiring in His law  
that man cannot do?

A. No. God so created man that he was able to do it.  
But man, at the instigation of the devil,  
in deliberate disobedience,  
robbed himself and all his descendants  
of these gifts.

10. Q. Will God allow such disobedience and apostasy  
to go unpunished?

A. Certainly not.  
He is terribly displeased with our original sin  
as well as the sins we commit.  
Therefore He will, by a just judgment,  
punish them both now and in the age to come,  
as He has declared:  
Cursed be every one who does not abide by all  
things written in the book of the law, and do them.

11. Q. But is God not also merciful?

A. God is indeed merciful, but He is also just.  
His justice requires  
that sin committed against the most high majesty  
of God  
also be punished with the most severe,  
that is, with everlasting,  
punishment of body and soul.

The Second Part

OUR DELIVERANCE

Lord's Day 5

12. Q. Since, then, by God's righteous judgement, we deserve punishment both now and in the age to come, how can we escape this punishment and be again received into favour?
- A. God demands that His justice be satisfied. Therefore full payment must be made either by ourselves or by another.
13. Q. Can we ourselves make this payment?
- A. Certainly not. On the contrary, we daily increase our debt.
14. Q. Can any mere creature pay for us?
- A. No. In the first place, God will not punish another creature for the sin which man has committed. Furthermore, no mere creature can sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin and deliver others from it.
15. Q. What kind of mediator and deliverer must we then seek?
- A. One who is a true and righteous man, and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is at the same time true God.

Lord's Day 6

16. Q. Why must He be a true and righteous man?
- A. He must be a true man because the justice of God requires the the same human nature which has sinned should pay for sin. And He must be a righteous man because one who himself is a sinner cannot pay for others.
17. Q. Why must He at the same time be true God?
- A. He must be true God so that by the power of His divine nature He might bear in His human nature the burden of God's wrath, and might obtain for us, and restore to us, righteousness and life.
18. Q. But who is that Mediator who at the same time is true God and a true and righteous man?
- A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

19. Q. From where do you know this?

A. From the holy gospel.  
God Himself first revealed this gospel in paradise.  
Afterwards He had it proclaimed  
by the patriarchs and prophets,  
and foreshadowed by the sacrifices  
and other ceremonies of the law.  
Finally He fulfilled it through His only Son.

Lord's Day 7

20. Q. Are all men, then, saved by Christ,  
just as they perished through Adam?

A. No. Only those are saved  
who by true faith are incorporated into Christ  
and accept all His benefits.

21. Q. What is true faith?

A. True faith is a sure knowledge,  
whereby I accept as true  
all that God has revealed to us in His Word.  
At the same time it is a firm confidence  
that not only to others, but to me also,  
God has granted forgiveness of sins,  
everlasting righteousness and salvation,  
out of sheer grace,  
only for the sake of Christ's merits.  
The Holy Spirit works this faith in my heart by  
the gospel.

22. Q. What must a Christian believe?

A. All that is promised us in the gospel,  
which the articles of our catholic and undoubted  
Christian faith  
teach us in a summary.

23. Q. What are these articles?

- A. I. 1. I believe in God the Father, Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth.  
II. 2. And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten  
Son, our Lord;  
3. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary;  
4. Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified,  
dead, and buried; He descended into hell;  
5. The third day He rose again from the dead;  
6. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the  
right hand of God the Father, Almighty;  
7. From where He shall come to judge the  
living and the dead.  
III. 8. I believe in the Holy Spirit.  
9. I believe a holy catholic church, the  
communion of saints;  
10. The forgiveness of sins;  
11. The resurrection of the body;  
12. And the life everlasting.



### Lord's Day 8

24. Q. How are these articles divided?

A. Into three parts:  
the first is about God the Father and our creation;  
the second about God the Son and our redemption;  
the third about God the Holy Spirit and our sancti-  
fication.

25. Q. Since there is only one God,  
why do you speak of three persons,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

A. Because God has so revealed Himself in His Word  
that these three distinct persons  
are the one, true, eternal God.

### God the Father and our Creation

### Lord's Day 9

26. Q. What do you believe when you say:  
I believe in God the Father, Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth?

A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who out of nothing created heaven and earth  
and all that is in them,  
and who still upholds and governs them  
by His eternal counsel and providence,  
is, for the sake of Christ His Son,  
my God and my Father.  
In Him I trust so completely  
as to have no doubt  
that He will provide me  
with all things necessary for body and soul,  
and will also turn to my good  
whatever adversity He sends me  
in this life of sorrow.  
He is able to do this as almighty God,  
and willing also as a faithful Father.

