

IN DIE SKRIFLIG IN LUCE VERBI

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The Heidelberg Catechism, 1563–2013: After 450 years still alive and relevant

The year 2013 is a year of particular importance for churches in the tradition of the 16th century Reformation all over the world. It is 450 years since the Heidelberg Catechism was accepted as confession in January 1563, with Ursinus and Olevianus as the main writers. It was written by order of the political head of the Palatinate, Elector Frederick III. His purpose was to enhance the unity of faith within his political domain, but also to instruct the youth, in the public schools, and the church in the true doctrine. The final confession reflects the influence of Calvin and Luther as well as theologians like Melancthon, Zwingli and Beza. The Heidelberg Catechism has therefore been called unique, with its own beauty and clarity (Schulze 1993) in which the focus is on the common theological ground amongst the leading Protestant theologians of the time (Bierma 2005). In the Heidelberg Catechism we find 'reformation ecumenism at its best' (Bierma 2005).

Therefore, it is fit that the Afrikaans speaking churches of the Reformation in South Africa also commemorate this important historical event. The Inter-denominational council, consisting of deputies from the Dutch Reformed Church, the Nederduitsch Hervormde Church and the Reformed Churches in South Africa, decided to commemorate the 450 years of the Heidelberg Catechism by a special publication of the journal *In Luce Verbi/In die Skriflig*.

Through the ages since 1563, and also during this year, many conferences took place; articles and books, dealing with this treasured confession, had been published; many commentaries had been written; and thousands of Catechism sermons had been delivered.

Is this just another publication? Hopefully not. In the first place, it illustrates the commitment of the churches of the Reformation to maintain the Heidelberg Catechism as living confession, which is part of the essence of the church. This is a hopeful sign in a time when the onslaught against the truth of the gospel, both from within and outside the church, is growing. Secondly, it illustrates the relevance and actuality of the Heidelberg Catechism in our times. The core truths of Scripture, as confessed in the Heidelberg Catechism, are applied to current problems in almost every article, for example the questions regarding the resurrection of Christ, the view on God, ethical issues, Catechism preaching, et cetera. In the third place it is our prayer that this publication will also be received and read internationally as part of the global commemoration. Apart from the contributions of a number of South African theologians, we are therefore particularly grateful for the contributions of two well-known international scholars, namely Proff Erik de Boer and Wim Verboom.

We extend special words of gratitude to the editorial board of *In Luce Verbi* for the permission to publish these articles, coupled with the scientific accreditation of each contribution. Thank you to the staff of *In Luce Verbi* for the administration and the staff of AOSIS for their assistance, co-operation and guidance to ensure a prestige publication. Also to Prof Natie van Wyk, Dr Ben du Toit and Ds Etienne Fourie, the other members of the editorial board appointed for this special edition, a word of gratitude. Their advice and inputs were valuable and meaningful.

May this publication be a humble contribution to keep the interest in and study of this valuable confession alive, and above all, to continue confessing the Heidelberg Catechism in the ages to come as living confession of the church of Christ.

To the only true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit all the glory and praise. In the turbulent times of heresy 450 years ago, He guided his church in the whole truth (Jn 16:13) to confess the truth of his Word in the Heidelberg Catechism. He will keep his promise also in the troubled and uncertain times of 2013. Soli Deo Gloria.

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