

***Rediscovering Catechism: The Art Of Equipping Covenant Children*, by Donald Van Dyken.** Published by P & R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2000; 146 pages.

—Reviewed by Elder Tim Hart

Developed societies are characterized by their clamor for temporal satisfaction. Fallen man either is consumed by the quest for personal fulfillment and/or is frantically escaping reality. We must ask ourselves: Is the church also caught in these downward patterns? Reverend Donald Van Dyken emphasizes that the hope offered from the truths of the Bible is the church's only hope. He says, "the world outside and the old man inside attack us daily, wear down our hope, and slow down our efforts. Only when God realigns our hearts to these grand eternal truths are we strong again."

How does catechizing with Biblical creeds fit into this picture? The past provides an answer. Van Dyken writes:

The situation at the time of the Reformation was similar to ours. Ignorance was rampant, the truths of Scripture were unknown or neglected, and the result was confusion of mind and ungodliness of life. Scottish preacher John J. Murray said: "We believe it is the discontinuance of the practice [of catechizing] that we can trace much of the doctrinal ignorance, confusion and instability so characteristic of modern Christianity."

Has the Church lost its potency in the equipping of the Christian family? Van Dyken answers:

The contemporary situation mirrors what the prophet Hosea saw: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). Perhaps we can understand how an anti-intellectual, anti-doctrinal atmosphere has found acceptance. Christians have watched brilliant theologians mutilate, twist, and pervert the Word of God. Disgusted with these ways of turning the truth of God into a lie, some Christians have eschewed learning itself, whether past and present. "Away with theology!" they cry. "Give me the simple gospel!" But is ignorance better than falsehood? Can the great God and Creator whose mighty acts and wondrous character confront us on every page of Scripture be reduced to a scant few beliefs?

Van Dyken directs this work to those who are charged with the scriptural and spiritual nourishment of the covenant children of the flock of Jesus Christ but have not used this valuable tool for the training of these children. As he writes:

Covenant children are those whom God has given to believing parents. Those parents came to be believers as God spoke to them through His Word. Through His Word and Spirit He created saving faith in their hearts. Their response to His Word and Spirit was to answer, "Yes, Lord, we believe. We believe what your church has confessed about Your Word."

*Rediscovering Catechism: The Art of Equipping Covenant Children* gives the reader the biblical mandate, historical precedent, and the logical argument for catechizing the children of the Church. The author says,

At the outset we are confronted with an obvious question: Isn't it a mistake to add man-written books to what God has written? This question deserves serious thought. . . . G. I. Williamson offers that, "The catechism is something like a map. We could ask: Why bother to study a map? Why not just go out and study the surface of the earth instead? The answer, of course, is that one is wise to begin with a study of maps. After all, life is short and the world is very big. . . . It is much the same with the Bible. The Bible contains a great wealth of information. It isn't easy to master it all—in fact, no one has ever mastered it completely. . . . That is why we have creeds. . . . They are a kind of spiritual 'road map' of the teaching of the Bible, already worked out and proved by others before us." The apostle Paul admonished the Corinthian church that they "all speak the same thing" and to be "perfectly joined together in the same mind" (1 Cor. 1:10). Paul is saying, "get your act together! Get unified on what you are going to say about Christ and the gospel!"

A few of the main topics that are efficiently covered in this manual for ministers, lay leaders, and heads of families are the importance of catechism, the history of catechism, how we should teach catechism, and who should teach catechism. The author gives many practical training suggestions that he has successfully employed over twenty years of catechizing covenant children.

Van Dyken challenges the teacher by declaring that "teaching is not merely telling the truth but also causing another to know the truth. Augustine testified that the wise catechism teacher labored to make sure that his students knew and understood the truth, not merely heard it." His challenge is seriously to undertake the formal catechetical training of the covenant children of our church families. When accomplished, the duty will have been seized with great passion and persistence. He writes, "Although some readers may disagree with Richard Baxter when he said, 'I must say that I think it an easier matter by far to compose and preach a good sermon,' we must allow that the proper catechizing of God's children presents a far more formidable challenge than many people realize."

To equip the covenant children of our church families is God's command. The spiritual battle lies ahead of them. As Van Dyken writes:

Conquest is what our Lord's command is all about. We do not take our children through the training ground of the wilderness merely to leave their bleached bones on the border of Canaan or have them whimper on the banks of Jordan. Instead send them into the land of wickedness, of giants and castles, for "they shall be dust beneath your feet," says the Almighty." . . . John J. Murray, who quoted Baxter in his article on catechizing, concluded, "What a blow was actually given in the days when this Scriptural practice held its place in the

Church. And as the true Church of Christ goes forth to battle in our day, as she seeks to storm the strongholds of sin and error, we pray that she may once again be constrained to take up this mighty weapon.”

As we faithfully endeavor to keep this duty to God and the Church we must always remember God’s promise:

And all your children shall be taught by the Lord,  
And great shall be the peace of your children.  
*Isaiah 54:13*