### Lord's Day 10

27. Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. God's providence is  
His almighty and everpresent power,  
whereby, as with His hand,  
He still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures,  
and so governs them  
that leaf and grass, rain and drought,  
fruitful and barren years, food and drink,  
health and sickness, riches and poverty,  
indeed, all things,  
come to us not by chance  
but by His fatherly hand.

28. Q. What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things, and that He still upholds them by His providence?
- A. We may be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity and with a view to the future we may have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from His love; for all creatures are so completely in His hand that without His will they cannot so much as move.

God the Son and our Redemption

Lord's Day 11

29. Q. Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is, Saviour?
- A. Because He saves us from all our sins, and because salvation is to be sought or found in no one else.
30. Q. Do those believe in the only Saviour Jesus who seek their salvation and well-being from saints, in themselves, or anywhere else?
- A. No. Though they boast of Him in words, they in fact deny the only Saviour Jesus. For one of two things must be true: either Jesus is not a complete Saviour, or those who by true faith accept this Saviour must find in Him all that is necessary for their salvation.

Lord's Day 12

31. Q. Why is He called Christ, that is, Anointed?
- A. Because He has been ordained by God the Father, and anointed by the Holy Spirit, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption; to be our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of His body has redeemed us, and continually intercedes for us before the Father; and to be our eternal King, who governs us by His Word and Spirit, and defends and preserves us in the redemption obtained for us.

32. Q. Why are you called a Christian?

A. Because by faith I am a member of Christ,  
and thus share in His anointing,  
so that  
as prophet I may confess His Name,  
as priest present myself  
a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him,  
and as king fight with a free and good conscience  
against sin and the devil in this life,  
and hereafter reign with Him eternally  
over all creatures.

#### Lord's Day 13

33. Q. Why is He called God's only begotten Son,  
since we also are children of God?

A. Because Christ alone is the eternal, natural Son  
of God.

We, however, are children of God by adoption,  
through grace, for Christ's sake.

34. Q. Why do you call Him our Lord?

A. Because He has ransomed us, body and soul,  
not with gold or silver but with His precious blood,  
and has delivered us from all the power of the devil  
to make us His possession.

#### Lord's Day 14

35. Q. What do you confess when you say:  
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary?

A. The eternal Son of God,  
who is and remains true and eternal God,  
took upon Himself true human nature  
from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary,  
through the working of the Holy Spirit.  
Thus He is also the true seed of David,  
and like his brethren in every respect,  
yet without sin.

36. Q. What benefit do you receive  
from the holy conception and birth of Christ?

A. He is our Mediator,  
and with His innocence and perfect holiness  
covers, before God's face,  
my sin, wherein I was conceived and brought forth.

#### Lord's Day 15

37. Q. What do you confess when you say that He suffered?

A. During his whole life on earth,  
but especially at the end,  
Christ bore in body and soul  
the wrath of God against the sin  
of the whole human race.

(37. A. Continued.)

Thus, by His suffering,  
as the only atoning sacrifice,  
He has redeemed our body and soul  
from everlasting damnation,  
and obtained for us  
the grace of God, righteousness, and eternal life.

38. Q. Why did He suffer under the judge Pontius Pilate?

A. Though innocent, Christ was condemned  
by an earthly judge,  
and so He freed us  
from the severe judgement of God  
that was to fall upon us.

39. Q. Does it have a special meaning  
that Christ was crucified  
instead of dying in a different way?

A. Yes. Thereby I am assured that He took upon Himself  
the curse which lay on me,  
for the death of the cross was accursed of God.

#### Lord's Day 16

40. Q. Why was it necessary for Christ to humble Himself  
even unto death?

A. Because of the justice and truth of God  
payment for our sins could be made  
in no other way than by the death of the Son of God.

41. Q. Why was He buried?

A. His burial testified that He had really died.

42. Q. Since Christ has died for us,  
why do we still have to die?

A. Our death is not a payment for our sins,  
but only a dying to sin,  
and an entering into eternal life.

43. Q. What further benefit do we receive  
from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross?

A. Through Christ's death our old nature is crucified,  
put to death, and buried with Him,  
so that the evil desires of the flesh  
may no longer reign in us,  
but that we may offer ourselves to Him  
as a sacrifice of thankfulness.

44. Q. Why is there added: He descended into hell?

A. In my greatest sorrows and temptations  
I may be assured and comforted  
that my Lord Jesus Christ,  
by His unspeakable anguish, pain, terror, and agony,  
which He endured throughout all His sufferings  
but especially on the cross,  
has delivered me from the anguish and torment of hell.

Lord's Day 17

45. Q. How does Christ's resurrection benefit us?
- A. First, by His resurrection He has overcome death, so that He could make us share in the righteousness which He had obtained for us by His death.  
Second, by His power we too are raised up to a new life.  
Third, Christ's resurrection is to us a sure pledge of our glorious resurrection.

