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WHAT'S GOING ON

by John H. C. Niederhaus

This little article is written on May 12th, the day before Ascension Day. *The Heidelberg Catechism* is at odds with much of contemporary evangelical thought as well as with the *Apostles' Creed* by the amount of writing it commits to Christ's ascension. In the Creed, both the resurrection of Christ and His ascension are dealt with in simple, single clauses: "the third day He rose again from the dead," and "He ascended into heaven." The Catechism requires only one question (Q. 45) to explain the resurrection, but takes four questions (Qq. 46-49) to explain the ascension. In addition, Questions 50 and 51 are related directly to Jesus' ascension and the benefits that accrue to His people as a consequence. That means *The Heidelberg Catechism*, unlike the Creed or contemporary evangelicals, expends significantly more thought and space (and memorizing labor for generations of catechetical students) on the ascension of Jesus than on His resurrection. So, we ask: What's going on?

The short and simple, but by no means sweet, answer is this: Jesus' ascension provided a focal point of controversy when the Catechism was written; such was not the case with Jesus' resurrection. All parties in the city Heidelberg basically agreed about the facts and implications of Jesus rising from the dead. It was another story when attention was directed to His rising in the ascension. At bottom, it was a raucous argument between Lutherans and Calvinists.

Johann Brenz studied at Heidelberg under Oecolampadius. He was present for the disputation held at the Heidelberg Augustinian monastery on April 26, 1518 which featured the presence of Martin Luther as he defended 40 propositions dealing with the theological movement springing up around him. Brenz became a firm advocate of Reformation views and, in due time, one of the foremost – if not the foremost

– Lutheran theologians of his day. He had a bulldog tenacity and liked to argue, that is, to articulate and defend his views vigorously while allowing little wiggle room for those who did not agree with him. He and the ever-conciliating Philip Melanchthon seemed to be on the same page for several years, but in the end they were not kindred spirits, though both were Lutherans. Brenz was two years younger than Melanchthon and outlived him by a decade, not dying until 1570. It was during that last decade of his life, after the death of Melanchthon, that tells us what was going on in Heidelberg in 1563.

Having been expelled by the Catholic authorities of Heidelberg in 1522, Brenz accepted a call to Hall, another German city, and it was from there that his influence began to grow. His reputation received a significant spike upward in 1525 when he defended successfully the Real Presence in the eucharist against his old teacher Oecolampadius. The result was that almost the entire province of Württemberg adopted Lutheran teaching. Thenceforward Brenz had a voice in all the major theological controversies and councils of his day. He was considered one of the more strict Lutherans, especially when compared to Philip Melanchthon whose moderating tendencies alarmed many in the Lutheran camp. Melanchthon indicated those "strict Lutherans" considered themselves the only "real Lutherans." He used the phrase *gnesio Lutherans* and it stuck! The one side understood it as a badge of honor and truth, the other as a sign of arrogance and undue rigidity. In the matter of the Real Presence, for instance, Melanchthon was seen as giving too much credence to the Reformed position. Melanchthon's views became characterized as *Crypto-Calvinism* and the Gnesio-Lutherans rejected such thinking and took specific measures to repudiate it and stop its spread. In

December of 1559 Brenz accomplished a major step in the rejection of Reformed ideas and the ensconcing of strict Lutheran dogmas by his work on the Stuttgart Confession.

The issue was that of Christ's two natures. For the first time on a confessional basis, the Stuttgart Confession of 1559 included the doctrine that Christ is *ubiquitous* in His divine nature and in His human nature. Melancthon had been steadily moving more closely to Calvin's understanding of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, which was not the mere memorializing of Zwingli, but affirmed the divine, spiritual presence of Christ. In fact, he had corresponded with Brenz on this matter already in 1535 expressing his dissatisfaction with those who understood the meaning of the word "is" in Jesus' statement "this is My body" literally instead of figuratively. In all the jockeying for positions over the decades the doctrine of ubiquity had not been enunciated in any confessional statement. That is what changed with the Stuttgart Confession of December, 1559.

