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# REMEMBERING THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY? SOME REMARKS ON THE COMMEMORATION OF A 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REFORMED CONFESSION

## ABSTRACT

With the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism of 2013 in mind, this article offers some remarks on the question what it means to remember and commemorate this 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformed confession in South Africa today. The first part of the article argues that commemorations invite us to be conscious of the close link between memory and identity, as well as to the fact that our memories of the past are often highly contested memories. The second part of the paper comments on the status of the Heidelberg Catechism as a historical document, while the third part of the paper extends the discussion with a focus on the reception of the Heidelberg Catechism in South Africa. By highlighting a few episodes from its reception history, the article affirms the view of the Heidelberg Catechism as an important identity marker amidst contestation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When the English delegates returned home from the famous synod of Dort (1618/1619), they reported back enthusiastically: “Our brothers on the continent have a booklet, of which the pages cannot be bought with tons of gold” (cf. Plasger 2012:9). The booklet they referred to was the Heidelberg Catechism, a document that was first published in 1563. In 2013 we commemorated the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this valuable Reformed

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confessional document. Several conferences and public celebrations were held worldwide to commemorate this event, including a conference in Heidelberg in Germany where the document originated. In South Africa, too, churches and theological educational institutions hosted events that commemorated the Heidelberg Catechism. At Stellenbosch, for instance, the theological day at the beginning of the 2013 academic year had as its theme: “Alienation and gift: The relevance of the Heidelberg Catechism for today”, and during the same year several other conferences aimed at pastors were held that specifically engaged with the history, theological meaning and relevance of the Heidelberg Catechism. Moreover, the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University also hosted a conference (from 31 October – 1 November 2013), in collaboration with the University of Pretoria and the University of the Free State, as well as with several church partners. In addition to these events, several South African publications have marked the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary. For example, a special edition of the theological journal *In die Skriflig/ In Luce Verbi* was published that contains several academic articles on the Heidelberg Catechism (see *In die Skriflig* 47/2, 2013), and seven young theologians published a creative engagement with this 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformed document under the title *Sewe stories en ’n stock cube: Die Heidelbergse Kategismus se troos vir vandag* (“Seven stories and a stock cube: The Heidelberg Catechism’s comfort for today”) (Van Tonder *et al* 2013).

In this article I attend specifically to the theme of the 2013 Stellenbosch conference: “Remembering the Heidelberg Catechism in (South) Africa today”. I will structure the article by engaging with the different words and phrases of the theme. First I will say something about the word “remembering”. Then I will turn to the fact that we are remembering *the Heidelberg Catechism*, a specific 16<sup>th</sup>-century document, in the process placing the emphasis on the fact that it is a document associated with *Heidelberg*, and that it is a *catechism*. Thirdly, I will pose some questions and offer some observations related to the reception or commemoration of the Heidelberg Catechism *in (South) Africa*. In the final section I will conclude with some remarks on the word “today”.

## 2. REMEMBERING THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM?

Over the last few years several conferences were held in Stellenbosch that commemorated important figures and events in the Reformed tradition. In 2009 a conference was held that remembered and reflected on the legacy of John Calvin, the influential 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformer<sup>1</sup>. This coincided with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of theological education at Stellenbosch. In

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1 For some published articles resulting from this conference, see *NGTT* 51, Supplementum 2010:289-437.

2011 a mini-conference was held that celebrated the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Confessio Belgica*, another important Reformed confessional document that had an interesting reception in South Africa.<sup>2</sup> And in 2012 a conference was held which had as its theme “The Reformed Churches in South Africa and the Struggle for Justice: Remembering 1960-1990”.<sup>3</sup> In the opening address to that conference I emphasised the importance of a responsible historical hermeneutic when engaging our shared but also divided (Reformed) past (Plaatjies van Huffel & Vosloo 2013:15-25). When we remember or commemorate the past we should continually ask self-critical questions, and be troubled by what the philosopher Paul Ricoeur refers to as

the unsettling spectacle offered by an excess of memory here, and an excess of forgetting elsewhere, to say nothing of the influence of commemorations and abuses of memory – and of forgetting (Ricoeur 2004:xv).<sup>4</sup>

Much can be said in this regard, but for the purposes of this article let me make two brief remarks.

