

may be, it is a movement born out of the Reformation, and it should be as committed to Reformation ideals as its first shapers were. I look forward to further volumes in the Reformation Anglicanism Essential Library series, as well as to the impact they will have for the Anglican Communion.

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Lyle D. Bierma. *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism: A Reformation Synthesis*. Columbia Series in Reformed Theology. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013. Pp. ix + 249.

Lyle Bierma is P. J. Zondervan Professor of History of Christianity at Calvin Theological Seminary. *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism* is the culmination of Bierma's writings on the Heidelberg Catechism (hereafter HC), Caspar Olevianus (one of the drafters of the HC), covenant theology, and the sacraments. This volume was written for the 450th anniversary of the HC (1563) and complements *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology* (2005), a scholarly introduction to the Catechism by Bierma and other church historians. A consideration of the HC through this review is fitting as we remember the legacy of John Calvin and the later Reformation.

For Bierma, the Reformation in Heidelberg historically was built upon a Lutheran foundation and refined through Reformed traditions. He intends to show that in the HC we “encounter traces of the same grafting of Reformed branches onto a Lutheran vine” (p. 11).¹ For that purpose, after an introductory chapter that discusses most of the significant literature on the topic (in English, Dutch, and German), he engages in a detailed textual analysis and theological commentary on the Catechism itself in chapters 2 to 8. Those chapters show familiarity with a rich variety of confessional and catechetical Lutheran and Reformed sources. The book ends with possible applications to the present ecumenical context of the church and a modern translation of the Catechism (pp. 131–200; this 2011 translation is the official translation of the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Church in America, and

¹ In a previously published chapter on Melanchthon and the HC, Bierma has pondered the HC's relationship to Lutheran views, cautiously indicating that in the tapestry of the HC, some Melanchthonian colors are found but no specific sources can be identified. See Lyle D. Bierma, “What Hath Wittenberg to Do with Heidelberg?,” in Karin Maag, ed., *Melanchthon in Europe: His Work and Influence Beyond Wittenberg*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 103–21, esp. 120–21.

the Presbyterian Church [USA]). The volume includes detailed endnotes, a comprehensive bibliography, and a helpful index.

The introduction of the book starts with the paradox that the HC is widely considered as an ecumenical catechism and yet features little in ecumenical discussions (pp. 1–2). One also has to acknowledge that the HC is mostly used in Reformed churches and has frequently been analyzed as a Calvinian or Bullingerian document (pp. 2–3). Bierma contends that three factors nevertheless point in an ecumenical direction (p. 3): “another line of research,” the HC’s context, and its text. First, Johannes Ebrard spoke of its “Melanchthonian-Calvinian” character, and Wilhelm Neuser in his groundbreaking article identified four fathers of the catechism: Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli (p. 4). This type of analysis has had an appreciable following. Second, the context of the Palatine speaks in favor of a double influence from both Melanchthon and Reformed theologians (pp. 5–10). Several events define this context: Luther’s death (1546) and the fragmentation of Lutheranism, the Peace of Augsburg (1555) and the legalization of Protestantism under the Augsburg Confession (hereafter AC), Melanchthon’s death (1560), and movement in the city of Heidelberg closer to Reformed theology under Frederick III. During this time, Heidelberg hosted a variety of theologians (one Gnesio-Lutheran, as well as Philippists, late Zwinglians, and Calvinians); however, the Gnesio-Lutheran soon left, and the Reformed came to dominate the scene. (Pages 8–10 elaborate more specifically on Zacharias Ursinus and the others involved in the writing of the HC.) Third, a demonstration that the text of the HC stems from several traditions occupies the rest of the book (pp. 11–12) and shapes its methodology, which looks at the HC’s themes in light of contemporary Lutheran and Reformed catechisms.

The journey starts in chapter 2 with a consideration of the theme of comfort and the tripartite structure of the HC. “Comfort” appears in explicit ways, in connected themes, and in the catechism’s structure (pp. 13–15). After a thorough comparative analysis, Bierma concludes that there is a strong impact of Lutheran sources (especially Melanchthon) upon the choice of this theme, but that its formulation is marked by Reformed sources (p. 21). As to the structure—misery, deliverance, and thankfulness—Bierma identifies and discusses several possible sources: many Lutheran (among them Luther and Melanchthon) and Theodore Beza’s short confession (pp. 21–28). It is difficult to decide among them (p. 27), but Bierma discerns a common tradition strongly influenced by Lutheranism.

