

REPORT of the Committee appointed by  
the General Synod Edmonton 1965 of the  
Canadian Reformed Churches to study  
English Translations of the Heidelberg  
Catechism.

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TO THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES.

Dear Brethren:

Synod Edmonton 1965 appointed the undersigned

- (a) "voor het bestuderen van daarvoor naar het oordeel der commissie in aanmerking komende engelse vertalingen van de Heidelbergse Catechismus";
- (b) om "de geschiktste van deze vertalingen nader te onderzoeken op haar taalgebruik en op haar weergave van de oorspronkelijke duitse en de door onze Kerken aanvaarde nederlandse tekst";
- (c) "van haar onderzoek rapport (eventueel met voorstellen) te doen toekomen aan de Kerken, uiterlijk een half jaar voor de aanvang van de volgende Generale Synode".

"Grond: Gezien de Heidelbergse Catechismus met name een leerboek is voor de jeugd der Kerk is het goed, dat de engelse tekst zo veel mogelijk aansluit bij het hedendaagse taalgebruik" (Acta, Art. 70).

The Brief Report of the General Synod Edmonton 1965 in the English language stated our mandate as follows:

"To study English translations of the Heidelberg Catechism, and to compare those deemed most suited and examine them on their merits of language and their being in accordance with the original German text and the Dutch text which has been accepted by the Canadian Reformed Churches.

This decision is made because the Heidelberg Catechism is a document used in the instruction of the youth of the Church and the language of our Creeds should be as close to the daily language as will be possible.

A report is to be sent to the Churches six months before next Synod."  
(Brief Report, Art. 15)

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We examined the following new translations:

1. The Heidelberg Catechism, 400th Anniversary Edition, translated by Allen O. Miller and M. Eugene Osterhaven, United Church Press, 1962.
2. The School of Faith, the Catechisms of the Reformed Church, translated and edited by Thomas F. Torrance, James Clarke & Co. Ltd., London.

In the process of its examination, it was brought to the attention of the Committee that these translations received extensive comment in a report contained in the Agenda for Synod, 1968 of the Christian Reformed Church. The Committee acknowledges various items of information contained in this report.

We unanimously came to the following conclusions:

1. Both above mentioned translations, considered in their entirety, offer many improvements compared to the translation our Churches currently employ.
2. Neither translation, however, in the opinion of the Committee, renders a significant modern "break-through" from a sixteenth century text.
3. Adoption of either one of the two translations is not advisable, since the Committee would prefer in some instances the translation of the 400th Anniversary Edition and in many other (and probably more) instances the Torrance translation.

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We arrived at the above conclusions after the following observations and considerations:

I. Re: The 400th Anniversary Translation.

1. Linguistically:

Although this translation is somewhat more modern linguistically, sentence structure shows no remarkable improvement over our current translation.

Example: The answer to Question 60:

" ... In spite of the fact that my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have not kept any one of them, and that I am still ever prone to all that is evil, nevertheless, God, without any merit of my own, out of pure grace, grants me the benefits of the perfect expiation of Christ, imputing to me his righteousness and holiness as if I had never committed a single sin or had ever been sinful, having fulfilled myself all the obedience which Christ has carried out for me, if only I accept such favour with a trusting heart."

2. Vocabulary and idiom:

The Committee is not convinced that vocabulary and idiom are "as close to

the daily language"as possible. To arrive at a firm unanimous conviction in this matter a further and more thorough study (than could be undertaken) of the meaning of many words and expressions is necessary.

3. Discrepancies with the original German text:

German: "... doch Gott on alle meine verdienst, ausz lauter gnaden, mir die vollkommene gnugthuung gerechtigkeit vnd heiligkeyt Christi schencket vnd zurechnet."

English: "... nevertheless God, without any merit of my own, out of pure grace, grants me the benefits of the perfect expiation of Christ, imputing to to me his righteousness and holiness."

4. The Main Divisions:

There are thirteen new subdivision headings introduced while the original has only six such divisions. The Committee takes a favourable view of these headings in concordance with current educational practice of studying subject areas thematically.

5. Prooftexts:

Prooftexts used in the new translation of the Heidelberg Catechism are not identical with those used in the version our Churches now use.

A further exegetical study is necessary to ascertain whether the differences are an improvement or a deterioration.

6. Biblical quotations:

Biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible and from the New English Bible, The New Testament, translations which have not been recommended for use in our pulpits.

II. Re: The Torrance Translation.

1. Linguistically:

As in the 400th Anniversary Translation, laborious language represents a major impediment to adoption with a view to the instruction of the youth of the Church.

Example: The answer to Question 60:

The 'modern' "in spite of the fact" (400th Anniv.) has been rendered less 'modernly' as "wherefore although"; the remainder of the answer differs little from the 400th Anniversary version in vocabulary and sentence structure. The entire answer consists of one 'interminable' sentence.

2. Vocabulary and idiom:

As in the case of the 400th Anniversary Translation the Committee deems it advisable to look further into the possibility of rephrasing more "modernly" many words and terms without sacrificing any of the theological implications that such vocabulary carries.

3. Discrepancies with the original German Text:

The Committee was not struck by discrepancies with the original German as it was in the case of the 400th Anniversary Translation.

4. Headings:

The headings of this translation faithfully follow the original German, except the heading "Prayer" (before Question 116).

5. Prooftexts:

This translation contains no scriptural references.

6. Edition:

This translation appears in a publication containing nine additional Catechisms and is, therefore, not separately available for our Churches without acquiring publication rights.

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

On the grounds of the foregoing, the Committee recommends that:

1. Synod not adopt the 400th Anniversary Translation nor the Torrance Translation.

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2. Synod appoint deputies to investigate the possibilities of arriving at a modern edition of the Heidelberg Catechism that is in accordance with the requirements set out in the Acts of Synod Edmonton 1965 of the Canadian Reformed Churches.
3. These deputies be of the highest calibre: they must be theological as well as linguistic experts, primarily in English stylistics and sixteenth century German linguistics and English-German and German-English translation.
4. In connection with the difficulties implied in the third recommendation, Synod suggest to those deputies to contact the Committee appointed by the last Synod of the Christian Reformed Church with a similar mandate.
5. Synod recommend to these deputies (if possible) to present to Synod a draft of a modern translation at a future date.

Respectfully submitted,

G. Kouwenhoven,

W. Loopstra,

H. Scholten.

September 1968.

P.S. We regret that we could not forward this Report to the Churches at an earlier time.