In Heidelberg this change was to play a significant role in the composition of *The Heidelberg Catechism*. Brenz had a colleague in Heidelberg, Tilemann Hesshus, who represented the views and attitude of Brenz most faithfully! Though it was Melancthon who had recommended Hesshus to the Heidelberg authorities to serve as head and dean of the faculty of the University as well as pastor of the church of the Holy Spirit, he was much more of the spirit of Brenz than of Melancthon. When a fellow Heidelberg minister, Wilhelm Klebitz, who was also in the process of earning a theological degree from

the University, wrote seven theses in support of the Melancthonian/Calvinistic view of the Lord's Supper, Hesshus became thoroughly agitated. This only increased when, while Hesshus was gone from Heidelberg on other matters, the University granted Klebitz his degree! In time, the ardor of Hesshus increased to the point where he denounced from the pulpit of the Holy Spirit church the University's degree-granting action. He used intemperate language, even for those days, using terms such as "devilish," "damnable," and "hellish." Tensions rose.

Frederick III was not having it. He forced Hesshus and Klebitz to agree to the statement on the

The issue was that of Christ's two natures. For the first time on a confessional basis, the Stuttgart Confession of 1559 included the doctrine that Christ is ubiquitous in His divine nature and in His human nature.

Lord's Supper as presented in the Augsburg Confession. While they assented as required, it did not stop the public, acerbic, vitriolic verbiage from flowing. Frederick had enough and ordered both men to leave Heidelberg, with the result that by the end of the year both were gone. That was in 1559.

As outlined above, it was in December of 1559 that the Stuttgart Confession was adopted which contained the first official pronouncement concerning the ubiquity of Christ in both His natures.

It wasn't only Heidelberg that was boiling from the tensions emanating from the debates about how Christ was present in the Lord's Supper. All Protestantism was caught up in the controversy. One recalls that Calvin wrote three treatises/letters responding to Gnesio-Lutheran Joachim Westphal about this very matter. But it was especially intense in the Palatinate which was surrounded by Lutheran territories. Consequently, in 1562 Frederick called for a new catechism for the Palatinate that would do all that catechisms were expected to do: teach, clarify,

provide spiritual food for young and old alike, and present a systematic ordering Christian faith and life based on those three solid foundations of the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed. By January of 1563 the work was done and *The Heidelberg Catechism* was ready for publication.

That brings us back to where we began: why so much space devoted to the ascension of Jesus when compared to that for His resurrection? The answer: it was a definitive rejection of the doctrine of Christ's ubiquity in both His persons, and a clear presentation of why such had to be the case.

So, we have Question 46:

How do you understand the words: "He ascended into heaven"?

Answer: That Christ was taken up from the earth into heaven before the eyes of His disciples and remains there on our behalf until He comes again to judge the living and the dead.

The parts of the answer emphasized above are meant to state explicitly why the doctrine of ubiquity is rejected. In His ascension, Christ in His glorified, physical body went from earth to heaven. He is still there. He will remain there until His Second Coming.

That's the bare statement of facts, but does not answer the questions raised by those with Lutheran sensibilities. For instance, how would you answer someone who said, "Then, is not Christ with us to the end of the world as He has promised us?" That, of course, is Question 47. The answer teaches about and clarifies the matter.

"Christ is true man and true God. As a man He is no longer on earth, but in His divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit, He is never absent from us."

The Nicene and Chalcedonian affirmations are honored, Christ is truly God and man, two natures but one person. In His human nature He is not on earth for He has ascended and is at the right hand of God. In His human nature He is not ubiquitous. Nonetheless, according to His divine nature Christ is always present everywhere, He is ubiquitous.

That answer, in turn, raises another question, Question 48:

But are not the two natures in Christ separated from each other in this way, if the humanity is not

wherever the divinity is?

Answer: Not at all: for since divinity is incomprehensible and everywhere present, it must follow that the divinity is indeed beyond the bounds of the humanity which it has assumed, and is nonetheless ever in that humanity

as well, and remains personally united to it.

As it often does, the Catechism answers with a calm *Not at all*, that immediately reassures and comforts young and old alike. It then proceeds to state plainly and in order why such should be the case. It does so by reminding the student of the incomprehensibility of God which precludes being comprehended, i.e. encompassed solely within or by anything human, including the human nature the Son of God assumed at His Incarnation. But that does not mean the two natures are mutually exclusive, for the divine nature is always united to and personally part of

That Christ was taken up from the earth into heaven before the eyes of His disciples and remains there on our behalf until He comes again to judge the living and the dead.

that human nature assumed in the womb of Mary.

