

Catechism: Out of Date or Tried and True Teaching of Eternal Truths

by Sally Michael

We Evangelicals have failed to pass on to our young people an orthodox form of faith that can take root and survive the secular onslaught. Ironically, the billions of dollars we've spent on youth ministers, Christian music, publishing, and media has produced a culture of young Christians who know next to nothing about their own faith except how they should feel about it. Our young people have deep beliefs about the culture war, but do not know why they should obey Scripture, the essentials of theology, or the experience of spiritual discipline and community. Coming generations of Christians are going to be monumentally ignorant and unprepared for culture-wide pressures.

From: The Coming Evangelical Collapse by Michael Spencer - JI Packer and Gary Parrett. Grounded in the Gospel (Grand Rapids, Mi.:Baker Books, 2010) 52

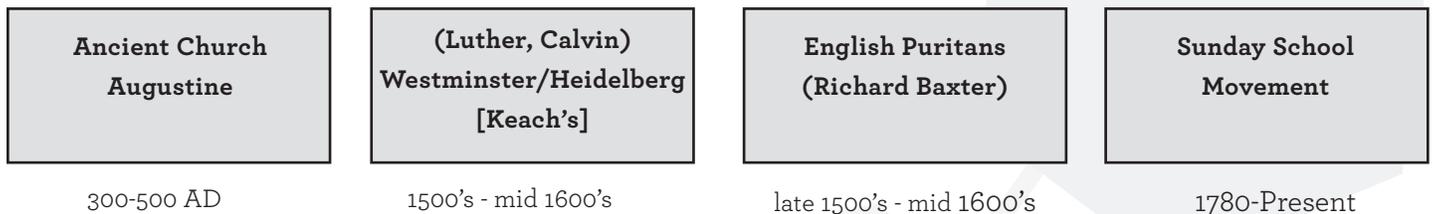
Definition of catechesis, or catechizing or catechetical teaching: intense, _____ systematic _____ I teaching of the Christian faith using a question/answer method of teaching which encourages _____, _____, investigation, and _____.

No doubt the church in the West has many new things to learn. But for the most part, everything we need to learn is what we've already forgotten. The chief theological task now facing the Western church is not to reinvent or to be relevant but to remember. We must remember the old, old story. We must remember the faith once delivered to the saints. We must remember the truths that spark reformation, revival, and regeneration.

Kevin DeYoung. The Good News We Almost Forgot. (Chicago: Moody Pub., 2010), 13

History

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 1:18-21; Psalm 78:1-8; Acts 2:42; 1 Timothy 4:6-7a, 1, 13-16; Titus 2:1



...some Christians have eschewed learning itself, whether past or present. "Away with theology!" they cry. "Give me the simple gospel!" But is ignorance better than falsehood? Can the great God and Creator whose mighty acts and wondrous character confront us on every page of Scripture be reduced to a scant few beliefs? The simplicity of the gospel is precious, but its simplicity never robs it of its profundity.

Donald Van Dyken. Rediscovering Catechism. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Pub, 2000.)26

...Throughout the two millennia of Christian history, the health of Christian communities has, in fact often been linked to the presence or absence of serious catechetical ministries.

J.I. Packer and Gary Parrett. Grounded in the Gospel (Grand Rapids, Mi.:Baker Books, 2010) 52

Christian Discipleship and Teaching

Not rote memorization:

Not passive participants:

Educational theories that insist that teachers must concentrate on drawing out ...the latent capacities of the child, and help him at every point to form his own judgments, without equal attention to the supply of information, are tragically mistaken... You cannot make anything unless you have the tools with which to form and construct it... It is important that from the earliest the child should be trained in the rudiments of Christian doctrine, and have these built into his mind and soul, so that he has eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to understand the whole message of the Gospel ...

(T.E. Torrance, Scottish theologian and teacher) J.I. Packer and Gary Parrett. Grounded in the Gospel (Grand Rapids, Mi.:Baker Books, 2010) 139

Classical Model of Education: Grammar Stage

Classical Model of Education: Logic Stage

Classical Model of Education: Rhetoric Stage

CHURCH	HOME
Sunday morning intergenerational church worship service (preaching)	Catechism using the Socratic method
Age-integrated Sunday school teaching doctrine	Bible memory (i.e. Fighter Verses)
[Sunday evening intergenerational worship service (teaching)]	Real life application of learned truths and modeling of faith and character
Intergenerational midweek program teaching practical theology	

Catechism Content and Usage

The content of most catechisms is based on the _____ Creed, the _____
 _____ and the _____ and are presented in
 a Question/Answer format with _____.

We give our children big truths they will grow into rather than light explanations they will grow out of.

Tedd and Margy Tripp. Instructing a Child's Heart. (Wapwallopen, Pa.: Shepherd Press, 2008) 45.