Lord's Day 18

46. Q. What do you confess when you say,  
He ascended into heaven?
- A. That Christ, before the eyes of His disciples, was taken up from the earth into heaven, and that He is there for our benefit, until He comes again to judge the living and the dead.
47. Q. Is Christ, then, not with us until the end of the world, as He has promised us?
- A. Christ is true man and true God. With respect to His human nature He is no longer on earth, but with respect to His divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit, He is never absent from us.
48. Q. But are the two natures in Christ not separated from each other if His human nature is not present wherever His divinity is?
- A. Not at all, for His divinity is without limits and everywhere present. So it must follow that His divinity is indeed beyond the human nature which He has taken on and nevertheless is within this human nature and remains personally united with it.
49. Q. How does Christ's ascension into heaven benefit us?
- A. First, He is our advocate in heaven before his Father. Second, we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, our Head, will also take us, His members, up to Himself.  
Third, He sends us His Spirit as a counter-pledge, by whose power we seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, and not the things that are on earth.

Lord's Day 19

50. Q. Why is it added, And sits at the right hand of God?
- A. Christ ascended into heaven  
to manifest Himself there as Head of His church,  
through whom the Father governs all things.
51. Q. How does this glory of Christ, our Head, benefit us?
- A. First, by His Holy Spirit  
He pours out the heavenly gifts  
upon us, His members.  
Second, by His power  
He defends and preserves us  
against all enemies.
52. Q. What comfort is it to you  
that Christ shall come to judge the living and the  
dead?
- A. In all my sorrow and persecution  
I lift up my head  
and eagerly await as judge from heaven  
the very same person  
who has already in the past  
submitted Himself to the judgement of God  
for my sake,  
and has removed all the curse from me.  
All His and my enemies  
He will cast into everlasting condemnation,  
but me and all His chosen ones  
He will take to Himself  
into heavenly joy and glory.

God the Holy Spirit and our Sanctification

Lord's Day 20

53. Q. What do you believe concerning the Holy Spirit?
- A. First, He is, with the Father and the Son,  
true and eternal God.  
Second, He is also given to me,  
to make me share, by true faith,  
in Christ and all His benefits,  
to comfort me, and to remain with me forever.

Lord's Day 21

54. Q. What do you believe  
concerning the holy catholic church of Christ?
- A. I believe that the son of God,  
out of the whole human race,  
from the beginning of the world to its end,  
gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself,  
by His Spirit and Word,  
in the unity of the true faith,  
a congregation chosen to everlasting life.  
Of this church I am  
and forever will remain  
a living member.

55. Q. What do you understand by the communion of saints?

A. First, that believers all and everyone,  
as members of Christ  
have communion with Him  
and share in all His treasures and gifts.  
Second, that everyone is duty-bound  
to use his gifts readily and cheerfully  
for the benefit and well-being of the other members.

56. Q. What do you believe concerning the forgiveness of sins?

A. Because of Christ's satisfaction,  
God will no more remember any of my sins,  
nor my sinful nature,  
against which I have to struggle all my life,  
but graciously grants me the righteousness of Christ,  
so that I will never be condemned.

#### Lord's Day 22

57. Q. What comfort does the resurrection of the body  
offer you?

A. Not only shall my soul after this life  
immediately be taken up to Christ, my Head,  
but also this my flesh,  
raised by the power of Christ,  
shall be reunited with my soul  
and made like Christ's glorious body.

58. Q. What comfort do you receive  
from the article about the life everlasting?

A. Since I now already feel in my heart  
the beginning of eternal joy,  
I shall after this life possess perfect blessedness,  
such as no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man conceived --  
a blessedness in which to praise God forever.

#### Our Justification

#### Lord's Day 23

59. Q. But what does it help you now that you believe all  
this?

A. That in Christ I am righteous before God,  
and an heir to life everlasting.

60. Q. How are you righteous before God?

A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ.  
Although my conscience accuses me  
that I have grievously sinned  
against all God's commandments,  
have never kept any of them,  
and am still inclined to all evil,  
yet God, without any merit of my own,  
out of sheer grace,

(60. A. Continued)

imputes to me the perfect satisfaction,  
righteousness, and holiness of Christ.

He grants these to me

as if I had never had nor committed any sin,

and as if I myself had accomplished

all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me.

All I need to do is

to accept this gift with a believing heart.

61. Q. Why do you say that you are righteous only by faith?

A. Not that I am acceptable to God

on account of the worthiness of my faith,

for only the satisfaction, righteousness,

and holiness of Christ

is my righteousness before God.

I can receive this righteousness and make it mine  
by faith only.