Does this teaching feed the soul? What ought the student glean from such an answer. That is the matter addressed in Question 49:

What benefit do we receive from Christ's ascension into heaven?

Answer: First, that He is our Advocate in the presence of His Father in heaven.

Second, that we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, as the Head, will also take us, His members, up to Himself. Third, that He sends us His Spirit as a counterpledge by whose power we seek what is above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God, and not things that are on earth.

The answer begins and ends with spatial terms which emphasize where the human nature of Christ is located: in the presence of God in heaven. And it is from there that He sends the Holy Spirit by which God's people are empowered to seek what is above, not things down below on earth. This, of course, is virtually a direct quotation from Colossians 3:1. Like the rest of the Catechism, this answer is thoroughly grounded in the Bible, not in arcane theological distinctions, though it responds cogently, when carefully read, to the most abstruse theological ponderings.

The second benefit listed, the one students might find most obscure, is replete with reminders of the historicity of the Incarnation of the Son of God. The flesh of Jesus of Nazareth is real, human flesh just like the flesh in which we live. It is the flesh that rested wearily by Jacob's well in Samaria. It is the flesh that sat on the Mount of Beatitudes and on the Mount of Olives teaching His disciples. It is the flesh that was tempted in all points just as our flesh is tempted. It is the flesh that experienced rejection

and humiliation and suffering and death during Christ's passion. That flesh, that type of flesh which we know all too well, that flesh, which is the same as our flesh, is in heaven right now. The fact that it is there reassures us that our human flesh, despite its weaknesses and difficulties, will also be taken into heaven by the Son of God, our Redeemer and Head. It is not some Gnostic, spiritualized flesh that is everywhere. It is the real flesh of a real human in a real place! It is spiritual and it is above all earthly conceptions, but it is genuine human flesh. Yes, we can be assured of a heavenly eternity of both soul and body.

What was going on when Ursinus and the committee at Heidelberg wrote and refined their Catechism was a line drawn in the sand: *we reject the Gnesio-Lutheran doctrine of the ubiquity of Christ's body*. It is a line that continues to define one of the boundaries distinguishing Reformed theology and Lutheran theology. The line goes on.

The Gnesio-Lutherans in due time did win the battle among Lutherans; Melancthon's folk lost. The Formula of Concord drawn up in 1577 finally settled the matter as far as Lutherans were concerned. One of its chief authors was Jakob Andreae, a close friend of Johann Brenz. In fact, Andreae was the person on the council that drew up the Stuttgart Confession of 1559 through whom Brenz had inserted the first confessional affirmation of the doctrine of ubiquity! Though Brenz died seven years before the Formula of Concord, his ideas about Christ's ubiquity were incorporated therein. Thus, in the article on the Holy Supper the matter of Christ's ubiquity in both His natures is stated clearly and is non-negotiable. Another line in the sand! Revered Lutheran theologian Francis Pieper [died 1931] wrote in volume two of his three volume *Christian Dogmatics*: "Against the Reformed we say that their almost fanatical denial of the communication of the divine attributes [i.e. ubiquity]

of God's Son to the human nature is both theological suicide and rejection of the clear Scripture teaching." [p.154]

One would think, perhaps, that the doctrine of ubiquity would have been addressed by the Catechism in the questions relating to the sacraments. Not so. There the argument is with the Catholics and has more to do with the one sacrifice of Christ, and the rejection of transubstantiation. Moreover, the Catholics also reject the Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity. Where the

rubber meets the road on the issue of ubiquity is Christ's ascension. What was going on in Heidelberg in 1563, among other things, was a final word on the controversial doctrine of ubiquity. They could hardly have stated it more clearly.

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KEEP YOUR CHIN UP

by Howard Sloan

"Keep your chin up" is the advice we often receive when we are down and discouraged. It is the same advice that the Heidelberg Catechism offers to those who are plagued by the woes of life.

Q. 52. What comfort is it to you that "Christ shall come again to judge the living and the dead"?

A. That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person, who before offered himself for my sake, to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as judge from heaven: who shall cast all his and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall take me with all his chosen ones to himself, into heavenly joys and glory.

In Luke 21:28 Jesus tells us to keep our heads up. "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Those who are alive on the great day of the Lord are called to "straighten up and raise your heads." Literally, they are to lift up their heads to look to the sky to see the Son of Man coming down on a cloud. But the advice to keep our heads up is not just good advice for them, but for Christians of all ages. What about Christ's return should cause us to keep our chins up?

