

CONFESSIONAL SECULARISM: DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEAS OF “CONFESSION” AND “CATECHISM” UP TO THEIR SECULARISATION IN MODERNITY

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ABSTRACT

Peculiar – just before and after the 1789 French Revolution secular and even atheist catechisms and confessions appeared. Within a wider project to study these peculiar documents, in this article it is attempted, by way of introduction, to disclose the nature of catechisms and confessions, by returning to the source: the Jewish-Rabbinical pedagogical tradition, as elaborated in the New Testament – the method of question-and-answer and repetition. I argue that the *rabbi-talmid* relationship was also adopted by Jesus and the apostles and is neglected in translations of the New Testament. The development of this genre is followed in main traits via Augustine and the Middle Ages, and it is indicated how philosophical-theological influences (Platonism, rhetoric) changed catechetical practice into scholarly continuous narratives, that have been simplified again in rosaries into daily ritual recitals, like in Kalde's *Kerstenspiegel* just before the Reformation. Luther and Calvin's recovery of New Testament practice is briefly indicated, as well as the worldview or ontological basis of their type of catechisms. It is summarily argued that the new worldview which made “nature” into origin and the “civil, rational human” into the final end of progress, accepted a new divinity – the natural-historical world – that required new confessional documents: a confession of science, of the state, the fatherland, the economy, labour, and so forth. The new catechisms and confessions expressly focused on these.

Keywords: Augustine; Calvin; catechism; Comte; confession; Engels; Galilee; Kerstenspiegel; Luther; Neo-Platonism; New Testament; ontology; positivism; rabbi; Reformation; Revolution; secularism rosaries; Rousseau; Saint-Simon; *talmid*; Voltaire



PROJECT

Before and after the 1789 French Revolution, a peculiar trend showed itself: “catechisms” and “confessions of faith” made their public appearance – a typical *denominational Christian* genre adopted by secularists and atheists. Surprisingly little notice has been taken of this trend.

The term “secularism”, when applied to Modernity, is often misleading. “Secularism” is closely associated with the Western dualism between church and world, since the Renaissance. Initially it was a movement to gain a kind of autonomy for the “temporary” (secular) authority (the state) as opposed to the “spiritual” (thus eternal) authority – this was called “secularisation”.¹

However, the relative autonomy ended up in an inversion of power favouring the state - increased control of the “secular” authority over the “spiritual” authority, in which (like in pre-Revolutionary France) the church became the handmaiden of the state: secularisation developed into “secularism”.² During the era of the Enlightenment, from the beginning of the 18th century especially, an enmity developed against (especially but not only) the Roman Catholic Church – a new religion was proposed: *the universal religion of reason within the civil state, based on Classical pagan models*. This had its roots in Machiavelli’s pagan Classicism, the “Christianising” of this by Hobbes, followed by the Neo-Classicism of Vico (1668-1744) (cf. further Venter, 2013).

I am giving a brief overview of the religious and even “denominational” character of the era from the 1760s to the 1860s, in order to make the following thesis acceptable:

The Neo-Classicist Rationalism of the 18th century (usually called “deism”) but more often than not a “panto-deism” or a pantheism, was a fervently anti-Christian religion with sometimes own rituals and confessional documents. There were, however, also religious atheists who showed similar tendencies.

This research is in line with so many studies of “civil religion” – a term that had originated in Rousseau’s *Du contrat social* (1762 – Book IV: 8) – a religion adopted and imposed by the civil state (see discussion below). In Rousseau this had a universalistic rationalistic elitist nature, standing above the established religions within a state. However, in the Netherlands, during the Batavian Republic, the state adopted the *Hervormde Kerk* as official church – this also happened at the Cape of

1 The terminology, “secular” versus “spiritual” is traditional (general use in the relevant literature); I use it purely for the sake of readability. I do not subscribe to a philosophy based upon such a distinction.

2 “Secularism” – in Protestant circles actually means the denial of the relevance of God in any aspect of social life beyond a narrowed down cultic expression that, supposedly, is a totally private affair. Given the central role of the church in Roman Catholic social thought, the elimination of the church from public life may count as “secularism” in the Catholic mind.

Good Hope and would influence the Afrikaner's conception of church-state-nation relationships for centuries to come.³

If anybody wants a *problem statement*, then it may be formulated as follows: given the evidence from the original documents, one could problematise the pretence of a modern, religiously neutral, secular state, cross-questioning the idea of a neutral state by asking: do we not have convincing documentary evidence to the contrary?

The hypothetical answer could be: though not a populist religion, among the elite leaders, who often imposed themselves in the name of civility, rationality, human rights and humane care, influential documents are to be found that are in a typical counter-religious format, among them "catechisms" and "confession" of faith, that express the faith in human progress by science and technology under rational supervision of the state or an international civil order.

One can say it differently: New gods require new catechisms and new confessional documents, especially when they are connected to Ancient gods. "Natural Law", "Progress", "Utility", "Material Welfare", "History", "Reason", "Science", "Humanity", "Civility" – all of these became the faces of a divine reality with two opposed but unified, supreme powers: Nature as origin (*arché, causa efficiens*) and Rationality as final end (*telos, causa finalis*). The different secular catechisms written in the 18th-19th century each serves one or more faces of this divine reality.

