

Catechismus

Oder
Christlicher Vnderricht/
wie der in Kirchen vnd Schu-
len der Churfürstlichen
Pfalz getrieben



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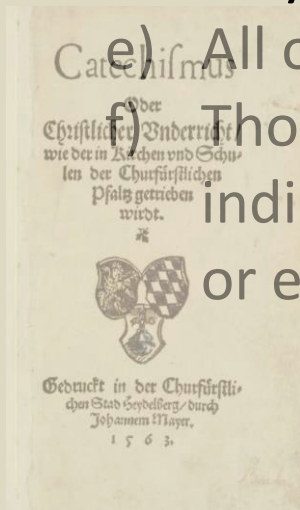
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Catechism Instruction in CanRC

Survey Responses

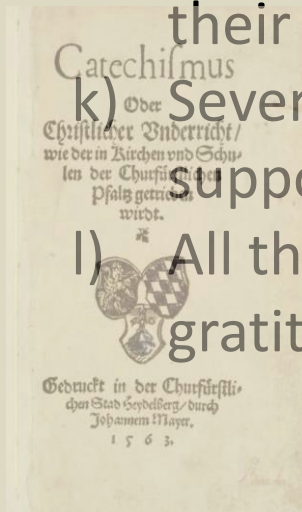
Introductory Remarks

- a) 21 ministers from Canada and Australia responded;
- b) No one disparaged the teaching of catechism, as such. The respondents were all committed to the necessity of this instruction of the youth, especially the H.C.
- c) 2 pastors said they used the English translation of “*Ik Geloof*”, a multi-year program written by several GKv ministers and teachers; (in both Can. and W.A. – well used)
- d) Several ministers reported using “*I Belong*” written about 30 years ago by Pastor James Visscher;
- e) All other programs were developed by local ministers;
- f) Though one may assume, there was, however, no indication that the local **consistory** had a hand in designing or even approving the minister’s program;



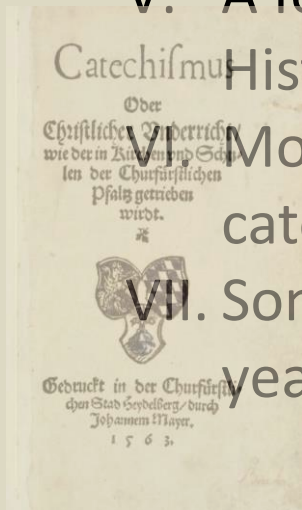
Intro. Cont'd:

- g) None of the respondents indicated that he had researched best teaching practices – but that does not mean it was not done.
- h) Several ministers stated that their seminary training had not helped much to prepare them for catechism teaching.
- i) Many pastors shared teaching responsibilities with an elder or another 'lay' person;
- j) Those sharing teaching responsibilities were usually left on their own to find what works for them;
- k) Several respondents lamented lack of active parental support.
- l) All the feedback shows that we have much reason for gratitude that the LORD continues to bless this!



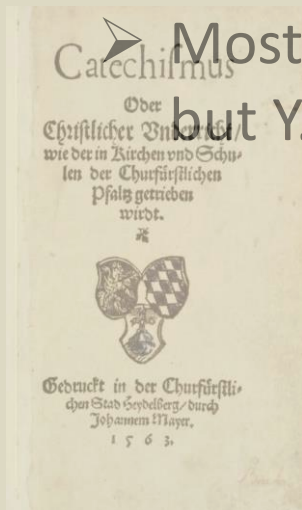
a) Outline of Programs/Curricula

- I. **All** respondents placed a very heavy emphasis on the H.C. as a **foundational** course of studies;
- II. Almost all respondents had developed a program of at least two, 2-year cycles of H.C. instruction;
- III. One respondent developed a single three-year program of H.C. instruction;
- IV. Subsequent years of instruction invariably included instruction the B.C. and C. of D, ;
- V. A few respondents included instruction in Ch. Pol. and Ch. Hist., apologetics, lifestyle issues in the senior years;
- VI. Most programs expected students to follow 6 years of catechetical instruction, starting in gr. 7;
- VII. Some respondents seriously included H.C. into the senior years instruction.