The first reason given for an "uplifted head" is Christ's dealings with all his and our enemies. Scripture reveals that on the day of Christ's judgment they will be condemned to everlasting punishment. Should we actually receive comfort from the "everlasting condemnation" of others? That seems harsh and cold even as I write it. What does 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 say about it?

"since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,"

We could never say that our comfort comes from their eternal destruction. No one's suffering in the fires of hell should ever give us cause for rejoicing or comfort. Even if they are the most wretched sinner and have heaped upon us the worst "sorrows and persecutions", their condemnation is still nothing that should make us glad. We should never be content with anyone being eternally separated from the presence of God as long as they draw breath in the world. The comfort

comes for the Christian in that all of the “sorrows and persecutions” that are heaped on Christ and all His church shall be dealt with on His great day. Every saint martyred shall be avenged. Every persecutor of the bride of Christ who has not fled to him for grace will be judged and held guilty and accountable for his transgressions. We desperately want justice and vengeance. We want in now! We do not often get it now. Our comfort comes in the perfect and fair judgment to come at the hands of our returning Lord Jesus Christ.

The second cause for our comfort is our coming heavenly joys and glory. Consider Matthew 25:32-40

Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

Far too often we are discomforted because our spiritual chins are down looking only at the sorrows

and persecutions of this world. We need to lift our heads up and gaze upon the wonders that await us. And what are those wonders? We can think of our perfected and sinless bodies, the presence of our redeemed loved ones, the mansions in glory prepared for us, the absence of pain or tears, or even the streets of gold and pearly gates. Those are great, but for me it is all about being in the presence of God our Father and Jesus the Christ His son forever. Don't misunderstand me. I look forward to a body absent of aches and pains, and to seeing loved one who have gone before me, but let me be with Jesus. When Christ returns, he does so to “take me with all his chosen ones to himself.” Isn't that what Horratio Spafford was getting at when he wrote the great hymn,

Far too often we are discomforted because our spiritual chins are down looking only at the sorrows and persecutions of this world. We need to lift our heads up and gaze upon the wonders that await us.

“It is well with my soul.”

When peace like a river attendeth my way.

*When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say.*

It is well with my soul.

It is well, It is well,

With my soul, with my soul.

It is well, it is well with my soul.

But Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,

The sky, not the grave, is our goal.

Oh trump of the angel! Oh voice of the Lord!

Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul.

It is well, It is well,

With my soul, with my soul.

It is well, it is well with my soul.

And Lord haste the day when my faith shall be sight.

The clouds be rolled back as a scroll.

The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend.

Even so, it is well with my soul.

*It is well, It is well,
With my soul, with my soul.
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

Dear Christian, keep your chin up. The Lord shall return and what a day that shall be.

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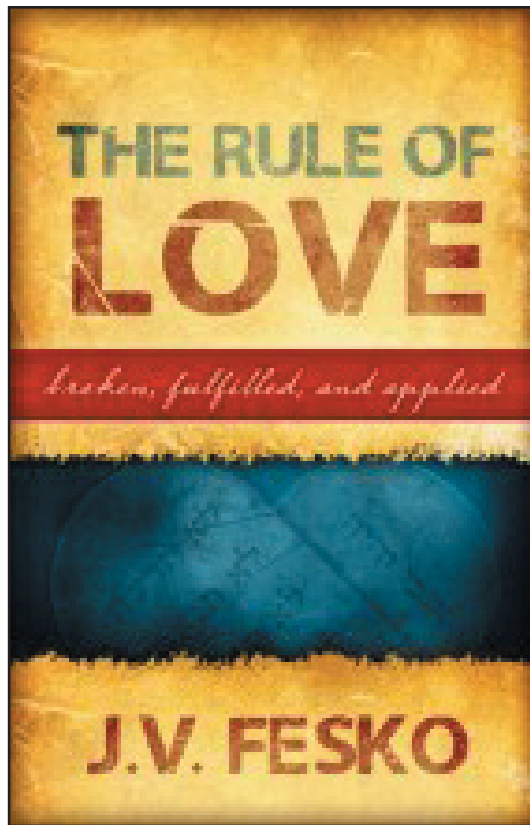
Book Reviews

The Rule of Love: Broken, Fulfilled, and Applied. by J. V. Fesko. 2009 Reformation Trust Books. 136 pgs. 4-5)
Reviewed by Howard Sloan.