The documents that come to mind are the four catechisms found in Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif* (1764), *Catéchisme de l' économie politique* of J-B Say (1815), the *Catéchisme des industriels* (1823) and the *Nouveau Christianisme* (1825), both of Saint-Simon, the *Communist confession of faith* (1847) by Friedrich Engels, and the *Catéchisme positiviste* (1852) by Auguste Comte. But: one cannot here ignore the one-liner civil religious confession by Rousseau in *Du contrat social* (1762) discussed below. During this era many similar documents appeared, combined with patriotic and cultic symbols – these latter regularly from Ancient Greece and

3 A reviewer referred me to the use of "universalism – individualism" and "part-whole" distinctions, in connection with "rationalism", in Sociology in authors such as Spann (1930). By "universalism" I do not mean the doctrine that views the social whole (such as the state) as the dominant (vis-à-vis the individual citizen). I mean the *ontological* doctrine which says that "humanness" is more important and elevated above Socrates and "being-a-mineral" is more important than being this cornerstone. "Rationalism" in my view, is the doctrine that "reason", whether limited to an individual human being or elevated into a universal power such as in Hegel, directs the universe especially by legislating for it. This is also the case – though limited – in Locke's 1790 theory of archetypes in the *Essay on human understanding* (II, xxx, 1-2). It is true that the distinction between "part" and "whole" has often been confused with "universal" and "individual" – this is because of the long reign of organismic holism. In Modernity individual (as part) has been closely associated with the mechanistic worldview, and holism remained organismic. Hobbes is a good example of both: when he speaks about the social individualistic state of nature, hence only mechanistic metaphors, but when he discussed the state as totalitarian, he uses organismic metaphors (cf. further Venter, 1997).

Rome. It was the era of Neo-Classicism, and in Voltaire's terms everything Classical was the good opposite of criminal Christianity.

The terms "catechism" and "confession" do come from a religious tradition with Ancient roots. They refer to ideas that have had a long development in the history of Western intellectual culture, but outside the range of scholarship – so we do not find ready-made definitions or clear circumscriptions in Ancient times.⁴ I focus on the historical contextual network first.

"CATECHISM": KATÉCHÊOO AND DIDASKOO

The proliferation of catechisms after the Reformation had much the same root: the Reformers wanted to purify the Christian faith from all kinds of deviations: Roman Catholicism, Occultism and so forth, but primarily to bring the children and new members into such a pure faith. Using Latin, symbols and rituals, Roman Catholicism had neglected the emancipation of its members. Luther discovered that local church members knew very little about the Bible and the content of Christianity.

The term "catechism", however, according to a widely accepted *prejudice*, has its roots in early Christianity, when it was under pressure and needed on the one hand to defend itself against all other religions and heresies. It is a prejudice in the sense that "catechism" as a practice had its origins in Ancient Jewish education (cf. further JE, 1906: s.v. *Catechisms*). Though Christian Bible translators do not seem to have linked the two terms, *katéchêoo* and *didaskoo* to what we today call "catechism", the *Jewish Encyclopaedia* (1906) correctly does so with regard to Acts 18:25. The use of these terms almost certainly had their background in the Rabbinical teaching methods in which Jesus and his disciples had been brought up.

Katéchêoo means to "create an echo", or "cause a resound" or "to fill up with the sound of something". In the interaction between humans this also came to mean: "sounding downwards to the other and an echo returning" – used to express *oral teaching and training by continuous repetition through prompting and reciting*. The Jewish cultural background has to be taken into account here: the teacher (it could be a scribe, a law teacher, or a rabbi) would sit on a chair and his pupils gathered around his feet. In the absence of books, the teacher would read, and the pupils memorise and recite – standardised questions and standardised answers inculcated by repetition.⁵

4 Many definitions and circumscriptions are available on the internet, but they are themselves products of later history. I found it worthwhile to use these as directives, but also to study these terms in their Ancient historical networks first – meaning is interaction with context, in practice, in speech and in writing – in order to understand the shift in their use from a denominational religious context to a civil (both local and international) context.

5 One could see something of this in the Old Testament: the Torah had to be taught to the children. Proverbs 3:1-4 gives a good example, but one can also read the speeches of Moses and Joshua, the Psalms (especially the long 119).

The Christian Biblical home page, *Follow the Rabbi*, has a very insightful article, *Rabbis and Talmidim*, (FTR-RT, 2015) on Jewish education in Galilee in Jesus' days. Galilee was on a trade route and the local Jews wanted to ensure that their faith remained pure in the face of pagan influences. Religion implies lifestyle (*praxis*) and due to the absence of pocket books one had to memorise and carry one's book in one's head. In later eras formal catechisms appear to have revived exactly in environments of religious diversity, providing principled knowledge for a "pure" lifestyle and doctrine.