First, commemorations invite us to be conscious of the close link between memory and identity. On the one hand, we should be aware of the great distance between us and the past, between, for example, us and the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore we should respect the strangeness of the past, also the mystery of the past (see Moltmann 2012:5), mindful of the fact that our access to the past is possible only via vulnerable epistemological routes. On the other hand, we should also affirm that this strange, and in many ways unknowable, past is also *our* past (Williams 2005:1). The past has formed or malformed our identity in significant ways. Even if we don’t have direct access to authoritative documents from the distant past (such as the Heidelberg Catechism) through our personal memory, these documents may form part of what scholars such as Jan and Aleida Assmann have described as cultural memory (see, for instance, Assmann, J 2006:1-30; Assmann, A 2006:51-54), and as such they continue to exert an influence on our personal, communal and cultural existence. In the already mentioned publication *Sewe stories en ‘n stock cube* the young theologians argue that even though one doesn’t often hear about the Heidelberg Catechism in worship services and catechism classes, the document still influences,

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2 For the published articles resulting from this conference, see *NGTT* 53, 3&4, 2012.

3 For a selection of the papers from this conference, see Plaatjies van Huffel & Vosloo (2013).

4 For an engagement with Ricoeur’s discussion of (the abuses of) memory, see Vosloo (2011a: 11-28), and Vosloo (2012:215-227).

often unconsciously, the way people think and speak about God, since – in a way – it is in our blood (Van Tonder *et al.* 2013:8).

The close relationship between memory and identity also challenges us to reflect on the way in which our projects of identity construction, often over against others whom we experience as a threat, influence the way in which we remember and represent the past. Therefore we should be mindful that the ways in which we recollect, or our predecessors in previous centuries recollected, the Heidelberg Catechism are not to be abstracted from the identity projects and theological controversies from our time and theirs. Hence the importance of asking questions such as: Who are those who remember the Heidelberg Catechism? What are the power configurations that possibly influence our historical recollections? And with what future in mind are we remembering the Heidelberg Catechism?

A second remark that I would like to make regarding the word “remembering” concerns the fact that the memory of the Heidelberg Catechism is also a contested memory.<sup>5</sup> For many people from a Reformed background the Heidelberg Catechism is indeed not remembered with joy and a sense of affinity, but is viewed as an oppressive document that formed part of a repressive tradition, partly because they associate it with a pessimistic anthropology.<sup>6</sup> For many the question is therefore not how we can remember the Heidelberg Catechism, but how we can forget it, or at least not bother to rekindle the memory of it. But there are also those people who feel that we should consciously reclaim the Heidelberg Catechism as a liberating document, albeit in a theologically responsible way, and who believe that this document, and the rich heritage associated with it, can still speak to us today.

## 2. REMEMBERING THE *HEIDELBERG CATECHISM*

The first edition of the Heidelberg Catechism appeared in Heidelberg in January 1563, with the preface dated 19 January, and the Heidelberg theologian Zacharias Ursinus is today generally acknowledged as the prime author.<sup>7</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism has a very interesting and complicated history of origin, and in order to also understand the theological meaning and relevance of the Heidelberg Catechism for today, it is important to

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5 See, for instance, the opening paragraphs of the essay by Smit, titled “Vervreemding en gawe – Sleutelmotiewe in die *Heidelbergse Kategismus*”, in which he notes and develops the idea that the Heidelberg Catechism was met from early on with both appreciation and sharp critique (Smit 2013:173-175).

6 Cf. Van Tonder *et al.* (2013:8-9), and also Smit (2013:175).

7 See, for instance, Ehmann (2012:33).

attend with a responsible historical hermeneutic to the pre-history, birth and early reception of this document. It remains important to be mindful of the fact that the Heidelberg Catechism originated in a specific historical setting and era, albeit that it also in some way transcends its time and place of origin. It is, moreover, probably true to say that one reason why the Heidelberg Catechism transcended its time and place lies exactly in the pertinent and powerful way that it spoke to its own time and context.

