

**From Rebellion to Redemption: A Journey through the Great Themes of Christian Faith (A Year of Reflections on the Heidelberg Catechism)**

**By Randal Working; Foreword by Richard J. Mouw. NavPress, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Pb. 319 pp.**

**Reviewed by Johan D.Tangelder.**

In our fearful and dangerous times, many so-called secular North Americans are spiritually hungry. They are looking for a message of hope that literally has the power to change their lives.

This may be so because of the spiritual void "created" by secularism. Consequently, interest in "new age," paganism, witchcraft, Eastern religions, and other nontraditional spiritualities is increasing rapidly.

Many seekers for spirituality and meaning are influenced by postmodern-radical individualism. But rather than knocking on churches doors, they are bypassing them instead. One of the reasons is the fragmentation of North American churches, and the loss of the Gospel in mainline denominations. Practically every heresy in the long history of the church can be found in one form or another in North America. "The church needs to confront these value systems in the discourse of ideas, while reaching out in love and service to the people involved in them," says Randal Working. He is right. Our response to God calls for the training of the mind and practicing our faith. Ours is a faith not merely of emotions, but of loving God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind (Matt.22:37).

Some say that the Catechism is out of date. Times have changed! Yet the Gospel hasn't. The German Reformed Heidelberg Catechism published in 1563 - with its constant appeal to Scripture and more than 700 Scripture references - is a time-honoured way to take more seriously the profound pain which plagues our postmodern culture. This Catechism was the first Protestant confession to be brought to America by the Europeans when the Dutch Reformed Church arrived on Manhattan Island in 1609. It has been the most widely accepted doctrinal standard among Reformed denominations in America up the present day. Its authors didn't try to reconstruct the Christian church with new theological insights to fit their own views. They built on the foundation of the early church and the church fathers. They proclaimed the Gospel "ever ancient, ever new."

The Catechism begins on a contemporary Gospel note by placing the believer in Christ. It employs very personal language, and evidences warmth and an evangelical emphasis. But unlike evangelicalism with its man-centred question, "Are you saved?" it breathes a spirituality which focuses on serving God and enjoying His creation in everything we do. It asks: "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" And the answer begins: "That I am not my own, but belong - body and soul, in life and in death - to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ." Its personal character makes it pedagogically superior and more relevant than other Reformed catechisms, which lack this type of introduction.

Although it meets man in his existential situation and is intensely personal, it also places the believer within the Church. The 3rd century St. Cyprian, martyr bishop of Carthage, said: "He who would have God as his Father must have the Church as his mother." Every

Christian, even the most individualistically inclined, is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ.

The catechism's confessional character is strongly emphasized. It is not a confession of two authors. It belongs to the entire Church of the Reformation. It does not offer cheap grace, pervasive in much popular contemporary piety, which implies that mere assent to some basic Christian doctrines is sufficient for salvation. It nurtures an entirely new way of life. It concludes with a section on joy and gratitude, connecting doctrine with practice, acknowledging good works as the fruits of saving grace.

In our times when even in Reformed churches confessional knowledge has become limited, Randal Working, an associate pastor at the First Presbyterian Church of Bellevue, and a faculty member at the Trinity Lutheran College in Seattle, Washington, offers a fresh approach to the Catechism. His book can be used as a guide to help a believer in his private devotions. It can serve also for group study sessions. It takes a year to complete the materials. Each Lord's Day begins with an opening prayer, states the questions and answers, provides a brief exposition, refers to other writers, ranging from John Calvin, Blaise Pascal to C.S. Lewis, includes a list of daily Scripture readings, questions for reflection and discussion, and concludes with a prayer. Working uses contemporary language and well-crafted words, which makes his book a joy to read. Enthusiastically recommended!