The main steps of Galilean religious education were: (i) a village hired a teacher (*rabbi*) associated with the synagogue (but having no special authority in it) – he would start with *Beth Sefer*, children of 4-5 years old (probably both genders) focusing on the Torah and taught both reading of Scripture and writing. (ii) At some stage the girls moved to house work and the boys learnt the family trade. During this period the more conscientious boys continued their education – *Beth Midrash* – in which they, together with adults, memorised the *Oral Torah* and its interpretations and applications, as well as interpreting it themselves, and they *had the right to question the rabbis*. By about 12 years old, boys participate in their first Passover in Jerusalem (today's *bar mitzvah*). (iii) A very small number of students – called *talmidim*, usually translated as "disciple" – asked permission from a famous rabbi to follow him. Sometimes a rabbi would select men of potential and command them to follow him – which was considered a great honour.

There is much more to a *talmid* than what we call student. A student wants to know what the teacher knows for the grade, to complete the class or the degree or even out of respect for the teacher. A *talmid* wants to be like the teacher; that is to become what the teacher is. That meant that students were passionately devoted to their rabbi and noted everything he did or said. This meant the rabbi-*talmid* relationship was a very intense and personal system of education. As the rabbi lived and taught his understanding of the Scripture, his students (*talmidim*) listened and watched and imitated so as to become like him. Eventually they would become teachers passing on a lifestyle to their *talmidim* (FTR-RT, 2015).

The disciples lived with the rabbi in the way of the rabbi – his teaching became their teaching and his experiences their experiences. FTR-RT argues that Jesus can be seen as one of the supreme rabbis who called *talmidim* to follow him, who had *s'mikhah* Greek: *exousia*, that is "authority"; being one who made his own surprising parables and could touch a number of Scriptural issues by a hint.

What we see in the teaching of the disciples is a reflection of their intimate living and experiencing with Jesus. Translators and exegetes often divorce the New Testament too strongly from its ancient Jewish cultural environment, and do not make it visible that terms like *katéchêoo*, together with the term *didaskoo*, had already acquired a fixed sense related to rabbinic education. This is not exceptional, for it was part of the *talmid's* "imitation of Christ", the supreme rabbi. The fact that

we have received the New Testament in Greek (rather than Aramaic or Hebrew) helped to create this distance, but it is also helpful in the sense of terminology.⁶ Some examples are discussed below:

- Luke 1:4 in its full strength, says: “...so that you may have complete knowledge (*epignoois*), the trustworthy certainty (*tênasphaleian*) about the words *catechised* (*katêchêthês*)...” One has to accentuate “complete knowledge”, “trustworthy certainty”, “catechised”.¹
- Acts 18:24 tells us about Apollos, a Jew, “Alexandrian by birth, a [well]-spoken man, strong in scriptural learning” (he may have been a Scribe; cf. SJLNT, 2015), and then in verse 25: “...he had been catechised (*katêchêmenos*) in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with a boiling spirit and he taught (*edidasken*) precisely (*akriboos*) about Jesus, but he knew only the baptism of John.” Aquila and Priscilla heard him speaking in the synagogue – usually a privilege of highly learned rabbis – and took him home “and they exhibited more precisely the way of God to him”. Here we have somebody in transition from the Jewish to the Christian tradition: completeness and preciseness were apparently quite important for catechists, both Jewish and Christian. Alexandrian by birth may exactly mean trained in the Jewish way, for a strong Jewish community lived in Alexandria at the time.²
- Acts 21:21. Paul is back in Jerusalem, and finds the Jewish Christians concerned about his teaching the diaspora Jews not to fulfil the Torah, though they had already decided that the same rituals need not be upheld by Christians from a pagan background (cf. verse 25): “But it is repeated (*catêchêthêsan*) about you that you teach (*didaskeis*) apostasy from Moses to all the Jews among the pagans, saying that they need not circumcise their sons and not walk the customary ways”. In verse 28 Paul is accused by some Jews in the temple: “... here is the man who teaches (*didaskoon*) all everywhere against our people and the law and this place”.³
- Romans 2:17-21: “But then if you call yourself a Jew, and you stand upon the law, and you boast in God, and you know the will, and you value that which

6 The cultural distance between the Old Testament and the New Testament has been created by a worldview – Renaissance Classicism, strengthened by 18th century Neo-Classicism and even Romanticism. Classical Greek was taught in schools and universities, in South Africa up to the 1970s – and that mostly to students intending to study Christian theology. *Koinê* formed but a tiny part of the curriculum. During the Renaissance there was at least one, utterly failed, attempt to translate the “bad” New Testament Greek into “good”, i.e. Classical Greek. Intuitively, when one translates from the New Testament, you reach for your “Greek” dictionary – that is a dictionary for Classical Greek. One also does so when you work on Latin texts – some from the 17th century! Intuitively one reads the New Testament as if far away from the cultures of the Near East. At the basis of the translator’s consciousness Classicism – the over-appreciation and Ancient Athens – reigns, because of a philosophical worldview developed in the Renaissance.

makes a difference, being catechised (*catêchoumenos*) out of the law, you trust that you yourself is a guide (*hodêgon*) to the blind, a light for those in darkness, a schoolteacher (*paideuton*) for the unintelligent, a teacher (*didaskalon*) for toddlers, having the appearance [shape] of knowledge (*gnoseoos*) and of the truth (*alêtheias*) in the law – you who teaches (*didaskoon*) the others do you not teach (*didaskeis*) yourself.” Paul here simply summarises the way of Jewish education but also the arrogance of the teachers of Torah (the Scribes?), who say they trust in the law and God, but transgress it to such an extent that God is slandered among the pagans.⁴