In addition to the history of its origin – which is closely associated with the Kurpfalz region in Germany, and more specifically the town of Heidelberg<sup>8</sup> – the reception history of the Heidelberg Catechism also deserves to be known and studied. This reception history reveals contested responses to it, but it is nevertheless clear that there are strong strands that attest to the way in which this document was received with gratitude, affirming the statement of the English delegates referred to at the beginning of this article that the pages of this booklet cannot be bought with tons of gold. One could even argue that the Heidelberg Catechism has become a religious classic. In his influential book *The Analogical Imagination* the Chicago theologian David Tracy (1991:108) remarks as follows on the notion of the classic and its normative element:

My thesis is that what we mean in naming certain texts, events, images, rituals, symbols and persons ‘classics’ is that here we recognize nothing less than the disclosure of a reality we cannot but name truth ... here we find something valuable, something ‘important’; some disclosure of reality in a moment that must be called one of ‘recognition’ which surprises, provokes, challenges, shocks and eventually transforms us; indeed a realized experience of that which is essential, that which endures.

This description rings true if we consider the reception history of the Heidelberg Catechism. Since its first publication in Heidelberg in 1563 people have testified to the fact that this “classic” disclosed something to them that rang true, in which they recognise something valuable, essential and important.<sup>9</sup> And in the process this little booklet has exercised a great influence, and continues to do so, as is evident from the fact that it has

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- 8 The link between Heidelberg and the Heidelberg Catechism is of course not merely limited to the history of origin. For a recent collection of sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism by theologians from Heidelberg, see Schwier and Ulrichs (2012).
- 9 A possible reason for the Heidelberg Catechism’s influence is well captured by Doug Ottati: “... it succeeds as a passionate and personally moving statement of life reordered and reconfigured by the strange logic of grace” (Ottati 2006: 48).

been translated into more than 40 languages, ranging from Afrikaans to Vietnamese.<sup>10</sup>

For many members of the Reformed tradition (and for other Christians as well) the first thing that comes to mind when they hear a reference to the Heidelberg Catechism is the first question of the catechism: “What is your only comfort in life and death?”, as well as the first part of the answer to this question: “That I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ” (Heidelberg Catechism 2013:8). At least part of the enduring power and influence of the Heidelberg Catechism is linked to the existential and pastoral tone of its first question and answer. In an essay for the recent anniversary publication *Power of Faith: 450 years of the Heidelberg Catechism*, Herman Selderhuis refers to Anna Maria van Schurman, the first woman to attend lectures at the University of Utrecht, who reported that when, as a four-year-old girl, she was picking flowers in the field, her family’s maid asked her to recite question and answer one of the Heidelberg Catechism. As she recited the words “that I am not my own but belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ”, she experienced such joy that this event and her experience of it remained with her for the rest of her life (Apperloo-Boersma & Selderhuis 2013:24). The testimonies of many others since then, also in South Africa, confirm that hers was not an isolated experience.

In addition to its famous first question and answer, the Heidelberg Catechism is also well-known for its three-fold structure, already announced in the second question of the catechism, which asks how many things are necessary to know concerning the comfort announced in answer one. The answer is simple and concise: “Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are; second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance” (Heidelberg Catechism 2013:8). The theological brilliance of this structure has often been praised. Karl Barth, for instance, said in a famous lecture on the Heidelberg Catechism in 1938:

The outline human misery–human redemption–human gratitude is in its simplicity an ingenious restatement of the essence of the whole Reformation (1964:122).

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10 For various translations of the Heidelberg Catechism, see the website of Refo500 at <http://www.refo500.nl/en/pages/10/Heidelberg%20Catechism%20in%20Various%20Languages.html> (accessed 23 October 2013). There is even a Twitte-chismus in Dutch. For an article on the first Afrikaans translations of the Heidelberg Catechism, see Britz (2013). For a recent edition of the text in its original language, see Freudenberg and Siller (2012).