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Those who use it in their families or classes must labour to explain the sense; but the words should be carefully learned by heart, for they will be understood better as years pass. (Charles Spurgeon)

JI Packer and Gary Parrett. Grounded in the Gospel (Grand Rapids, Mi.:Baker Books, 2010) 138

[catechetical instruction] imparts to a child at an early age long before his mental powers can grasp the meaning of it all, a considerable body of historical and doctrinal matter, and so provides him with something to think about in the years when he is developing his mental and spiritual capacities... It so stretches his powers that helps him to reach beyond his grasp and then grasped beyond his former reach. (T.E. Torrance)

JI Packer and Gary Parrett. Grounded in the Gospel (Grand Rapids, Mi.:Baker Books, 2010) 139

Q. What is God? A. God is a Spirit (John 4:24), infinite (Job 11:7, 8, 9), eternal (Ps. 110:2), and unchangeable (Jas. 1:17) in his being (Ex. 33:14), wisdom (Ps. 147:5), power (Rev. 4:8), holiness (Rev. 15:4), justice, goodness, and truth (Ex. 34:6). (Charles Association Baptist Catechism of 1813)

27. Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. God's providence is His almighty and ever present power,[1] whereby, as with His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures,[2] and so governs them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty,[3] indeed, all things, come not by chance[4] but by His fatherly hand.[5]

[1] Jer. 23:23, 24; Acts 17:24-28. [2] Heb. 1:3. [3] Jer. 5:24; Acts 14:15-17; John 9:3; Prov. 22:2. [4] Prov. 16:33. [5] Matt. 10:29.

28. Q. What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by His providence?

A. We can be patient in adversity,[1] thankful in prosperity,[2] and with a view to the future we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from His love;[3] for all creatures are so completely in His hand that without His will they cannot so much as move.[4]

[1] Job. 1:21, 22; Ps. 39:10; James 1:3. [2] Deut. 8:10; I Thess. 5:18. [3] Ps. 55:22; Rom. 5:3-5; 8:38, 39. [4] Job 1:12; 2:6; Prov. 21:1; Acts 17:24-28.

(Q/A 27 and 28 are from the 1988 update of the Heidelberg Catechism)

Catechizing forces one to redeem the time...Many parents struggle...with finding a means of creating spiritual and biblical discussions with their children. The discipline of catechizing draws parent and child, student and teacher, together in the most helpful and edifying of all activities—the submission of heart and mind to the teachings of the Bible.

As Andy Crouch has argued, we do not change a culture by analyzing it, critiquing it, withdrawing from it, or simply setting up alternatives to it. We change culture when we create new culture. When we commit to creating a new culture of catechesis in our congregations we can—over time, with sustained efforts, and by God's grace—begin to change the culture of these churches.

JI Packer and Gary Parrett. Grounded in the Gospel (Grand Rapids, Mi.:Baker Books, 2010) 174

After listening to modern tirades against the great creeds of the Church, one receives rather a shock when one turns to the Westminster Confession, for example, or to that tenderest and most theological of books, the “Pilgrims Progress” of John Bunyan, and discovers that in doing so one has turned from shallow modern phrases to a “dead orthodoxy” that is pulsating with life in every word. In such orthodoxy there is life enough to set the whole world aglow with Christian love.

J. Gresham Machen. Christianity and Liberalism. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1923) 39

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. Colossians 1:28-19

Resources

- Grounded in the Gospel—*J I Packer and Gary A Parrett*
- The Good News We Almost Forgot—*Kevin DeYoung (explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism)*
- Teaching Truth, Training Hearts—*Tom Nettles*
- Rediscovering Catechism—*Donald Van Dyken*
- Know the Creeds and Councils (KNOW Series Book 1)—*Justin Holcomb*
- A Catechism for Boys and Girls <http://founders.org/library/childcat/>
- The Baptist Catechism Set to Music—*Jim Scott Orrick (2 CD set based on the Baptist (Keach’s) Catechism; video clips on YouTube)*
- <http://press.founders.org/shop/the-baptist-catechism-set-to-music/>
- <http://www.graceandtruthbooks.com/product/baptist-catechism-set-to-music>
- Text: <http://www.reformedreader.org/cc/bapcat.htm>
- Videos: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL16A3DFD0570F9D39>
- Baptist catechisms recommended in Tom Nettles book <http://www.reformedreader.org/cc/bcat.htm>
- The Heidelberg Catechism (updated 1988 version)
https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/Heidelberg%20Catechism_old.pdf
- The Heidelberg Catechism—*Christian Reformed Church (March 1990 version)*
- First Catechism: Teaching Children Bible Truths. Great Commission Publications. (Shortened version of the Westminster Shorter Catechism—for young children.)
- The Westminster Shorter Catechism
http://www.reformed.org/documents/wsc/index.html?_top=http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC.html
- The Westminster Larger Catechism http://www.reformed.org/documents/wlc_w_proofs/
- Training Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Shorter Catechism—*Starr Meade*