- In I Corinthians 14:19 where Paul has it about charismatic gifts, in this case that of speaking in tongues, he stresses clarity: “But in the church I prefer five words to the mind so that I may also catechise (*catêchêsoo*) others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.” What Paul wants in church is intelligibility in teaching; not incomprehensible disorderly chanting like pagans calling their divinities.
- Galatians 6:6 is very significant for the double use of *katêchêoo* and the explicit reference to the intimate relationship between the receiver of the word (the *talmid* as it were) and the one who teaches (the rabbi): “Let him, who is catechised in the word, share with the catechiser in all good things.”⁵

The discursive network in which the terms *katêchêoo* and *didaskein*⁷ operate in the texts above, indicates levels of learning from low to high, purity of doctrine and a keen sense of *praxis* under divine law, precise teaching directed at intelligibility but also at spirituality in the broad sense, and the intimacy and interaction between teacher and follower. To the network also belongs the idea of standing upon a reliable bridge, trustworthiness, and especially the practicality of following and teaching *a way*⁸ – the *existential* moment in the relationship between the teacher and the disciple: the *talmid* was not only physically away from home and following the rabbi, but he lived the rabbi’s teaching in interaction with him: saying after him, but doing as he does until he himself was emancipated to be teacher in his own right. The Biblical idea of *truth* and *certainty* (included in Biblical hope), as Anselm of Canterbury has shown in *De veritate* (11th century) is not a *logical* discovery, but an *existential following a true road using a walking stick you can count on* – and is an active *emancipatory* road. In the New Testament the disciples were emancipated into apostles – Paul often says: *what I have received I have transferred to you.*

7 I do realise that my insistence on translating *katêchêoo* with the related “catechise” rather than “teaching” may sound artificial. I did so in order to contextualise the term, and show a continuation within the shift from Galilean education to New Testament Christian education.

8 Existentialists like Heidegger have seen and adopted this. However, in Heidegger following a way is rather living a *question* and passing-beyond, without being able to say that what is left behind ought to have been left behind and without the trustworthiness of the external walking stick and being sure of the right road.

An important term in the network of “catechism” is “confession”. This was the case in Ancient times, but also in the middle Modern era at which this study is aimed. The connection is one of content: the final “exam” following “catechism”, which is the introduction and acceptance of the member into the faith community as an “adult” participant, is called “confession”. But one who participates in a “catechism” as a student, has already shown some interested participation in the relevant community, and therefore “confession” and “catechism”, though not totally overlapping, have been used interchangeably, as in Friedrich Engels’ *Communist confession of faith*, which he himself also described as a “catechism”.

“CONFESSION”

Confessio was a legal term in Classical Latin: *Cassels* (1966) quotes Cicero’s use of it as acknowledgement of one’s guilt or transgression or indebtedness. The term has been developed in Christianity as a public acknowledgement of one’s guilt before and dependence upon God:

1. “Admit, declaration of an error.” In plural: memoirs in which the author admits to his errors and retraces his life; 2. The action of confessing to a priest. 3. Public declaration of one’s religious convictions; Hist. *Confession of Augsburg*, formulated by Melanchthon and presented to Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg. (DUQF, 1963, s.v. *Confession*; transl. author)

The *British Dictionary* (BD) gives more or less the same explanation, and provides the following Biblical references:

1. An open profession of faith (Luke 12:8).
2. An acknowledgment of sins to God (Lev. 16:21; Ezra 9:5-15; Dan. 9:3-12).
3. To a neighbour whom we have wronged (James 5:16; Matt. 18:15).

Concerning the admission of sins before God and pleading for mercy from God, I have consulted the Vulgate translation in order to find the uses of forms of *confiteor* – the Latin verb from which the term “confession” has been derived. The idea of acknowledging one’s sins and asking for forgiveness is present in Lev. 16:2, Ezra 9:5-15, but the term *Confiteor* only occurs in the translation of Daniel 9:4. The context here is Daniel reading the prophet Jeremiah’s predictions of the punishments of Israel for her sins:

And I prayed to my God, and I confessed, and I said: I plead, Lord God, great and worthy of submission, who sustains his covenant... we have sinned... (Daniel 9:4-6, BSV).

The text in Luke in BSV explicitly uses *Confiteor* in the double sense of acknowledging commitment. Here I have also taken the Greek text into account. It is the famous passage about blaspheming against Jesus versus against the Holy Spirit.

I tell you, whoever will acknowledge [*confessus* Greek: *homologēsei*: “will be in agreement with”] me in the presence of human beings – the Son of man will also acknowledge [*confitebur* Greek: *homologēsei*] him in the presence of the angels of God, but whoever refuses [*anêrsamenos*] me in the presence of humans, will also be totally refused [*apanêrsamenos*] before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of man – he will be forgiven; but he who blasphemes [*blasphêmēsanti*: “to slander or speak profanities”] against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven [author’s translation directly from *Biblica Sacra Vulgata* [BSV] and *Novum Testamentum Graece NTG*].