Closely linked to the structure is the pattern of law and gospel dealt with in chapter 3. Bierma speaks of “a basic Lutheran skeleton that is sometimes

fleshed out with material that appears dependent on Reformed sources or at least reflects a Reformed theological slant” (p. 29). In addition to a threefold structure, the HC retained five traditional elements of catechetical instruction (summary of the law, the Creed, the sacraments, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer). Ursinus’s catechisms and the HC distinguish themselves by doubling the treatment of the law and relating the five parts to the tripartite structure (pp. 30–31).² Here again, both Lutheran and Reformed influences emerge, with particular attention given to Beza in step with Walter Hollweg’s work (pp. 32–33). Among the several themes uncovered, we could mention that the more Lutheran victory motif (HC 1) is somewhat eclipsed later in the HC by the more Reformed penal satisfaction theme (HC 12–18; p. 39), and that the “Lutheran law-gospel dialectic” of the beginning makes way for the role of the law in thankfulness; thus the two traditions are united.

Faith and Creed, as well as providence and predestination, occupy the attention of Bierma in chapter 4. On faith, by using Melancthonian overtones “the very heart of the catechism [is introduced] ... with language that is not only familiar to Lutheran ears but resonant with the authoritative text of the AC” (p. 43). Bierma also indicates that the threefold structure of the exposition is marked by Lutheran sources and the personal character of HC 24 echoes Luther (p. 44). On providence (pp. 44–49), in the exposition of the first article of the Creed, one can detect influences from Calvin without excluding other Reformed influences and the impact of Luther. Bierma discusses the fascinating question of the near silence of the HC on predestination, which should not be read as a denial of the doctrine (implicitly present) but rather as an effort to navigate within the confines of the AC.

In chapter 5 on Christ and the Holy Spirit, Bierma starts with the comprehensive notion of deliverance (pp. 53–56), the focal point of the HC’s Christology. He compares here the HC with Luther’s Small Catechism and the Geneva Catechism (pp. 56–60); he also identifies influences by Beza on justification (p. 60) and points to the characteristic Reformed threefold office of Christ and doctrine of the atonement (pp. 61–63). Of special note is the HC dealing with the controversial Lutheran doctrine of the ubiquity of Christ (HC 46–49); it offers a nuanced answer in line with the Reformed and Philippists (pp. 63–64, see also p. 70). In the second half of the chapter on the work of the Holy Spirit, Bierma detects influences from Luther and

² An English translation is available in Lyle D. Bierma et al., *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology: With a Translation of the Smaller and Larger Catechisms of Zacharias Ursinus*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 163–223.

Melanchthon, Calvin, and John à Lasco. The question of the relationship of the Spirit with the church is discussed, and also of the divisions within the last part of the Creed (where Lutheran and Reformed differ; see pp. 68–69). On the Holy Spirit, there is therefore “an intricate blend of language from both traditions” (p. 70).

Chapter 6 deals with the sacraments.³ There are multiple interpretations of the HC’s view of the sacraments and no consensus at the moment (pp. 71–72). Bierma continues to argue for a dual—Lutheran (pp. 73–83) and Reformed (pp. 83–89)—background, especially in view of the need for a consensus document on this delicate topic. The definition of the sacraments that includes teaching and sealing has an affinity with Luther and Melanchthon but is not specific to them (pp. 74–75). Much of the interpretive debate has turned around Brian Gerrish’s analysis of “symbolic parallelism” (p. 76), where for Calvin the sign is equal to the blessing and for Heinrich Bullinger they are parallel. In fact, the picture is more complex, making it difficult to identify the HC’s exact position between Calvin and Bullinger. Bierma contends that the HC’s silence on the exact nature of the relationship between sign and blessing might be intentional to accommodate Calvin’s, Bullinger’s, and Melanchthon’s views (p. 81). The author, however, discerns some “Reformed language and emphases” (p. 83) such as the sacrament in relation to Christ’s death as a sacrifice (p. 85), covenant language, and the omission of the terminology of “substance” to accommodate the Zurich theologians (p. 87).

Bierma offers a short but enlightening chapter on the theme of the covenant (chapter 7). The catechism contains only a few explicit statements of that theme (p. 90). The common view that covenant theology was receding in Ursinus’s work and omitted because it was a theological novelty, inappropriate politically, and for catechetical purposes must be nuanced (pp. 91–95).⁴ Bierma agrees with scholars like Heinrich Hepppe that covenant is central to the catechism but wants a sounder methodology to establish that. Bierma suggests comparing the HC with other parallel works (e.g., by Ursinus) where the covenant theme is more explicit to help uncover implicit

³ Bierma has already dealt with the topic in a short monograph; see Lyle D. Bierma, *The Doctrine of the Sacraments in the Heidelberg Catechism: Melancthonian, Calvinist, or Zwinglian?*, Studies in Reformed Theology and History, New Series 4 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1999).

