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(9 pages)

REPORT COMMITTEE FOR A TEXT BOOK FOR CATECHETICAL INSTRUCTION

To General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches  
Toronto 1974.

To the Canadian (American) Reformed Churches.

L.S.

I. MANDATE

Synod New Westminster 1971 appointed a two-men Committee with the following mandate:

1. to consider the set-up of a Textbook useful for catechetical instruction in home, church and school;
2. to seek the advice and cooperation of the faculty of our Theological College in this matter;
3. to present the result of their considerations to the next General Synod;
4. to keep the Churches informed about the progress of their work."

Remarks on Mandate.

Quite obviously the Synod did not expect, and therefore did not give the mandate, to have such a Book completed by 1974. We read, "to consider the set-up..."; "to present the result of their considerations..." Once having started, the Committee was very happy with this limited mandate. In addition, we knew that a revision of the Catechism text was in progress; already for that reason only it would have had no sense to prepare a "definite" Textbook or even part of it.

II. REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

1. Synod 1971 saw fit to appoint only two members for the Committee, two ministers who both have a sizeable ministry (plus extra work for the Churches) but also were both busily engaged in the completion of the Book of Praise for some time after Synod 1971. This took so much time and energy that not much of both was left for starting to tackle the new mandate.
2. This did not exclude that the textbook mandate was in their minds, and weighed heavily on their conscience. It was and it did!
3. A primary result of sub 2 was an early conclusion that composing such a textbook "was an almost impossible task for two men" (quote from our Questionnaire to our ministers). In the time left to us (cf sub 1) we could do hardly more than making initial plans that may serve the start of the work as such.
4. In harmony with our mandate a Questionnaire was sent to all catechetes in our Churches in September 1973. We asked the following questions:
  1. What is your method in teaching Catechism with relation to the other two Forms of Unity?
  2. Do you have some published or personally written material available in connection with this relation?
  3. What are your experiences with the reference texts?
  4. Do you think that "liturgical elements" should be included?
  5. Should the Church Order be incorporated, and to what extent?
  6. What about the Confederation of Churches?
  7. Do you have suggestions for different letter-types?"

This list is far from complete but could serve in getting things going, not only in our Committee but also in the minds of our ministers.

5. Seven ministers responded, some in great detail, some adding extensive materials that they prepared themselves and are using in their classes. We greatly appreciated their help.

Their answers and suggestions will be discussed below.

Although one of them had objections that a General Synod decided to give this mandate (but your Committee was of the opinion that we were not the proper address for ventilating such objections), all applauded in varying degrees the fact that such a textbook is going to be prepared.

6. From the previous remarks it becomes clear that the work of this Committee was very much provisional. Let's consider this an advantage because now Synod 1974 can express itself in more detail before the actual composition of the textbook gets underway.

### III. REVIEW OF REACTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS.

(N.B. There is no logical order in this list.)

1. The remark was made that the Committee need not complain about being understaffed because of point 2 of the mandate: 2 plus 4 makes 6.

In our opinion, however, "advice and cooperation" is not equal to making the faculty members part of the Committee.

2. Always "start with the H. Catechism"; let this booklet-of-the-comfort" always remain the heart of catechetical instruction in all age-groups, though supplemented by quotes from other creeds.

3. "Add lists of questions to be taken home by the students for their homework."

4. "Interrupt Catechism teaching by courses in Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort". (Some provided us with whole textbooks, in which both Creeds are given in the form of questions and answers, plus, in some cases, reference texts).

5. As to the reference texts placed underneath the Catechism answers, opinions are divided. Some quotes: "I have never had any specific trouble with the reference texts." "At times they are excellent, at times they could be more specific." "Some are better than others." "They are not always as fitting as we may think they could be."

Also:

"These texts should be selected in cooperation with our schools so that Church and School both work along the same lines."

and: "No out of context texts should be printed but whole passages of Scripture."

6. Liturgical elements, the Forms for Sacraments and Discipline included, should most certainly be added "somewhere" (L.D. 25 - 30, 31, 38 etc). As to the Form of Baptism as well as the Creeds in general, their authority, purpose etc, they could also form the Introduction to the whole book, to be taught in 1, 2 or 3 lessons.

7. About the inclusion of the Church Order, opinions also varied. Some want to include the whole Church Order, others want it to be the program for a special course, for example for (young) professing members after they have completed the regular classes. Again others want "to include only the main principles" of Church Government etc (could be attached to L.D. 21). "Include some lessons on principles". "Discuss Church Order in pre-confession class."