One could say that is the Great Rabbi speaking here from his *human* side, saying that if anyone confesses to be with Jesus the Great Rabbi, i.e. confesses to live in agreement with him in spite of the probability of being found guilty for this, then, when the Son of man is revealed as the Son of God, such a confessor will be remembered in the presence of the angels; and a denial or refusal of the Son of man will be forgiven. There was always some unfathomable ambiguity in Jesus’ revealing and covering himself on earth – it could be forgiven if anyone wavered here. It is as though Jesus foresees the initial agreement but later refusal of the disciples on that night when everything pointed in the unexpected (wrong) direction (remember Peter in the court yard of Caïphas). But the ambiguity in the unity of Son-of-man and Son-of-God does not apply to the Holy Spirit, who was and is not in human flesh – thence the shift from *anersamenos* to *blasphêmēsanti* – to slander the Holy Spirit is to slander God.

The text in James (5:16) is about the power of prayer in sickness and in sinfulness. James advises mutual confession of sins for the sake of inter-cessionary prayer. It does *not* here refer to the reconciliation when one Christian sinned against another (as BD has it, and is found in Matt 18), but in fact a confession, to a fellow Christian, of sins against God – for God provides healing and forgiveness:

Fully confess therefore (*confitemi ergo*; Greek: *exhomologeistheoun*) to one another your sins, and pray for one another, so that you may be saved. The prayer of a just man is powerful and effective. (BSV, NTG, see also NIV)

The Bible thus already had the meanings of “confession” that later came to be in general use:

- i. Acknowledgement of wrongs (in the context of accepting just punishment and asking for forgiveness).
- ii. Expressing one’s beliefs and regrets before others regardless of the consequences.
- iii. Not be ashamed of whom you believe in and what you believe, and that in the public sphere.

Notably, “confession” can here not be separated from the triangular relationship, *I-God-you*, and the bond among these. The texts from Daniel and from James make this clear: God who sustains his covenant is the judge, and confession is *not* simply a

pietistic, single person matter: it is done mutually, that is in an *intimate relationship* with fellows-in-faith, although *publicly* and in great *humility*⁹ (this versus Voltaire's Neo-Classicist claim that it was stolen from the Ancient pagan, secret, mystery religions).¹⁰

In early Christianity, in some churches, post-catechetical confession of faith had apparently been done, question-and-answer format, as if cross-questioning the catechist about his sins; his/her response would imply acknowledgement; he would be absolved by the priest in the name of Christ. The Roman legal tradition thus merged with the catechetical teaching tradition, to produce documents that both *confess to sin and to religious conviction*. This was done in straight-forward, direct questions with direct and simple answers. Once philosophers and theologians began to write high-level catechisms, the doctrinal nature, the systematic intellectual side, began to dominate – since the Alexandrine Church fathers and Augustine catechisms and confessional documents became loci for doctrinal subtleties.

It should be clear, I believe, that in any catechetical-confessional environment in which the relationships between the divine and humans-to-humans-and-things (i.e. the *worldview* framework) is not conceived of in terms of the covenantal love-relationship between God and creatures – howsoever *formally* still catechetical and confessional – inherently the ontological focus relationships will have changed: the consciousness of coherent creatureliness, of dependence and interdependence, of individual and communal sin, is easily replaced with *elitist* imposition of doctrine and praxis; if necessary also violent coercion, as is propagated in Friedrich Engels' *Communist confession of faith*.

FROM AUGUSTINE'S *ENCHIRIDION* TO KALDE'S *KERSTENSPIEGEL*

Changes occurred in catechetical practice in early Christianity. Augustine did try to follow up on the apostles' approach, but was heavily influenced by the Alexandrine Church Fathers – their Middle Platonism strengthened by the Neo-Platonism in his own environment. Searching the internet for the idea of “catechism” in Augustine of Hippo, the first title to pop up is *Enchiridion* rather than *De catechezandis rudibus*

9 When Jesus advised that one has to go into your inner room to pray, he did not intend to say one must avoid publicly confessing and communally confessing one's sins (as some Reformed South Africans held regarding confessing before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission); all he intended to say is that prayer is not an occasion for bragging and insulting others, but exactly for humility (cf. Matth. 6:6). This is also the meaning of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9ff). He was in fact criticising in two directions: on the one hand the “hypocrites” (Pharisees, Scribes, and other haughty people) but also aiming at the pagans, who were babbling loudly in empty, incomprehensible, ritualistic formulas (and later imitated by those “speaking in tongues”).

10 DPP, s. v. *Catéchisme du curé*.

(DCR). He loved dialogues, but always filled them with philosophical-theological expositions.

Somewhere during or soon after the time of the apostles, the most universally accepted confessional document in Christianity, the *Apostolic Creed* or the *Symbol*, with its twelve articles, came into use – it is already found in the writings of the early Apologetic Fathers such as Tertullian (circa 160-225) and his older contemporary, Irenaeus of Lyon. Structurally it set the format for the later creeds and catechisms, namely the sections:

(i) *God the Father* as creator; (ii) *Jesus Christ's* incarnation, crucifixion and ascent into heaven, and his return to judge; (iii) *the Holy Spirit*, including the (iv) universal (“catholic”) church and the salvation of the individual human being. *Over time* (iv) *tended to become prominent*.