The Rule of Love by J. V. Fesko is a nice, concise book on the Ten Commandments. Of course, there are plenty of books on the law. So what sets this one apart? As Fesko treats each of the commands, he does so keeping the historical, covenantal, and redemptive contexts of the commandment in mind. He begins every chapter on one of the commands with a statement to that effect. What he means by that is explained in his introduction.

Fesko's great concern for how the law is often used (or misused) is that it is removed from its context.

"In studying the Law, we must first investigate it in its original historical context: God giving the Law at Sinai. Second, we should see how God's covenantal dealings relate to the Law. That will help us recognize that God delivered His people from Egypt because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then how Christ fulfilled the Abrahamic covenant. Third, we must consider the redemptive context of the Law and determine how Christ fulfilled the Law... Keeping these three contexts in mind, we will see how the Law points to Christ and how He applies it to us by the indwelling power and presence of the Holy Spirit." (p.



Before tackling the commands themselves, Fesko points out the importance of the Prologue. He sees this as vital to keeping the Law in its proper context. I appreciated this chapter and this approach. The Law of God is not like other moral codes and systems of laws. It is based on God's relationship to His people and our application of it becomes further reaching in and for us as a result.

I thought that Fesko did a great job of interpreting and applying the commands. He remained consistent to his contextual theme with each commandment. His treatment of the second commandment was excellent as he brought it around to the sacraments and to God remaking us in His image. I also thought his treatment of the

Sabbath command was good because he avoided a legalistic approach that one often finds. Instead of duty, he ends the discussion with the joy in the Sabbath. This is as it should be. The chapter on the seventh stood out to me because of the way Fesko related the command to our marriage to Christ.

I will share one more quote from Fesko that summarized for me what our approach to the commands should be all about.

"Who needs the Ten Commandments in school when

covenant youth bear witness through their words and deeds not only of the Law of God but of the gospel of Christ and how He has fulfilled the Law? Might more Christians grow in [the] sanctification if they understood that the Law is powerless to save and sanctify, that it only condemns and show us our need for Christ, and that it is Christ through the Spirit who

saves and sanctifies?” (p. 135)

The book was easy to read and thoughtful. It would be ideal for individual reading or group study since each chapter ends with Study Questions. I recommend this book to any reader.

Finally, Some Clarity!

What's the Difference? Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible. Small Group Series on DVD with accompanying Study Guide. Crossway Books, 2009. Pp. 187. DVD, \$29.99 [\$20.99 at Westminster Seminary Bookstore – www.wtsbooks.com]; Study Guide \$9.99 [\$6.49 at Westminster Seminary Bookstore]. Review by John H. C. Niederhaus

World War II often serves as a marker for when the roles of men and women began to get confused. While men were the ones going to war and doing the fighting (something which is changing even as this is being read!), the jobs they normally held were taken over by women. One thinks of the iconic Rosie the Riveter as a reflection of women doing men's work, and doing it quite competently. The roles of the sexes never seemed to recover and western culture undertook what has become an inchoate and incoherent restatement of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. There still is no clear word on this subject from the reigning social/cultural authorities. Unfortunately, the church also is afflicted with this disease and is increasingly myopic, cross-eyed, and close to being outright blind, when it comes to the roles of men and women in the home, in the church, and in society. We've forgotten who we are!

For those reasons and more, everyone should be grateful for a teaching series designed for use by small groups entitled *What's the Difference?* Produced by Desiring God Ministries [www.desiringgod.org], the ministry resource group responsible for disseminating materials from the ministry of John Piper, Pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, this 10 part DVD with accompanying

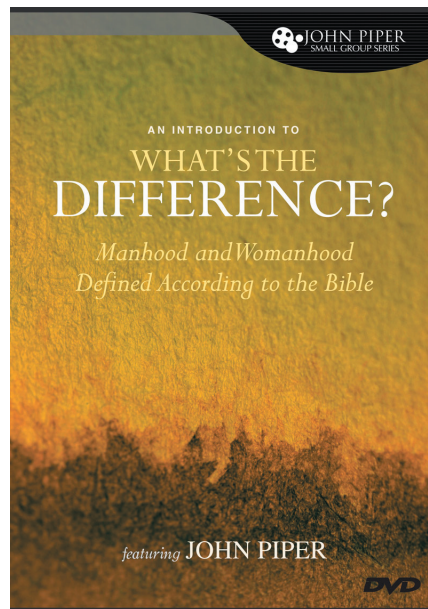
Study Guide offers a clear word on the controverted issue of male and female roles.