⁴ Note that Ursinus’s own commentary on the HC contains a section on the covenant after the exposition on the mediator (p. 96); see Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (1852; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d.), 97–100 (available online: <https://books.google.com/books?id=RgdMAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>).

covenantal language in the HC (p. 95). Thus, HC 1 is covenantal and deals with the law-gospel theme (p. 96). Also, the HC's view of baptism is more than Melancthonian, as it adds the dual covenant benefit of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit (p. 97; for other references to this dual benefit, see pp. 98–99). In conclusion, the HC has few explicit references, but “a remarkable amount of covenantal material” (p. 100). This conclusion is further strengthened by Bierma's research on Olevianus (p. 225, n. 39).⁵

In chapter 8, Bierma's analysis of the theme of “good works and gratitude” confirms his general outlook on the HC as containing both broad Lutheran and specific Reformed influences, circling back to the pattern of HC 1 (p. 113). The definition of repentance can be associated with both traditions (p. 104), but the division of the Ten Commandments follows Lasco's and Calvin's catechisms (p. 105). The exposition of the law reveals a common Protestant hermeneutics. An interesting analysis of the links between good works, gratitude, and prayer follows (pp. 109–13). It comes out that prayer is closely connected to the law as a means of obeying it in conjunction with the work of the Spirit (p. 110).

Chapter 9 on ecumenism and contemporary application is of a different sort and might obtain a more mixed reception. Bierma first offers a realistic appraisal of the limitations and potential of the HC as an ecumenical document. In step with the studies of Heinz Schilling, he acknowledges the political dimension of confessions in the sixteenth century (p. 117).⁶ The remainder of the chapter stems out of Bierma's engagement in the life of the church and his efforts to bring the HC to bear to that context. Besides examples drawn from dialog with Catholics (p. 124) and Lutherans, the HC is taken as a common Reformed voice (p. 127); he also views the HC as having potential application for economic and social issues (p. 125–26). For instance,

⁵ Bierma dealt earlier with the use of Olevianus's commentary to interpret the Catechism. Lyle D. Bierma, “*Vester Grundt* and the Origins of the Heidelberg Catechism,” in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. Fred Graham, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), 289–309. Bierma also published a translation of Olevianus's work; see Caspar Olevianus, *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 Books, 1995).

⁶ See Heinz Schilling, “Confessionalization in the Empire: Religious and Societal Change in Germany between 1555 and 1620,” in Heinz Schilling, *Religion, Political Culture and the Emergence of Early Modern Society: Essays in German and Dutch History*, trans. Stephen G. Burnett (New York: Brill, 1992), 205–45, esp. 218–19. The political function of the HC is hinted at in Frederick's preface (p. 118). For the text of this important document, see George W. Richards, ed., *The Heidelberg Catechism: Historical and Doctrinal Studies* (Philadelphia: Publication and Sunday School Board of the Reformed Church in the United States, 1913), 182–99.

the exposition of the sixth commandment applies “certainly [to] war, capital punishment, abortion, and euthanasia, but also gender discrimination, homophobia, AIDS, environmental damage, and economic injustice.”

To conclude, Bierma offers a thorough and insightful historical and theological analysis of the HC—the main body of the book serving as a thorough commentary of the HC. Overall, perhaps a little more emphasis could be given to the biblical influences on the catechism. Only on a few occasions (e.g., Romans on p. 23; Hebrews 11 on p. 24) does he mention the Bible’s influence on the HC theology. (We could add, for instance, that 1 Pet 2 is used on several occasions and serves as a structuring text.) Prooftexts could further be used to evaluate the HC’s hermeneutics within the Protestant tradition of the sixteenth century. On the historical analysis side, Bierma has well shown the complexity and variety of backgrounds behind the HC. In light of his research, we might suggest a model for comprehending the background. Instead of the four fathers listed by Neuser, we could see a focus on three cities (Wittenberg, Zurich, and Geneva⁷) where the earlier generation (Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin) had some influence, but it was the later generation (Melanchthon, Bullinger, and Beza) that had the most influence on the HC.⁸ Further, Bierma does well to see the political and ecumenical context of the HC, but a comprehension of its theology could be enriched by further probing the social context of themes such comfort. For example, could contemporary persecutions and suffering (such as the 1562 massacre of Wassy), part of the pastoral context, illumine the context of the theology of the HC?

Bierma’s work on the HC is thus a welcome resource for the study of this historical catechism. The reader will be greatly rewarded in reading this book and will have a deeper understanding of the HC and Reformed theology.

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⁷ An interesting confirmation of the Genevan connection is that a German translation of Beza’s short confession, likely by Olevianus, was printed in Heidelberg in 1562, and the next year (1563) a German version of the French Confession was printed together with the short Beza confession in Heidelberg (pp. 21–22). This later work was published by Johannes Mayer, who also published the Heidelberg Catechism.

⁸ Ursinus, after studying with Melanchthon, visited both Geneva and Zurich before arriving in Heidelberg (p. 9). For more on Ursinus, see Derk Visser, “Zacharias Ursinus, 1534–1583,” in Jill Raitt, ed., *Shapers of Religious Traditions in Germany, Switzerland, and Poland, 1560–1600* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 121–39, esp. 122–25.