Augustine used the *Creed* as basis for catechism, together with the *Lord's Prayer*, in his *Enchiridion* and in DCR – he interpreted these in terms of faith, hope and love. Significantly faith, hope and love have always remained the strong points that secularists, even atheists, tried to adopt from Christianity (as is visible in Auguste Comte's *Catéchisme positiviste* and in some Neo-Marxist works).

DCR provides Augustine's “theory” of catechism. A deacon in Carthage, Deogratias, asked Augustine for advice on how to approach the catechising of new members. Carthage was an urban environment with people from all walks of life: learned ones, soapbox orators, rural people, and of course children. Deogratias' concern was more with the *rhetorical* side of catechising – he was afraid of boring the catechised or wearing them down. He wanted to know: (i) What kind of style does one need? (ii) With what part of Christian doctrine to begin? (iii) Whether there is a limit to length? (iv) Does one need a summary at the end? (v) Must there be an exhortation at the end?

These very questions indicate an influential shift in the method of catechising based on Graeco-Roman rhetoric: it is about expression, introduction, conclusion; much like the way a Roman advocate would present a case in court. The question-answer-format has made way for a speech. Questions are only introduced to determine whether the student follows intellectually (whether his eyes become “glassy”). Augustine's advice is not to be too concerned about rhetorical niceties, but rather to adjust to the audience “even if it means using popular language for the illiterate” (cf. further DCR, 1-2). For an educationist this actually should be self-evident. Martin Luther had a similar idea when he had his small catechism translated from high German into low German. Roman Catholicism's sanctification of Latin was therefore *un-catechetical* and *un-confessional*.¹¹

11 It became a sanctification to the *letter* – even the grammar of the Vulgate became the infallible grammar of the Holy Spirit over against the erratic grammar of Classical Latin grammarians.

Regarding the contents, Augustine prescribes a historical narrative from “in the beginning God created... up to the present state of the church”. He shows a scholarly feeling for such a presentation – one gives the general frame but singles out those details that show the turning points; especially highlights the wonder of God’s love. The aim is that God speaks in the heart of the teacher in order that the catechist ends up expressing the commandment: “. . .to love, from a pure heart, a good conscience and an honest faith.” It is all about inculcating that God loved us first, down to the death of his Son in flesh, that we have to love Him, flee the seductions of the devil, and find strength in the community of the saints. The two short catechism examples at the end of DCR follow this pattern.

The *Enchiridion*¹² (subtitled: *On faith, hope and love*) however, though following the same pattern, is a sophisticated piece of learning: it is an exposition of the Christian faith, guided by the *Apostolic Creed* – the narrative pattern – and *the Lord’s prayer*, to bring the believer to faith, hope and love. It is heavily charged with Biblical expressions and quotes, but all too often the “Neo-Platonist” allegorical exegesis dominates. The *Enchiridion* has always been read as a catechism, but it is almost like a philosophical document written on the basis of creedal “propositions” and the Lord’s Prayer.

Augustine prescribed and adjusted catechism to conform to the type of audience – thus he did not exactly follow the Graeco-Roman tradition of orator’s art (ornamental language in advocacy), yet he adopted much from the tradition of rhetoric and philosophy, deviating from the New Testament way of short questions with direct answers and chose for *a narrative in continuous speech*. In *De magistro* he argues that no human being really teaches – they only disclose what God has inserted in the mind (the doctrine of the a priori that later became the doctrine of natural law). In DCR this was deepened into *giving with joy* what has been given to you, in order to elicit faith, hope and love.

It is not for nothing that Augustine chose the narrative format. These small works are of later date, and he thus recovered some of his earlier work. He grew in the consciousness of the work of God in history; thus his *De civitate Dei* (DCD) became one of his strongest works.¹³ His catechetical works followed the pattern. But he loaded them with texts from the Bible.

A long liturgical tradition for church and home intervened. By 600 a.D. Coptic texts already contain adorations of Mary much like the rosaries of later date. Among many other practices, the nearest to catechetical confessions were the recitals of

12 *Enchiridion* means “handbook”, to be learned as shorthand for practical life. (cf. *Enchiridion* 4) Luther also used this term for his Catechism. The idea of a doctrine-practice shorthand that can be memorised may partially explain why in the 19th century the term “catechism” became attractive in titles about political economy, law, agriculture and botany.

13 Augustine’s historic vision in the *De civitate Dei* provided the onset of the historicising of the ontology in the sense of a civil *causa finalis* for the heathen in the work of Giambattista Vico, followed by Turgot, Kant, and Comte.