It's a clear word because the series takes the time to sort through all the muddied waters that are part of the topic. Not just a "here is what the Bible says" approach, though it does come down to that ultimately, the course helps participants think through the specific areas foundational to anyone's thought about these matters. So, is there a fundamental

difference in *nature* between males and females? How can or ought one go about determining if such is the case? Who provides the best role model for what a woman should be: Britney Spears or Hillary Clinton or Oprah? Who's the quintessential male representative: Bill Gates or Terrell Owens or Brad Pitt ?

It is a fully biblical investigation. Did the Fall alter the roles God designed for men and women? How significant, or of what significance, is that crucial Gal. 3: 28 text? How might one think about hard texts such as Eph. 5:22-33 and 1 Tim. 2:9-15? What does a Proverbs 31 woman really look like?

A great feature of the course is the 20 to 30 minute DVD presentation each class session by John Piper. Always thorough, he helps class members analyze the salient scriptural texts as well as the foundational problem each one addresses. When Paul says women are to keep silent in the churches [1 Cor. 14:34], participants don't read it quickly with an embarrassed quaver in the voice, but rather address it calmly, deliberately, and deliberately. It is, after all, part of the Bible and as such given to us by God so we need to hear what He is telling/teaching us therein. Any pastor will be glad to have his people learn to deal with texts in this fashion, sitting under the expert exegesis of a master expositor such as Piper.



Practical applications and illustrations abound. In one session Piper deals with why men are so reluctant to take spiritual leadership roles in the home. He provides a apt and inspiring illustration from his ministry, explaining a scenario with which most pastors are familiar. The husband works in a trade, is good with his hands, but is not much of a reader. Yet, this man is married to a woman who is a good reader, a woman who is spiritually motivated, and she becomes the de facto spiritual leader of the household. Piper relates how this man learned to be the spiritual leader in his household without changing the fact that he is a tradesman and is more at home doing property repairs than studying the Bible. The man did so. Not only did he thrive and grow as a Christian, but so did his wife and kids. Good stuff.

The course will expose students to the resources of both sides of the sexual roles debate: egalitarian vs. complementarian. Freely quoting from and directing students to the website of Christians for Biblical Equality, the arguments of those espousing an *egalitarian* understanding of sexual roles are presented, analyzed, and responded to with charity, yet a clarity that documents/demonstrates where such reasoning leads. Students also are introduced to the resources of the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood [CBMW] which espouses the *complementarian* understanding of sexual roles. This is particularly salutary as most evangelicals, Reformed or otherwise, are not aware of CBMW's existence, much less familiar with the resources available through their website and various publications.

Enough of all that. How does this course work out in congregational life? The congregation where I serve had a group work through this material this past winter. It included older married couples, middle-aged married folk, a couple of younger women, and a couple of singles. We had some lively discussions, replete with examples from personal experience of how these issues were being experienced right then in the workplace, in the home, in the media, and in their minds! One wife said she never had heard such a powerful and clear explanation of what godly submission by a Christian wife really looks like. Some of the men expressed appreciation for the chastening they received about what male leadership is and how it ought to be lived out in normal Christian marriages. Almost all of the class participants remarked on the relevance of the discussion of

spiritual gifts and offices and how they should be exercised in the church, especially the issues relating to women serving as teachers, elders, or pastors.

That collection of small group participants suggested that we offer the course during the summer months so that students home from college and other young persons and young married folk could be exposed to the same teaching that was proving so instructive in their lives. We did so, and now have that course currently underway with participants ranging in age from 19 to 30, and including those who are single, married, college students, and regular working folk. The point is this: *What's the Difference* is an eye-opening and worldview-changing course regardless of one's demographic status.

Are there some weaker points to the study? Well, yes, a couple. For instance, Piper's suggestion about how a woman boss might demonstrate a proper relationship to a male subordinate leaves much to be desired. Many of the women in the course were glad their mothers' in law were not Piper's mom, Ruth Piper; they thought it would be something of a challenge to be married to a man who holds his mom in as high esteem as Piper does. Initially it is confusing to have the chapter numbers not coincide with the session numbers, so that the session number is always one less than the chapter number. But you get used to it.