Many South African Reformed Christians will still recall that the structure of the Heidelberg Catechism was taught to them in catechism class as encapsulated in the notions of sin, redemption and gratitude, following Gerdener's *Handboek by die Katkisasie* ("Handbook for Catechism") (1927:158), and the later General Sunday School commission of the Dutch Reformed Church's *Die Katkisasieboek* (The Catechism Book) (Die Algemene Sondagskool Kommissie 1950:124). The strong focus on sin as the main organising concept for the first part of the catechism is revealing, especially since the heading in the original version of the Heidelberg Catechism refers not to "sin" but to "human misery" ("von des Menschen Elend"). In an interesting recent article, a published version of a paper read in 2013 at the theological day of the Theology Faculty at Stellenbosch, Dirkie Smit addresses the possible misinterpretations when the first part of the catechism is reduced to a certain understanding of sin that negates the wider meaning of misery (Smit 2013:173-188). In the article Smit also attends to some challenges arising out of the spirit of our times against the three-fold structure of the catechism,<sup>11</sup> including the way in which the catechism is understood as promoting a pessimistic anthropology and the charge that gratitude cannot serve as motivation for the Christian life (as is reflected, for instance, in the philosophical discourse on the question "Can a gift be given?"<sup>12</sup>). One can therefore speak of both appreciation for and critique of the three-fold structure of the Heidelberg Catechism, as well as the theological and ethical ideas underlying it.

In commemorating the Heidelberg Catechism the opportunity arises not only to reflect on the theological meaning and historical origins of the Heidelberg Catechism, but also on its genre and purpose, mindful of the fact that it is a catechism, intended for the teaching of the faith. The Heidelberg Catechism – which can be viewed in line with several other catechisms of the 16<sup>th</sup> century – was thus designed for teaching, as is also noted in the Preface by Frederick III to the original 1563 Catechism. The purpose was not merely the training of the youth, but also to provide for the pastors and schoolmasters themselves a reliable teaching aid (see Freudenberg & Siller 2012:15). Today the teaching of the faith is faced with huge challenges in secular or post-secular societies, and the question can

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11 Smit comments in this regard: "The spirit of our times no longer knows *this* kind of awareness of sin and feelings of guilt. The worldview of our day no longer needs *this* kind of forgiveness, redemption and justification. Contemporary people experience the call to show gratitude – which finds expression in commandment and prayer – as something legalistic and in conflict with their need for individual freedom" (2013:174, my translation).

12 For references to the literature on the philosophical discourse on the gift and gift-giving, see, for instance, Smit (2013:175).

be asked whether a renewed engagement with the Heidelberg Catechism can contribute in a meaningful and fruitful way to addressing contemporary concerns and realities regarding the transmission of the Christian tradition. Can we find a way between over-playing and under-playing the possible role of the Heidelberg Catechism in this regard? It falls beyond the scope of this article, however, to address these important questions.

The Heidelberg Catechism, moreover, was not merely intended as a catechetical tool, but also as preaching guide and as a form of confessional unity among the different Protestant factions in the Palatinate.<sup>13</sup> There is no doubt that the impact of the Heidelberg Catechism can hardly be over-estimated, as its reception in the rest of Germany as well as further afield and especially in the Netherlands, bears witness to, including through the tradition of catechism preaching.<sup>14</sup> The specific reception history of the Heidelberg Catechism in the Netherlands is of special importance for South Africa, given the fact that when the Dutch came to the Cape in the mid-seventeenth century they brought along their Reformed faith and tradition (which included the Heidelberg Catechism as part of their confessional heritage).

### 3. REMEMBERING THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM IN (SOUTH) AFRICA?

With this in mind, I now turn to the some aspects of the reception of the Heidelberg Catechism *in (South) Africa*. We should remember that through the mission work of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) the Heidelberg Catechism also had an impact on other countries in Africa, and the Catechism still forms part of the confessional base and church polity discourse of many of the churches that were born out of the DRC's mission work.<sup>15</sup>

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13 Cf. Bierma (2005:51). Cf. Barth (1964:12).

14 On Catechism preaching in the Netherland, see Baars (2013:137-146). For a more extensive discussion see his book *'De eenvoudige Heidelberger ...' Een korte geschiedenis van de Catechismuspreek in Nederland* (Baars, 2012). This title of this book refers to the famous words of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Dutch theologian and preacher Hermann Friedrich Kohlbrugge on his deathbed: "De Heidelberger! De eenvoudige Heidelberger! Houdt daaraan vast, kinderen!" (The Heidelberg! The simple Heidelberg! Hold fast to it, children!").

15 For a discussion of the reception and relevance of the Heidelberg Catechism with reference to the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian, see Zeze (2012).