Psalms, the *Pater Noster*, and the rosaries. J.D. Miller provides a complete history of the development of the rosaries: intended for use in the monasteries as well as recitals at home. While most of the rosaries are of later date, a number of *Vita Christi* rosaries were recited by 1300 a.D., together with German vernacular psalter and the Lord's Prayer, at the cloister of St Thomas on the Kyll. This tradition formed the basis of for example the *Kerstenspiegel* of Kalde discussed below. Some *Vita Christi* rosaries Christo-Mariological; others were purely Christological.¹⁴

By the 14th century, the Renaissance had already started; or at least the spirit of recovering the sources had shown itself. Petrarca (1304-1374), usually considered a Renaissance thinker, took Augustine very seriously. So did the pre-Reformers, like Bradwardine (1290-1349), Wycliffe (1324-1384), and John Huss (1371-1415). The Franciscan monks and the Mendicant Friars had already begun to preach in the vernacular – so did Meister Eckehardt, the suspect German mystic; and Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) had already published his *Divina commedia* in Italian.

In the later 15th century the “mirror” genre made its appearance. A well-known work is *Elckerlijc* (“Everybody”) – a religious play written in Dutch around 1470, which won the *Rederijker* prize in Antwerp in 1485 and was first printed in 1495. It is a play on how to die, how the soul is to meet with God. It has to take leave of the world: friends, property, knowledge, the senses, have humility – all that can pass with it is virtue. It is still Catholic – the capital sins and the purgatory are still present – but it is rather more Christological than Mariological. Another such a mirror, a complete confession, was written by a monk named Derick Kalde, [German: Dietrich Kolde] entitled *Kerstenspiegel* (*Christian mirror*), in the Dutch of the time – apparently published in Deventer (the Netherlands) between 1492 and 1500 (barely more than two decades before Luther's work). Here is how Kalde formulates his intention with the booklet:

Here starts a clean mirror of the Christian person, which he has to carry with him always as a handbook, for included herein is all that is needed to know for the beatitude of the soul. Searched for and collected from many holy scriptures and for the profit of teachers and beatitude of all people. And to the praise of our dear lord and his blessed mother mary. And the brother who has made this, prays that all people will read this booklet often and direct themselves according to it. And that they will on the holy days read this to the other lay people who cannot read, for they are then sitting idly on the streets, for which they will suffer great pain in the purgatory fire. Also he prays that the parents teach their children to read. Also he desires that men will pray for him, for he commits himself all his days to pray

14 For those interested in catechetics as a theological discipline, it may make sense to study the rosary tradition – the deviation between the Christological ones and the Christo-Mariological ones, may shed light on the development of Luther's catechisms. (cf. further Fisheaters, 2015; Armstrong, 2006.).

for those that have this book and direct themselves virtuously and heartily according to this. (Kalde, 1500: preface)¹⁵

In its very first content chapter it indicates the importance of the “Faith” (the Apostle’s Creed) with reference to Augustine. Kalde’s work is more confessional than catechetical, not the question-answer-format but a continuous text, laden with long passages from the Bible and documents of the Catholic Church. One can see the Rosary tradition in it. Compared to Augustine’s work, and to the later horrible infighting about doctrinal questions that led to so many deaths and violations, Kalde’s little work is refreshingly unphilosophical, low in doctrinal quarrel, although orthodoxly Catholic. Clearly a shift within Catholic circles was in the air: Kalde promoted Biblical knowledge by quoting in the vernacular; he advised public reading of his booklet, and also propagated literacy for the purpose of religion. The booklet is supposed to direct the reader on life’s journey from birth to death:

Here begins the table of this book, indicating what is taught in it – as the three teachings: namely how one ought to believe, how one ought to live, and how one should die. (Kalde 1500, table of contents)

He stuck to this summary, but with many little explanatory deviations, interspersed with standard prayers relevant to the topics discussed. Apart from the prayers to the Virgin Mary, the document is Christocentric with not much visible adoration of the saints. It is a booklet for daily Catholic life, with commitments to read, to recite, pray, confess – morning, noon and night; about sin, God’s punishment, salvation – almost a monkish life at home. There are a few pictures – significantly one of a rabbi-like teacher with his pupils sitting around him; the others mostly of Jesus giving his blood directly from his heart. Soon after, in 1522, Luther published his 95 propositions on the door of the Wittenberg Church.

RECOVERY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT LUTHER AND CALVIN

Luther recovered the New Testament approach – direct questions and answers for ordinary people and local pastors – to introduce them to the basics of faith and the Bible, which he found lacking as he travelled. But he also drew on the Roman Catholic liturgical traditions. His catechetical writings have an occasional (needs) character. Based upon sermons and brief expositions, Luther in 1525 wrote *Ein buchlin for the leyen und kinder* – this for the first time contained the five chapters of the Lutheran Catechism: (i) Commandment, (ii) Faith, (iii) Prayer (including explication of the Lord’s Prayer), (iv) Baptism, and (v) the Lord’s Supper. In later editions a baptismal

15 Kalde was inconsistent in his spelling, but mostly did not spell “god” and “jesus” or “mary” with capitals.

and a wedding formula were sometimes added and sometimes left out; the prayer sections, apparently giving examples of prayers, also wall papers with exemplary prayers (like that of Kalde); and later (from 1529) also sections on confession and absolution. In some editions lessons on reading and writing were included, echoing Kalde's advice to parents (cf. further Zwanepol 2011, 2ff).