8. On the Federation of Churches: "instruction in this important matter could be given together with the discussion of a part of the Church Order" (see sub 7).

9. Assignments for home work. In addition to learning the Catechism by heart, students should get home work. The students have to find the answers to certain questions at home, writing them down. Then they are discussed in class, pointing out what is correct and what is wrong. (examples of such questions were submitted to the Committee)

10. Let's by all means profit from the work presently done in the Netherlands in "De Weg". (way of printing, subdividing answers, making use of letter types and colours, adding explanation of words and expressions, etc.)

11. (in distinction from sub 2) "In the junior and intermediate groups I teach Catechism, in the pre-confession year the Confession of Faith in the form of questions and answers."

12. Different letter types. One minister did not deem this advisable, while others recommended it, especially in the Cat. answer: the main sentence in bold type (for the youngest pupils).

13. As to age groups, it seems quite usual to have three groups or classes. Some ministers informed us about a concentric curriculum they had built up along the line of distinction in age groups, like:

- a. for the youngest group the core of the Catechism (using the booklet of the Rev. H. Scholten, Th.M.);
- b. for the middle group the whole Catechism, adding Bible texts and/or questions (cf sub 9);
- c. for the seniors the whole Catechism plus Bible passages and related parts of the other Creeds.

14. Church History.

Though generally the need of instruction in Church History is felt (of course!), our correspondents were far from unanimous in the way they want it done.

One, remarkably, is of the opinion that "a short history of the Liberation will cover this part." Another sent us a booklet with questions and answers about the history of the church in the Netherlands since 1816. A third one was of the opinion that we should teach church history in catechism classes if there is no Reformed day school available.

The third opinion indicated that this minister considers Church History to be an essential part of Reformed school education and one of the primary motivations behind setting up such schools.

15. We heard the wish that a separate booklet containing the Three Forms of Unity be made available. This minister seemed to be unaware of the fact that the Committee for the Publication of our Psalm Book has some thousands of these booklets for sale!

16. As already stated, the Committee was the grateful receiver of a list of added materials, made and used by ministers among us. In addition to what the Rev. H. Scholten has published, we mention:

- a. Background and History of the Liberation 1944 in the Netherlands, with 1816, in questions and answers;
- b. "The Heidelberg Catechism Divided." (Catechism answers cut in 'pieces', preceded by questions and accompanied by one text per answer);

- c. Confession of Faith in questions and answers. (the answers are literal quotes).
- d. idem as sub c from an other minister (how much unnecessary work!)
- e. Questions and Answers on the Catechism. (this is not the booklet of the Rev. Scholten but another example of doublettes).
- f. The Canons in questions and answers, preceded by a historical introduction.
- g. A Summary of sub f. (very clear, simple, helpful).

#### IV. CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.

Having discussed all these reactions and suggestions, the Committee arrived at a provisional formulation of its opinion concerning the whole set-up of a Textbook. It submits the following considerations and conclusions which may serve as a basis or 'grounds' for the final part of this Report.

##### 1. No 'subjective' material.

Previous publications of textbooks similar to the one we have in mind provided also what we call "subjective" explanations, i.e. some kind of popular dogmatics, in the words of the author. We remember that during Synod 1971 the main argument against such a textbook was such 'subjective' elaborations. The one minister might love them, the other catechete might like something different.

We have come to the conclusion that such 'subjective' material should not be included in our Textbook. Explanation, with personal taste and touch, specific preference and 'colour', emphasis here and stress there, should be left to the individual catechete. Every catechete should be able to work with this book and at the same time retain his individuality (within the confines of the adopted Confession).

Although even in the selection of Scripture passages etc a 'subjective' factor may play a role, yet we submit that only 'objective' materials should be included. By this expression we mean, Catechism, quotes from Creeds, Bible passages, texts and the like. Only material that has been officially adopted by the Churches.

As to passages and texts, such a selection should be made that even there room is left for personal preference of the individual catechete.

##### 2. No "Cutting Down" of the Catechism.

"Cutting Down" is a quotation from one of our correspondents, meaning that the Catechism answer is "cut down" or "cut up" in parts.

We are of the opinion that we should not apply this method in our Textbook. The grounds are quite obvious:

- a. We have seen the work of the Committee for the revision of the Catechism. This revision means an important step forward in breaking long answers in more-than-one independent sentences. In many (though, alas, not in all) instances part of the question is repeated in the answer. This is, to us, sufficient;

- b. if bold type is used for the "main sentence" (see above, cf the books of Bremmer/Visee and H. Scholten) there is no need for further breakdown;

- c. if, like in these books, the text is printed "poetically", such a breaking down becomes even less necessary or desirable;

- d. the benefit of 'our' method is that in this way our children start learning, right from the start, within the frame of the complete Catechism, which is to be preferred for several reasons (psychologically, pedagogically, etc).

