

HC and Me: The Heidelberg Catechism for Christian Living. Leader's Guide. Pp. 166.

HC and Me: The Heidelberg Catechism for Christian Living. Student Resource. Pp.111

by Bob Rozema. Published by Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, Mich. 2006. Reviewed by Johan D. Tangelder.

They say, "We are living in different times than our forebears. Therefore, we must change our approach to teaching our youth." I am sure we will agree that some of the teaching methods in the past were not always helpful. For example, now we realize that we cannot properly teach thirty or forty students in a lecture setting and hold the attention of each one of them. Our youth are bombarded by non-Christian messages by the secular consumer-focused media. And if we want to understand them we need to know the framework in which they are thinking and communicate accordingly. But do we need to change our approach to doctrine to accommodate our youth? Should the teaching of the Church become a question or an exclamation mark? In our age of appalling Biblical illiteracy and ignorance of Biblical doctrines, our youth need to be introduced to the basics of the Reformed faith. Encouraging inflated self-esteem or engaging in "fun activities" is no substitute for learning. We are called to teach the youth why they belong to a Reformed and not to a non-denominational church.

Why are we called Christian? What is salvation? Is coming to Christ our decision or God's? Rozema, a former high school teacher, says that the Catechism's mood is in rather sharp contrast to the mood of most modern evangelicalism. He notes that hardly ever do they hear the gospel presented in terms of God's justice. "Most modern preachers like to tell the gospel (the way most modern audiences like to hear it) in terms of an ultimate solution to our felt needs." Rozema rightly asserts that the Christian faith is more than to just believe. Doctrinal content is important. And he doesn't hesitate to say that "God does mean to teach us that our sins will be punished, either in this world or in the next." He shows from Scripture and the HC how great our sins are. He writes about original sin, our human misery, and taking responsibility for our actions instead of blaming God. He tells the students about God's solution. He emphasizes the vicarious atonement of Christ as the only path to forgiveness and salvation. He also refers to the importance of the doctrine of election. Faith is not our decision, it is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8). And there is no short-cut to sound instruction.

Rozema's course covers Q&A 1-58 in twenty-five sessions. Since the students will receive a resource book, they will be able to reflect on what they learn in their class sessions. The course provides a "user-friendly" approach for teaching the HC to high school students. "Old truths" are offered in a modern package. The leader's guide has tips for teaching and suggestions for making each session a rewarding learning experience. The students are also invited to make a personal faith commitment to Jesus Christ and how to apply it to their life's experiences at home, and at school. Parents are invited to interact with the catechism assignments. Thankfully, Rozema stresses the importance of memorization. His course shows that catechism teaching has a crucial function in the life of the church. It calls for a major commitment on the part of the instructor as well as the students.