From the time of the Dutch settlement at the Cape, the Heidelberg Catechism played a role in teaching and preaching, as was the practice in the “Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk”, of which the early congregations formed a part. In a letter to the classis in Amsterdam (dated 20 April 1655), the sick comforter Willem Wylandt, for instance, reported that every second Sunday he read a commentary from the Catechism from Ursinus’ *Het Schatboek der Verklaringen van de Heidelbergse Catechismus* or from Lansberghius. After the reading the children had to recite the questions, with some Scripture references.<sup>16</sup> Catechism sermons were also part of ecclesial practice from early on, although reports to Synod in 1773 and again in 1829 mentioned lukewarm attendance of these afternoon services. In time the Catechism was used less and less, in part replaced by the summary of the Catechism, the well-known *Korte Begrip*, as well as by new catechism books. The Catechism, however, retained its status as Reformed Confession (Oberholzer 1986:7-8).

In reflecting on the reception history of the Heidelberg Catechism in South Africa, one should also take note of the fact that its reception history alludes to conflict and contestation. In the 1860s, for instance, the Heidelberg Catechism – together with the other confessions that formed part of the Three Formulae of Unity – was at the heart of the so-called Liberal (or Modernistic) Controversy. Several ministers of the Dutch Reformed church, who were influenced by Modernism (among them J.J. Kotze and T.F. Burgers), were challenged to defend their ideas. In his recent book *Vroom of Regsinnig?* (“Pious or Orthodox?”), Vincent Brümmer has argued that Andrew Murray<sup>17</sup>, who was then the moderator of the Cape Church, was conscious that the court could not charge these proponents of what is referred to as “the Modern Strand” (“die Moderne rigting”) on grounds of their piety, but could challenge them on grounds of their commitment to the Reformed Confessions, which they signed upon their legitimation as ministers (Brümmer 2013:107). One of them, Rev. J.J. Kotze of Darling, did not want to defend the view that the Confessions were always in line with (“in ooreenstemming met”) the Bible. In this regard he referred to Sunday 23 (question 60), which described the human being as “still inclined toward all evil” (“nog gedurigdeur tot alle kwaad geneig is”). For him these words should not even come out of the mouth of a pagan, and certainly not out of the mouth of a Christian. For him this statement was neither Reformed nor biblical. At a synod meeting both Kotze and Burgers were suspended, although their later appeal to the civil court was successful (Brümmer 2013:107).

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16 See Spoelstra (1906:3). Cf. Oberholzer (1986:7).

17 One of the volumes in Andrew Murray’s collected works contains his meditations on the Heidelberg Catechism, see Murray (1945).

In the theological struggles of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Modernism and Liberalism, understood in a certain way, continued to be viewed as a danger for the church. The Reformed confessions were often used in order to define the “true” Calvinistic faith, over against the dangers of Modernism and Liberalism. In the process a form of neo-Calvinism developed that had a specific understanding of the Reformed Confessions, and if you read, for instance, the articles of these neo-Calvinist theologians of the 1930s and 1940s, you get the sense that the Confessions functioned in a rather abstract way to fight different “-isms”, ranging from modernism, to liberalism, to communism, ecumenism, even to what is described as other-ism (cf. Vosloo 2010:281-283).

If one speaks of the reception of the Heidelberg Catechism, one can also consider the way in which the Catechism functioned in an alternative strand of Calvinism in South Africa, the strand that became associated with the critique of apartheid and the Belhar Confession (a new confession that arose out of the church and theological struggles in South Africa, and that was adopted as draft confession in 1982, and as official fourth confession of the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1986). The early negative reception of this document in the white Dutch Reformed Church focused mainly on what was seen as the link between the Belhar confession and liberation theology, but this critique often failed to notice the way in which the Belhar Confession is deeply embedded in the Reformed confessional tradition, including the ecclesiology put forward in the *Confessio Belgica* (articles 28 and 29) and the Heidelberg Catechism (Sunday 21, question and answer 54 and 55). I have a copy of the first handwritten draft of the Belhar Confession (the original document is stored by the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa in the church archive at Stellenbosch), and it is interesting to note that above the first article is written in the margins HK XX1, 54-55. The ecclesiology of articles 54 and 55 of the Heidelberg Catechism was therefore part of the theological imagination that produced this document.