To complete the study requires eleven weeks: an introductory week, and then ten weeks of lessons. If participants are willing, a twelfth week for final thoughts, questions, comments, and rebuttals can be done. Yes, the sessions can be done in one hour, but to do so a strict observance of the starting time must be enforced.

Why consider doing this course? I suggest five reasons:

- 1) It will get folk into the Bible fruitfully;
- 2) It brings clarity to one of the most important, albeit confused, issues of contemporary life;
- 3) It equips participants to engage others and explain why they believe what they believe;
- 4) It casts a compelling vision for young believers regarding their sexual roles;
- and 5) It encourages and teaches older folk that "always being reformed" is a good thing for them too, even in the basics of sexual roles.

Thanks for the Reminder

The Good News We Almost Forgot: Rediscovering the Gospel in a 16th Century Catechism, by Kevin DeYoung. 2010 by Moody Publishers. Pp. 252. \$14.99 [\$10.04 at Westminster Seminary Bookstore, www.wtsbooks.com]. Review by John H.C. Niederhaus

A few years ago I was becoming very discouraged. Many evangelical leaders, Reformed and otherwise, were getting old, retiring, and some were dying. Being somewhat past middle age status myself, I wondered how the strong, clear, faithful, fearless, persevering voices needed in the Church and in our society would come forth. Not much was visible on the horizon, at least to me.

Since then much has changed. God certainly has raised up new voices, better voices even, than those of previous generations. There is a veritable revival in Reformed theology; and that's not an oxymoron! One of those voices raised up by God, one of those persevering (it is to be hoped) leaders is Kevin DeYoung. Though just a few years past his 30th birthday, he has written a number of worthwhile books already. For instance, *Just Do Something* is a valuable tool to give to college students and others seeking direction from God, or to those who seem paralyzed by fear of missing God's best by making a wrong decision. Two books he's co-authored with Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent* and *Why We Love the Church*, provide trenchant analysis of what biblically faithful Christianity should look like, and how some contemporary movements are weighed in the balances and found wanting. He's also authored *Freedom and Boundaries: A Pastoral Primer on the Role of Women in the Church*, which would be a benefit for many to read.

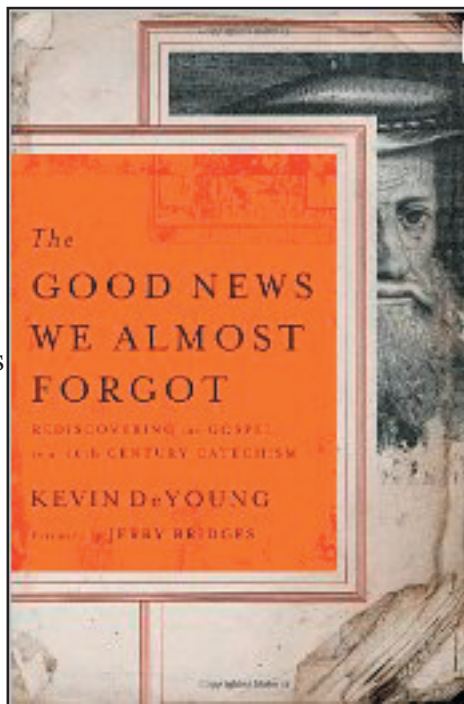
Most recently DeYoung has come forth with an attractive work that comments on each of the Lord's Day readings of *The Heidelberg Catechism*. The fact that it got published is pretty amazing – the market for folk looking to read about a 16th century catechism

is not overly large! Not only did it get published, it is published by Moody, hardly the sort one would think interested in making available a book that argues in favor of infant baptism! Everyone associated with the Heidelberg Reformation Association should be heartened by the publication of *The Good News We Almost Forgot*. It cannot but cause many who've never read or never heard of the catechism to become aware of it and, one hopes, to read and profit from it.

DeYoung is the Senior Pastor of University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan, a congregation that is part of the Reformed Church in America, the denomination in which DeYoung was raised, and in which he learned the catechism. A couple of years ago he decided to spend a year studying the catechism, spending at least three hours each week at that task. Then, as part of his ministry to that congregation, each week he wrote a devotional piece on that week's Lord's Day questions and made them available to members of the congregation. This book is a reworking of those articles.