### 3. The Catechism remain the heart of the whole book.

Although wholeheartedly agreeing with the need for additions, insertions, or as one called it, "dovetailing" the other Creeds etc into the Catechism (more about this below), we have come to the conclusion that our "old faithful" should remain the very heart of every chapter in this Textbook. It should be and remain a "Catechism book"! All the other didactic materials should and can easily be arranged 'around' the Catechism.

Reasons necessary?

a. the Catechism is the instruction book par excellence, written for this specific purpose and up to now unsurpassed;

b. it is pedagogically questionable (if one wants, "didactically") to drop the Catechism completely in, for example, the third age group and then "proceed to something else". One should think of the great importance of L.D. 34-44 and 45-52 for the pre-confession instruction and "de praktijk der godzaligheid." This instruction would be lost, if the Catechism would be replaced by Confession and/or Canons (this does not mean that the latter do not contain much food for that "praktijk").

c. Once the principle of concentric teaching is adopted, everyone would agree that the same 'centre' should dominate the wider and wider 'circles' around that centre.

### 4. Concentric Method and Age Groups.

Although opinions differ about the need for a special pre-confession class (all classes are pre-confession...) the division in three age groups is nearly universal. The same system is taught in Kampen (Dr. C. Trimp).

Without getting into technical details, we are of the conviction that a three-phase or three-level curriculum can be easily built around the Catechism.

first group: H. Catechism, bold print, plus one or two texts. explanation of words, terms, expressions;

second group: the whole Catechism. Discussion Bible passages. More reference texts. "Dovetailing" from other Creeds, Forms etc (including Mission, "Evangelism", Liturgy, "kerkelijk besef", the main line of the Church History), principles of Church Polity etc.

third group: repeating it all, adding "Controversies" (see below).

### 5. No (complete) Church History.

The Committee has come to the conclusion that it will be very hard to include a 'complete' Church History in this book. Nor do we agree that "a short history of the Vrijmaking could do the job." ; not even the history of the 19th Century. Our Catechism time and again must be understood against the 16th century background.

While realizing that good Reformed catechesis will, at every turn, refer to the "struggle and triumph" of the true church (cf doctrine of Trinity, justification, church, sacraments, good works etc etc etc), we are of the opinion:

a. that we with great gratitude may "lean against" the growing number of schools where our children are taught in a Reformed way. As said before: the instruction in Church history was one of the main motives of our parents in establishing these schools, and it still is. Thus these Schools should teach Church History and not the one hour Catechesis per week during part of the year.

b. if the catechete feels he should give a special course in church history, he may make use of existing books, booklets; we should not repeat that in our Textbook.

#### 6. No (complete) Church Order.

A revision of the Church Order is in progress. Completion might take quite a number of years. Once completed we feel it should be included in the (new edition of the) Book of Praise, available to every church member, but not in our Textbook (think of size, costs etc).

We wholeheartedly agree with the wish to "dovetail" principles and parts of the Church Order into our book (with the Church, L.D. 21, sacraments, L.D. 31 etc).

We agree with the suggestion that special courses are given for (young) communicant members in the Church Order. This is already practiced here and there.

#### 7. Questions for Home work?

From our first principle, "no subjective material" may be derived that we are not enthusiastic about adding such specific questions for home work, as described above. We believe it is a good teaching method, but we do not believe that "our Book" should include them. This be left to the individual catechete.

A different matter, however, is whether not questions can and should be added which may serve to clarify the text of the Catechism. The committee has not arrived at a final conclusion and opinion in this matter. One knows that several catechetical instruction books add such lists (one example: Vonk) but one should also keep in mind that such questions are attached to an explanation of the Catechism, which we would exclude from this book (see above).

As to home work, the need for this may be easily satisfied by giving the students some work to do on a selection of Bible passages which will be provided, and equally of references to other Creeds etc.

#### 8. "Tekstbehandeling"?

The word is taken from "De Weg", the new Catechism curriculum published in the Netherlands. By it the authors understand a list of explanations of words, expressions from the Catechism answers.