The influence of the Heidelberg Catechism is also more explicit. As Piet Naudé has highlighted in his award-winning book on the Belhar Confession, *Neither Calendar nor Clock*, the words in article 1 of the Belhar Confession that follow

We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, namely the words “... who gathers, protects and cares for his Church by his Word and his Spirit, as He has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end”, is an almost direct quotation from the Heidelberg Catechism, question and answer 54, which reads: “What do you believe of the holy catholic church? That the Son of God ... from the beginning to the end of the world gathers, defends, and

preserves for himself ... by his Spirit and Word ... a church chosen to everlasting life" (Naudé 2010:6).

Much more can be said on the direct and indirect influence of the Heidelberg Catechism on the Belhar Confession, but suffice it to say that the issue of the underlying ecclesiology operative in the Reformed churches in South Africa is still a highly contested, but also extremely vital, conversation. When one speaks about the reception of the Heidelberg Catechism in South Africa, one cannot separate this discourse from the debates around the Belhar Confession (and its reception and non-reception in other churches in the Dutch Reformed church family). At the heart of these debates are questions related to our ecclesiology, as well as to what is understood under confessional theology (cf. Tshaka 2010) and what it means to be a confessional church.

Let me conclude this section on the reception of the Heidelberg Catechism in South Africa by saying that it is highly significant that the theologian who wrote probably the most influential work on Reformed Confessions in South Africa – I am speaking of Willie Jonker and the book is *Bevrydende waarheid: Die karakter van die gereformeerde belydenis* ("Liberating truth: The character of reformed confession") (1994) – uses as one of the mottos for a later publication on his personal life journey within the Dutch Reformed Church, entitled *Selfs die kerk kan verander* ("Even the church can change"), question and answer 55 from the Heidelberg Catechism (Jonker 1998). Clearly for Jonker the ecclesial vision of the Catechism is not that of a church divided or isolated along racial lines (a type of "volkskerk"), but of a united church in which people (who share the treasures and gifts in Christ) joyfully share their gifts and lives with each other.

#### **4. CONCLUSION: REMEMBERING THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM TODAY**

The conference held in 2013 in Stellenbosch that commemorated the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism had as its theme "Remembering the Heidelberg Catechism in South Africa today". The word "today" in the theme suggests that it is also important to ask questions about the relevance of the Heidelberg Catechism for church and society, and not merely engage with the document out of intellectual curiosity or for antiquarian purposes. Much can be said on the relevance of the Heidelberg Catechism for today, but for the purposes of this article I want to emphasise in closing the importance for the hermeneutical process of interpreting and embodying the Heidelberg Catechism to be guided by

a sense of the Christian tradition (and also the Reformed tradition) as a *living tradition*<sup>18</sup>, a tradition that always seeks, in deference and faithfulness to its history, fresh articulations of the faith we confess.<sup>19</sup> Karl Barth has expressed this poignantly:

We no longer live in the sixteenth but in the twentieth century ... If we concern ourselves today with Christian doctrine, there is no point in staring spellbound at the sixteenth century and holding on to what was said then and there as immoveably and unchangeably as possible. Such a procedure would be inconsistent with the Reformation. It is always a misunderstanding of the communion of saints and a misunderstanding also of the fathers when their confession is later understood as chains, so that Christian doctrine today could only be repetition of their confession. In the communion of the saints there should be reverence and thankfulness for the fathers of the church, those who have gone before us and in their time have reflected on the gospel. But there is also freedom in the communion of the saints (1964:21).

This quotation challenges us not to see the Heidelberg Catechism as a chain that binds us (in the sense that we view it as a document that requires mere repetition), but as a gift that we can receive without regret as we seek to confess our faith *with* the Heidelberg Catechism,<sup>20</sup> in Christian freedom, and with joy.

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18 On the Reformed tradition as a living tradition, see Vosloo (2011b:18-31).

19 For one such fresh articulation, see Theissen (2012). This book is tellingly dedicated to Zacharius Ursinus, the author of the Heidelberg Catechism.

20 On confessing “with the Heidelberg Catechism”, see Busch (1998:vi).

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