There is much to like about this book; it's a good read, whether you're a layperson or a pastor. DeYoung writes well. Here's his opening sentence in the Introduction: "The only thing more difficult than finding the truth is not losing it." A few sentences later he amplifies this by writing, "But for the most part, everything we need to learn is what we've already forgotten." [p.13] His analogies/illustrations include, but are not limited to, some things you'd expect of a thirtysomething: fantasy sports leagues, dealing with infants and toddlers, and references to entertainment venues. But he does it well. It clicks with folk. And, the illustrations/analogies are appropriate.

For example, in dealing with Questions 96, 97 and 98 [Lord's Day 35] which treat of the Second Commandment, he discusses pictures of Jesus, nativity sets, and the more contemporary notion that people learn better through video and movie clips. He ends up by saying, "Our goal in worship, therefore, is not to entertain or impress the senses but to edify the



people by educating them in the Word of God. . . . We must resist the urge to get with the spirit of the age and feed our people with more than a steady diet of video clips and sermonettes.” [p.169]

Sometimes even the chapter titles are provocative. The title for Lord’s Day 24 is *Achieving Low Self-Esteem*. Oh yes, that’s something to which everyone aspires nowadays! There are others of a similar nature: *Vivacious Baby-Baptizing*, *Vital Virginity*, *Getting Away with Murder*. The casual reader skimming through the table of contents wonders what in the world *that* chapter could be about.

Not only does the book have popular appeal, it also has solid food for every reader. DeYoung does not hesitate to engage controversial topics. For instance, for centuries the answer to Question 37 has led some folk to assert the catechism is soft on the doctrine of limited atonement. When dealing with that answer in the catechism, DeYoung writes that “*Particular redemption* is actually a more helpful term than *limited atonement*, because the point of the doctrine is not to limit the mercy of God, but to make clear that Jesus did not die in the place of every sinner on the earth, but for His particular people.” He insists this is a talking point that needs to be talked about! “Did Christ’s work on the cross make it possible for sinners to come to God? Or did Christ’s work on the cross actually reconcile sinners to God? In other words, does the death of Jesus Christ make us saveable or does it make us saved?” [p.83] People who read this book will find their minds and hearts engaged in vital

Christian thinking.

Pastors will benefit from some of DeYoung’s personal examples. For Question 74 which deals with infant baptism, he gives an extended example of how he explains to his congregation why a baby is being baptized. In many of our congregations that may not seem necessary, but inevitably we’ll have some “long-time visitors” who are baptistic and wonder how any church could baptize a baby! Or, we have new converts who really don’t know much about the pedobaptism-credobaptism arguments, but who have imbibed the baptistic flavor of today’s evangelical worldview and wonder why babies should be baptized. Finally, all our people interact with other Christians who are baptistic and end up having to explain [or, *try* to explain] why in our church we baptize babies. So, it’s a worthwhile chapter for clergy and laity alike.

Will you find things you disagree with in this book? Of course, after all, you didn’t write it! But it is a good book, one that we should read and one we should encourage other members of our churches to read. The chapters are short enough that an individual or family could use it in conjunction with daily devotions for a few months, or to provide some table talk at dinner time. It wouldn’t be amiss to give a copy to pastoral colleagues who know nothing about *The Heidelberg Catechism*. The church owes a debt of gratitude to Kevin DeYoung for reminding her of this great resource she’s had for almost 450 years, and in calling her back to a faithful use of it.

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LORD’S DAY ONE

**ALL ARTICLES SHOULD BE IN JULY 5TH.
ALL BOOK REVIEWS SHOULD BE IN BY JULY 15TH**

Editorial Policy for the Reformation Voice

1. The Executive Committee shall serve at the editorial committee for the Reformation Voice. They shall have the right to select or reject any content for inclusion in the Reformation Voice.

2. Content may be submitted by members, pending members, or members of member churches. The Executive Committee may also solicit the right to (re)print articles from other authors or reviewers whose writings may be of value to the membership of the HRA.

3. In keeping with the purposes of the Association, books reviews in the Reformation Voice shall be reflective of the purposes and standards of the Association.

4. The Reformation Voice shall not be used as a platform to voice views and positions that are particular to a denomination or group. Rather, it should seek to promote those theological positions which are held in common by all who hold to the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of