

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“CATECHISM PREACHING” — LET’S LOVE IT!

IMPORTANCE OF CATECHISM PREACHING

We should all agree on the tremendous importance of such Catechism preaching as described in the previous chapter.

As fruits of faithfulness on the part of the preacher in this respect may be mentioned, first, that the congregation becomes well-informed about the “complete doctrine of salvation.” Thus they will be able to discover the errors of heresies before it is too late. They will even become able to “speak with the enemy in the gate,” a very important part of “evangelism.”

An illustration from experience may illustrate this.

Two young ladies, who had attended our church services for some time already (it was in Holland), applied for membership. Both were communicant members of some Evangelical Group. They wholeheartedly believed, and confessed with joy that Jesus was their Saviour. Then we started to ask some simple questions. One of them had used the words “faith,” “Church,” and more like them. I asked: “What is faith?” The answer was: “Faith is. . . uh yes, faith is something like. . . , ya how do you say that again. . . , it is. . . oh well, you know what I mean. . . .” The same hesitation or rather incapability to give a definition of such central biblical terms showed when I asked: “What is the Church. . . ?” etc. Then she interrupted herself, and said: “Look, that is now exactly the reason why I want to join the Reformed Church. I have heard enough Catechism sermons by now to know that in your Church people really learn to put into words what they believe and I want to learn that too! I want to become a Reformed believer!”

Both were admitted. Some years later one of them was president of the women’s society.

That is one of the results of Catechism preaching, *if* it is done well, and *if* the congregation listens well.

Everyone will, at some time, have met believers from other churches, who love the Lord, but – when it came to discussing the divine truth – were unable to exactly put into words what the LORD teaches us in His Word on any issue.

Only by maintaining Article 68, Church Order, faithfully will we have a message for the world, an answer to ethical, political, and other problems. With *Dr. B.D. Kuiper* we say that the most excellent method of winning others for the Church of Christ is the Reformed truth.

INVALID ACCUSATION

We mentioned some objections against Catechism preaching. One of them, the most serious one, is: "It is not 100% biblical preaching."

This accusation, as well as the one that says that we "brainwash" our children in the catechism class, is invalid.

What else is the Catechism but a sign-post to the Scriptures? Every word is taken from them. For every expression there are reference texts. The Catechism says, all the time, "Don't believe me; go to the Bible!"

This "going to the Bible" should take place in the Catechism classroom all the time. The Bible open, and used!

The same must happen in the P.M. sermon. Children as well as adults have all the time to learn to find their way in the green pastures of the Scriptures. The teaching and preaching of the Catechism is the best way to reach that goal. Not isolated texts but the Scriptures in their unity must be known by every mature Christian.

Thus, partly repeating and/or summarizing, let's conclude with some remarks on:

THE CHARACTER OF CATECHISM PREACHING

It is, and must remain, one hundred percent ministry of the Word. For that reason a minister need not read one or two texts together with the Lord's Day. He is going to weave many more texts into his sermon. Of course, his "public reading of the Scriptures" should be chosen well: a combination of Bible passages which are relevant to the doctrine to be preached. But he is *not* allowed to preach on one such passage, or even on one text. Remember, he has to preach the "sum of Christian doctrine," be it "briefly."

Catechism preaching is only possible because of the unity of the Bible, which is its own interpreter. Then it will become a bulwark against biblicism, fundamentalism, sectarianism, and any other "ism" which pulls the Bible apart and is left with only fragments. "Iedere ketter heeft zijn letter" (every heretic has his text).

The difference between the A.M. sermon and the P.M. sermon is *not*: in the morning God's Word, in the afternoon the Church's confession. But, as has been said before, in the morning: preaching on one "text" in its fullness (a "text" is not "a verse," of course; it may be a whole chapter). In the afternoon: a sermon, not just on some texts, but on the whole Bible regarding one specific doctrine, the sum of which is "comprehended" by the Church in its Creeds.

The Bible is not an encyclopedia of many loose sayings, but fundamentally it is "one text," as the Catechism has it in Lord's Day 6, Question and Answer 19: "The holy Gospel which God Himself has first revealed in paradise, then through patriarchs, prophets, ceremonies, etc., and finally fulfilled by His own Son." *Dr. H. Bavinck* did not hesitate to say that the

Bible is a “system,” taking this word in its real meaning: *su-stema*, i.e., every part “stands together with the other parts.” As *Calvin* said, the New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament opens wide in the New Testament.

This biblical “system” has to receive its due in the preaching, especially in the Catechism preaching.

Every minister, in his study preparing his sermons, discovers that the Catechism, with all its beauty, is only “a pail filled from the ocean.” The “fullness” is not in the Catechism; it is in the Bible. Every Catechism sermon must try to draw as many pails from that ocean as possible. And the longer he has been preaching, the more the preacher discovers that the ocean is still full, and that he will never empty it.

That’s why we are happy with the addition to Article 68, made in 1905: “as much as possible.” Apart from the fact that there are special Sundays on which Catechism preaching may be interrupted (like Easter, Pentecost, etc.), which would already render it impossible to complete the Catechism annually, a minister should have the full freedom to either take only one question and answer at one time, or prepare a whole series on just one Lord’s Day, according to the need of the time and of the congregation.

Aversion to Catechism preaching, as was voiced in Rijsbergen (older readers know what I hint at), and as is sometimes also heard among our own number, must be considered suspect. That aversion cannot base itself on any part of the Catechism, or on Catechism preaching as such, but usually betrays that one does no longer agree with what the Church Order calls “the Reformed Religion.” “None shall be admitted to the Lord’s Supper except those who. . . have made a profession of the Reformed Religion” (Article 61, Church Order). Both words get a capital “R.” What else is “Reformed Religion” but that Religion which, in the age of the Reformation, Returned to the Scriptures!

In his Pastoral Letters to Timothy and Titus Paul uses the words “sound doctrine,” “sound words” no less than eight times. We find this expression nowhere else in his letters. That is significant. Timothy and Titus were called upon to maintain the pure doctrine. “O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’!” (I Timothy 6:20). And again: “Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit Who dwells within us” (II Timothy 1:14).

The only way to do that is the way Article 68, Church Order, shows: regular preaching of the sum of Christian doctrine, the sound doctrine. It should be a joy for every minister of the Word to fully maintain this Article.

If that is done, then we may expect that “the pastor and teacher will equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of

God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful lies. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him Who is the head, into Christ" (Ephesians 4: 11-16).

Catechism preaching? Let's keep it!

Let's love it! Let's improve it!