

The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism

Davenant Hall ☿ Trinity Term 2021

Teacher: Rev. Danny Hyde, PhD (cand.)

Course Description

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) has been called “the church’s book of comfort” (*Het troostboek van de kerk*). Originally written in German for the preachers, people, and pupils of the Palatinate, it was also translated into Latin to testify throughout European courts and universities of the Palatinate’s unique reformation. In 1597 it was even translated into Greek so that it could be sent to the Patriarch of Constantinople. It’s been translated into everything from Afrikaans to Vietnamese.

In this course, we will study the venerable Heidelberg. We’ll briefly introduce the who, what, when, where, and why of the Catechism but will focus our time and attention on the text. Since we have just 10 weeks to analyze its 129 questions & answers or 52 Lord’s Days (*zondag*), biblically, theologically, polemically, historically, and practically, we’ll use an often-forgotten division of this material: the Palatinate’s *Kirchenordnung* (Church Order). In this document the Catechism was required to be read aloud every Sunday in every congregation in just 9 *lectiones*.

Course Format

The format of the course will blend short lectures, guided discussion of the Catechism and Ursinus texts, and Q&A. The instructor will often be doing most of the talking, but generally to illuminate and draw out themes from the text for discussion. Thus, students will be expected to come having already read and engaged with the text selection for the week, and with thoughts prepared to contribute.

Nota bene: I’m not expecting you to do a cursory read of every word in Ursinus (it’s 1,100 pages in scanned 17th century text; unless you’d like to). I am expecting you to do more of a deep dive of sections that interest you.

Classes will meet via Zoom for two-hours each week and will be recorded for later viewing by students who cannot participate (but not for dissemination outside of class). Additional student participation and instructor interaction can take place on a Google Classroom discussion board.

Course Objectives

Objectives for this course include:

1. **To engage** some of the background history, overall structure, main themes, and contents for understanding the Heidelberg Catechism (*mind/head*).

2. **To enable** utilization of the Catechism proficiently in the areas of preaching, teaching, devotions, family worship, and testimony to the grace of God in your life (*will/hands*).
3. **To enflame** love for the Lord to whom you belong body and soul in life and in death (*affections/heart*).

Course Requirements (*for-credit students*)

Participation (20%): Attentive and sustained participation in class is the primary requirement. For-credit students may have one excused absence. Each additional absence will result in a penalty of one grade (e.g., A to A-, A- to B+, etc.)

Reading Responses (30%): For-credit students are required to complete the assigned readings each week submit *Reading Responses* by 24-hours after each class session ends. Each *Response* is to be formatted and including the following:

1. 1-page *max*; Times New Roman, 12-point, 1" margins
2. Each *Response* is to include biblical, theological, polemical, and practical aspects of the week's readings. For example, you can reflect on 1 Q&A for all four aspects, 1 different Q&A for each aspect, or various Q&As for each aspect.

Term Paper (50%): For-credit students are required to submit a 3,000–5,000 word (including footnotes) research paper by 11:59pm on 6/30 (same formatting parameters as above). Papers must be approved by the instructor in advance. Your paper may be in the realm of historical theology (e.g., descriptive paper on Q&A 44's interpretation of the *descendit* clause in the context of history), history of exegesis (e.g., the exegetical tradition of using Romans 7 as a *sedes doctrinae* as in Q&A 60), dogmatics (e.g., the doctrine of the ascension in Q&A 46–49), or devotional theology (e.g., how the Catechism's doctrine of assurance impacts Christian prayer in Q&A 116–129). I expect analysis of the text of the Catechism, interaction with secondary sources, biblical, theological, historical, polemical, and/or practical aspects of what you are researching.

- o ***Nota bene***: if you are a minister of the Word or seminary student/licentiate/candidate/aspirant, you may write a catechetical sermon on a Lord's Day of your choice. I expect the same analytical rigor as above except show me your work in footnotes; this is a sermon after all!

Course Texts

Bible

The Heidelberg Catechism

- o I recommend the most up-to-date English version adopted by the United Reformed Churches in North America: <https://threeforms.org/heidelberg-catechism>

Zacharius Ursinus, *The Summe of Christian Religion, Delivered by Zacharias Ursinus in his Lectures upon the Catechisme*, trans. Henrie Parrie (London 1617)

Recommended Reading

- Bierma, Lyle D. with Charles D. Gunnoe Jr., Karin Y. Maag, and Paul W. Fields, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005)
- , *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism: A Reformation Synthesis*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013)
- , *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996)
- Clark, R. Scott. *Caspar Olevianus and the Substance of the Covenant: The Double Benefit of Christ*, Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2005)
- Hyde, Daniel R. "The Holy Spirit in the Heidelberg Catechism." *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 17 (2006): 211–37. Also in *A Faith Worth Teaching: The Heidelberg Catechism's Enduring Heritage*, ed. Sebastian Heck and Jon Payne (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), 195–212.
- , "The Principle and Practice of Preaching in the Heidelberg Catechism." *Puritan Reformed Journal* 1:1 (January 2009): 97–117.
- Klooster, Fred H. *Our Only Comfort: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2001)
- Muller, Richard A. [Confessing the Reformed Faith: Our Identity in Unity and Diversity](#)
- , [How Many Points?](#)
- , [Was Calvin a Calvinist? Or, Did Calvin \(or Anyone Else in the Early Modern Era\) Plant the "TULIP"?](#) Also in *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 51–69
- Olevianus, Caspar. *An Exposition of the Apostles' Creed*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma, Classic Reformed Theology 2 (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009)
- , *A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. and ed. Lyle D. Bierma, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995)
- Power of Faith: 450 Years of the Heidelberg Catechism*, ed. Karla Apperloo-Boersma and Herman J. Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013)
- The Church's Book of Comfort*, ed. Willem Van't Spijker, trans. Gerrit Bilkes (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009)
- The Spirituality of the Heidelberg Catechism: Papers of the International Conference on the Heidelberg Catechism held in Apeldoorn 2013*, ed. Arnold Huijgen, Refo500 Academic Studies 24 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015)

Course Schedule

Week	Dates	Discussion Topics	Reading
1	April 12–16	Who, What, When, Where, Why	Ursinus, <i>The Summe</i> , 1–49
2	April 19–23	Theme, Outline, Misery	Q&A 1–11 Ursinus, <i>The Summe</i> , 50–178
3	April 26–30	Deliverance: Satisfaction, Faith, God the Father	Q&A 12–28 Ursinus, <i>The Summe</i> , 179–368
4	May 3–7	Deliverance: God the Son (1)	Q&A 29–45 Ursinus, <i>The Summe</i> , 369–525
5	May 10–14	Deliverance: God the Son (2), God the Holy Spirit	Q&A 46–58 Ursinus, <i>The Summe</i> , 526–640
6	May 17–21	Deliverance: Justification, Sacraments, Baptism	Q&A 59–74 Ursinus, <i>The Summe</i> , 640–723
7	May 24–28	Deliverance: Lord's Supper, Keys of the Kingdom	Q&A 75–85 Ursinus, <i>The Summe</i> , 723–847
8	May 31–June 4	Thankfulness: Good Works, 1 st –4 th Commands	Q&A 86–103 Ursinus, <i>The Summe</i> , 848–1004
9	June 7–11	Thankfulness: 5 th –10 th Commands	Q&A 104–115 Ursinus, <i>The Summe</i> , 1004–1061
10	June 14–18	Thankfulness: Prayer	Q&A 116–129 Ursinus, <i>The Summe</i> , 1061–1111