Curriculum Summary:

- Gr. 7/8 – H.C. exclusively
- Gr. 9/10 – H.C. exclusively
- Gr. 11/12 – B.C. and C. of D. – with an emphasis on the B.C. – several continued to integrate this with the H.C.
- Several churches still maintain a older style Pre. Conf. catechism class as their 6th year in instruction.



➤ Most churches allow young people to do P.P.F. after gr. 10, but Y.P. are still expected to complete 6 years of instruction.

b)Memorization

1. Memorization is still the **primary** means of learning, especially of the H.C., Word-for-word;
2. Only a few downplayed the importance of memorization in favour of understanding the meaning of the H.C.;
3. Several respondents felt that memorization of H.C. should be pushed down into the gr. 2/3 level; done by gr. 7/8.
4. Several respondents made it the **parents' responsibility** to monitor memory work – and report to the minister;
5. Most respondents assumed that memorization is best done by young brains, i.e., every very young;
6. The effectiveness of memorization as learning strategy appears to be based on personal assumptions;
7. Written **term tests/evaluations** were only done by a few pastors; most respondents disparaged tests: it's not school.
8. Most measured students' learning by discussion with them.

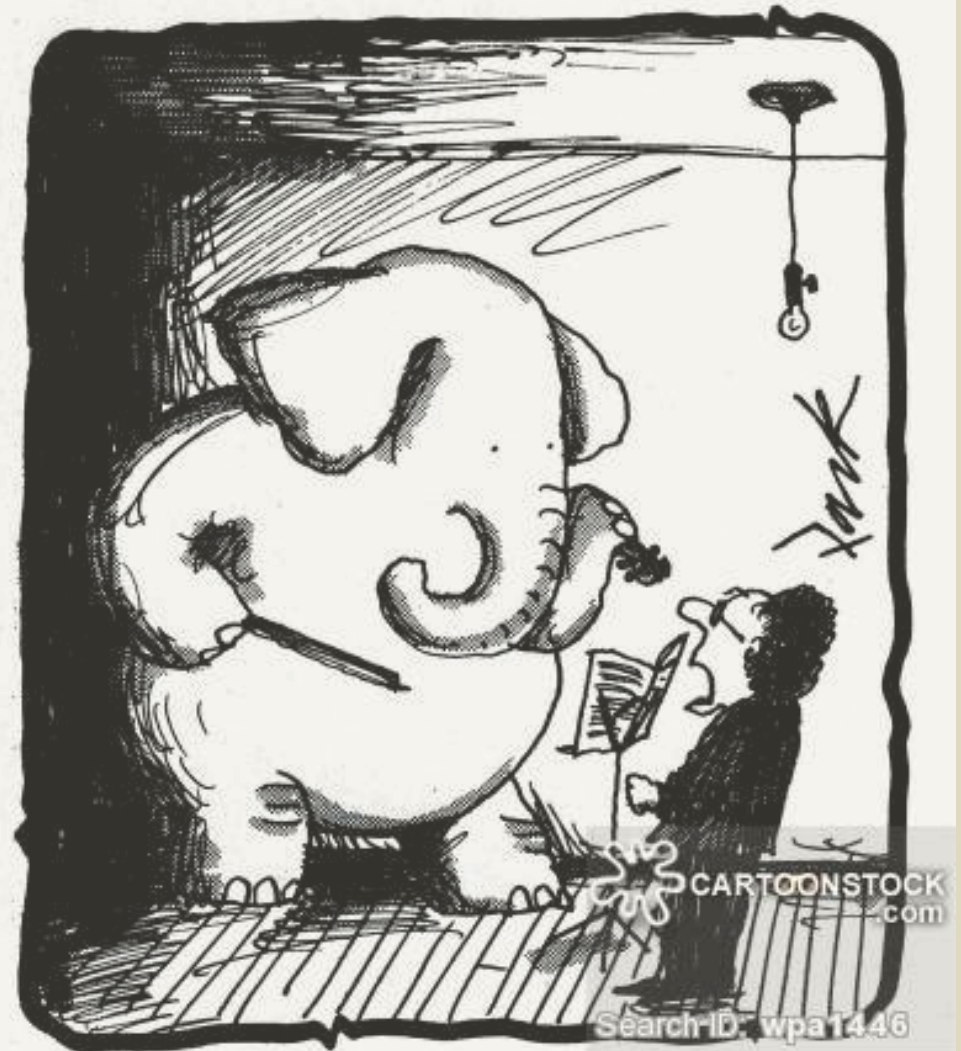
Opposing views on rote memorization:

Memorization is a frontage road: It runs parallel to the best parts of learning, never intersecting. It's a detour around all the action, a way of knowing without learning, of answering without understanding... (Ben Orlin)

The best argument for verse memorization may be that it provides us with knowledge of a qualitatively and physiologically different variety: you take the poem inside you, into your brain chemistry if not your blood, and you know it at a deeper, bodily level than if you simply read it off a screen. Robson puts the point succinctly: “If we do not learn by heart, the heart does not feel the rhythms of poetry as echoes or variations of its own insistent beat.” (Brad Leithauser)

Question:

If your **primary** goal was UNDERSTANDING and student engagement, would you have to change your teaching strategies?



"No, no, no! Attack the vivace passages!
Slow down the andante! Where is this great
memory I'm always hearing about?"

c) Teaching Emphasis: Knowledge, skills and attitudes

1. “*Rem tene, verba sequentur*: grasp the subject (understand the subject), and the words will follow.
2. This, I believe, may often be the opposite of what happens with catechism memorization, which is more a case of *verba tene, res sequentur*: grasp the words, and the subject will follow.” (My adaptation from Umberto Eco who quotes Cicero).

Should we juxtapose rote memory to understanding? *I don't think so*. But based on the overwhelming emphasis given to rote memorization of the H.C., I would like to suggest a firm shift in favour of facilitating understanding. Has preeminence of rote learning become the *default learning strategy* because others are less evident?

d) Description of challenges

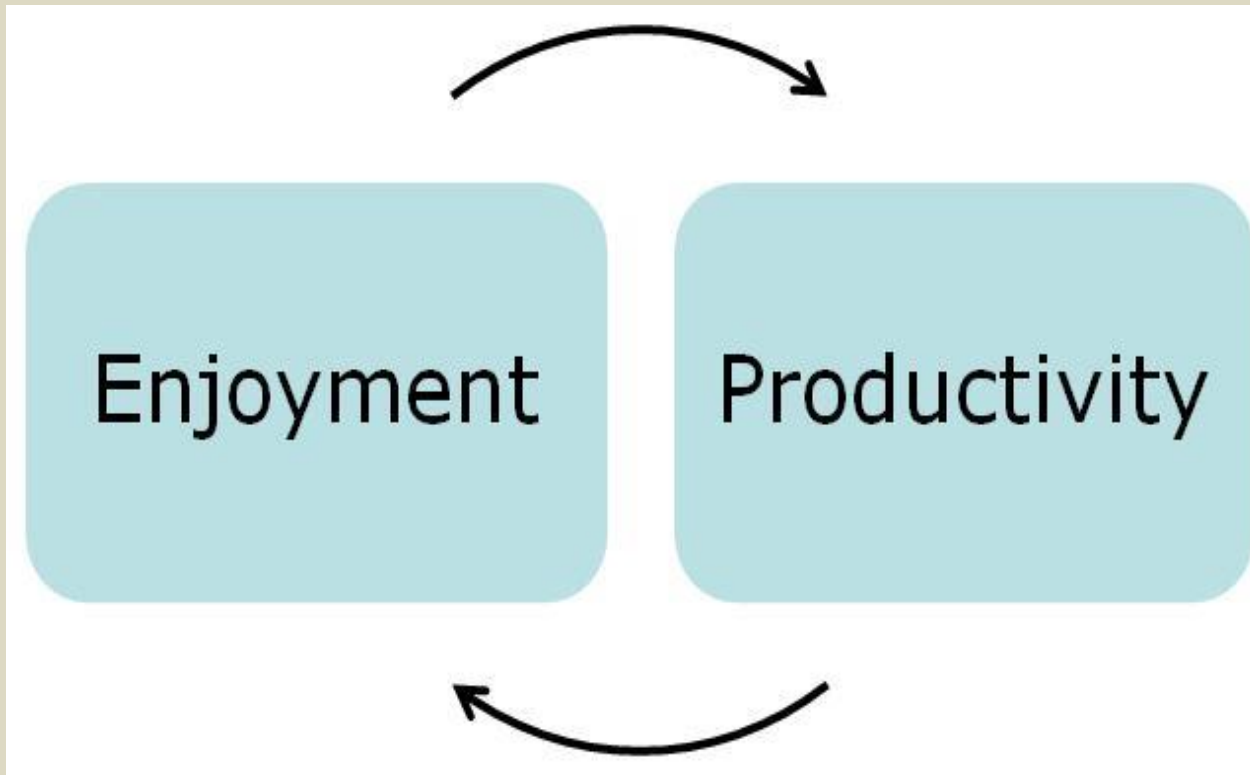
What was said:

- i) Most respondents said there were no (big) challenges;
- ii) Some found it problematic to meet the different levels of ability;
- iii) Some respondents found it challenging to make their lessons relevant to their students.
- iv) A few stated that “evening classes” are not a good time to learn.

What was not said:

- i) Students with special needs: are there any?
- ii) How do instructors make their teaching engaging?
- iii) How do the pastors’ determine whether students are meeting their learning outcomes?
- iv) How do pastors evaluate the effectiveness of teaching?
- v) What expectations do parents have of catechism instruction?

Feelings of engagement/enjoyment should be mutual



Cuts both ways: for the teachers and the taught

Feelings of engagement/enjoyment

All 21 respondents appeared to enjoy their catechism class interaction with their young people, highlight of the week.

They were engaged, and most stressed that they strived to impact favourably on the attitudes and faith development.

Most of the respondents clearly stressed the “knowing” side of faith development, but they truly wanted to go beyond that by impacting on developing Y.P.’s faith commitment (convictions).

Caveat: this survey only asked **pastors**. Would it be even more informative to ask your students, or past students what they appreciated, and what they would like to change?

What would be a true measure of the “success” of our catechetical programs?

e) An instructional program developed for our churches?

- a) Respondents with a number of years experience, did not support a program developed for our churches;
- b) Most had problems with a program that would be “imposed” upon them compromising their “style”;
- c) Many respondents felt such a program would not ‘fit’ with their style of teaching;
- d) Others felt that such a program would leave too little room for subjects they felt were important in their community;
- e) Young/inexperienced pastors said they would have been very happy with a well-prepared program;
- f) One pastor stated that such a program would be a big benefit for elders or ‘lay’ people teaching catechism;
- g) Ergo: many vacant churches would benefit.

Pastors: Place strong emphasis on teaching style

Where is the concern about student **learning** style or metacognition strengths?



Reflection on the present

- Survey feed-back; - 'all's well'
- Other Reformed churches, - Netherlands

Living in a bubble?



- Is a status quo, i.e., – 'stay the course' – o.k.?

Reflecting on the teaching/learning process:

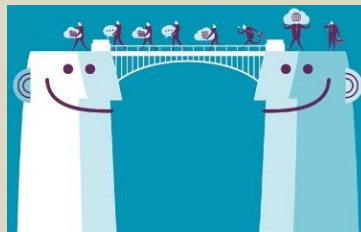


Exposure,
Teaching:
(Speaking,
Showing)

Behaviour:
(Process,
Listen, discuss,
think

Experience:
(Internalizing,
learning
attitude
changing

Outcome:
(Lifestyle
choices,
commitment)



Counterpoints



- a) No one is looking for a 'make-work' project;
- b) Pastors (especially the younger ones) stated that they were not trained as teachers and that presented them with significant challenges to teach catechism;
- c) There are many vacant churches, more to come;
- d) A well-designed program will significantly help the seminary in teaching catechetics;
- e) Like the men of Issachar, we must be aware of changes in our surroundings; Is the status quo good enough for (near) future?

“If you don’t build in the present, you have reason to fear the future.” (Palome, in *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*)