We are of the opinion that adoption of the revised Catechism text will greatly reduce the need for such explanations. We are, however, also aware, if it were only from experience, that one should not overestimate the understanding of confessional terms by our youth (and adults?). Thus, while leaving most of the needed explanation to the individual pastor, we could consider adding a list of explanation of terms. In De Weg this list often is a complete explanation of the whole answer. We do not think we have to go that far.

#### 9. Signpost to the Scriptures.

From the discussed reactions we have heard the call for all kinds of additional subject matter: bringing in elements from other Creeds, Forms, Church Order, Church History etc.

Agreeing with this wholeheartedly, the committee nevertheless (if this word is necessary in this context) is convinced that Reformed Catechesis e voto (according to the promise and wish) of the Fathers must be, at every step, a signpost to the Scriptures. Our Text book should be set up in such a way that teacher and students are 'forced' to have the Bible in front of them, and open and read it. That is the reason why we disagree with the suggestion that we should not print 'texts' but complete 'passages' underneath the Catechism. We should print the texts in full for obvious reasons. But passages are references: the Bible must be opened, the passage read, and thus the students taught to find their way in the Scriptures. This is ultimately, the one goal of catechesis.

For us, therefore, the selection of passages, containing at the same token the reference texts of the Catechism, deserves great care and should provide ample choice for every catechete.

#### 10. Letter Types.

Though we should beware of overdoing it, we envisage at this moment at least the need for three different letter types, although we would prefer four. This has to be discussed with publisher(s); the costs involved will be a factor.

Why three or even four different types?

- a. because the Cat. text should be the eye-catcher, it should be in medium-bold type;
- b. on top of that the 'main sentence' should "jump to the eye" and therefore in bold type;
- c. the reference texts, to be learned by heart, should differ in type from:
- d. the regular print, covering all the other materials.

#### 11. General set-up.

Instead of giving an example lesson (we considered it) we hope it may be sufficient at this stage to just mention in a list of priority or order what elements every lesson should contain.

The word "lesson" does not suggest that we consider to subdivide one Lord's Day in more than one lesson, or combine two L.D. s in some cases. That would, again, introduce a 'subjective' element. Be it left to the catechete. We would bring all the material together just L.D. by L.D., 52 "lessons".

The following list does not contain all elements, just the main set-up.

A. The text of the Heidelberg Catechism, the revised version, in two different types. Preferably in "poetic" order (Lemmer/Visee), answer by answer.

B. Explanation of difficult words, terms, expressions, as a footnote to the Catechism text, in regular print;

C. List of Scripture passages, relevant to the Catechism answer. In regular print. They should not be printed in full. The Bible open on the table! The passages should not be too long, but must form a unity. They must contain reference texts.

The number of passages referred to should not be too small, in order to give room for the catechete to make his own selection.

D. Reference texts. To be printed in semi-bold type. Selection should be made possible, as under C. The translation to be used that is adopted by the General Synod.

In connection with what has been said before, this matter of reference texts is a study all by itself. What were the original texts? Are all relevant? Are there better ones? We would not bind the composers of this Textbook to the texts given in the regular editions. If better ones can be found, let's do it by all means. Here the cooperation with all ministers (see below) should, hopefully, bear fruits.

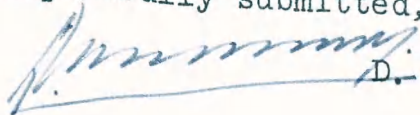
E. Quotations from other Creeds, Forms, Prayers, Church Order, etc.

The book would become too heavy and too expensive if all were printed in full. Therefore, as a rule, the reference ("verwijzing") should be sufficient.

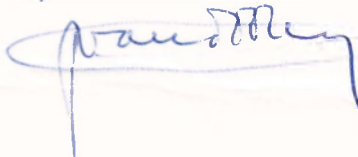
There may, however, be exceptions like the beloved example of "the marks of the true Church" and the like. Composers should not hesitate to print them in full.

3. Synod encourage a close contact with all ministers by submitting the results of the Committee work in bodies of 5 to 10 Lord's Days for criticism, testing, suggestions and the like.
4. Synod encourage the involvement of the College in this undertaking by means of advices from the Staff and the cooperation of the catechetical workshop of the Diaconiological Department.
5. Synod permit the Committee to start preliminary consultations with publishers to find out what would be reasonably possible, within certain costlimits, with regard to technical and typographical matters.
6. Synod mandate the Committee to submit to the next Synod a draft of the whole book.
7. Synod provide for sufficient funds needed to cover the costs of extensive secretarial work.

Respectfully submitted,



D. VANDERBOOM



G. VANDOOREN.