I do believe that a historical reason existed for the order of topics in Luther's catechetical documents. The Protestant tradition and its church historians stress the discontinuity between Catholicism and Protestantism and neglect the continuity. Luther's Catechism more or less reflects the mystical road in Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana* (DDC) – but only that part of the road that the *stulti* of *De utilitate credenda* (DUC) walk – from the fear of the Lord given his commandments to the active faith and its concomitant earthly, Scriptural logic. The further mystical steps (beyond Scriptures to a direct mental unification with God) are absent – those followed by the intellectual elite clerical, who teaches the lay from an elevated position (cf. further DDC; DUC; and Venter 1982: 43ff).

Luther eliminated the Augustinian individual elitist part. But it was recovered in Modernity (via the Joachimists' view of history): a much more dangerous form of group elitism, found in the doctrines of Masonics such as G. E. Lessing and the libretto of Mozart's *Zauberflöte*. Modernity's catechetical tradition was rooted in the elitism of the "initiate". "Catechism", in the New Testament and in Luther and Calvin, was exactly not a "Gnostic" initiation into an elite group; in fact the very opposite: a public confession by an individual that he/she knows and accepts the core of the faith and its consequences (even persecution).

John Calvin probably had a more stable situation in a more limited and more literate environment than Luther. His catechism – the Latin edition of 1545 – follows the New Testament format closely, with short questions and very direct answers. It analytically breaks up the issues and at times revisits earlier questions and answers to sustain the line of thought. The topics are more or less the same as in Luther and early Christianity – the Reformation was truly a *re*-formation – but in a different order: an introduction covers the whole; (i) then a chapter on faith via an exposition of the Apostolic Creed, (ii) next another chapter on faith via an exposition of the Ten Commandments; (iii) then a chapter on prayer, that explains how to pray, including an exposition of the Lord's Prayer; (iv) finally the means of grace, namely the sacrament of baptism and holy communion. Calvin's order is a bit nearer to that of Kalde than Luther's.

After the Reformation the use of this type of catechism as confessional preparation became widespread in Roman Catholic and Jewish circles. Almost all of the Modern authors, from Machiavelli and Bacon, then Galileo and Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, the 18th century writers, up to Charles Darwin, had a religious upbringing. And some prominent thinkers among whom Turgot, Malthus and Darwin studied theology. Marx grew up in a rationalist Lutheran environment and

Ecclesiastical Law was still part of his studies in Law; Engels came from a stern Lutheran moralist background. “Catechism” and “confession” were part of their upbringing, and the stern religious dutifulness may have produced a rebellious, stern, reaction. As far as I could trace this history, among secularists Voltaire may have been the first to use the term “catechism” with its traditional question-and-answer format, in his *Dictionnaire philosophique portative* (DPP, 1764).

THE BIRTH OF SECULAR CONFSSIONALISM – ROUSSEAU, VOLTAIRE AND THE 1789 FRENCH REVOLUTION

Note that Voltaire’s *Dictionnaire...* was supposed to be an alternative to the *Encyclopédie française*, which was too large to be “portable”, and also to counteract the atheism of the encyclopedists, especially Diderot. Voltaire himself surely saw his work as deeply religious; he was almost obsessed with the religious aspects of Western thought. This not only found expression in five catechisms, but almost like a modern Augustine he published “homilies” (1767) on topics such as atheism, superstition, and hermeneutics of the Old and New Testament – these in the vein of a scientific¹⁶ approach to the physical world and a moralistic one to the “spiritual”. He in fact *preached*. Voltaire was but one of the pre-Revolutionary philosophers espousing the “religion” of Rationalism, Scientism and Patriotism.

Whereas Voltaire probably was the first to expressly take up the catechetical confessional format, it had been Rousseau, following Machiavelli, Thomas More and Hobbes, who proposed “to transform the state into the real church” by writing a confessional document, overarching all denominations within the state’s ambit. Hobbes had already deified the state, calling it “Leviathan, or rather, to speak more reverently, of that mortal God, to which we owe under the immortal God, our peace and defence” (1651, ch. 12). Arguing that political wars and religious wars have always been the same, Rousseau praises Hobbes (DCS, IV, 8) for having seen the total overlap of cult with state (as in Ancient Rome and Greece), but criticises him for having overlooked that Christianity had an inherent spirit of domination, which would undermine peace in a modern multi-denominational state. He distinguishes between the religion of the individual as a person (*homme*) and the religion of that individual as a citizen (*citoyen*). The “confession” of the state speaks to the “citizen”; this encompasses the “person”:

The dogmas of the civil religion have to be simple, small in number, expressed with precision, without explications or commentaries.

16 “Scientistic” is derived from an –ism, namely “scientism” – a term to be found in F A von Hayek’s work: *The counter-revolution of science*. It expresses the idea that “science” (usually the “natural sciences”) can explain everything thinkable, and ought to be in control of human life and action (usually via the state).

[The positive dogmas:]

- The existence of the divinity, almighty, intelligent, beneficent, with foresight, and provident.
- The future life, the happiness of the just, punishment of the evil, the sanctity of the social contract and the laws.

[The negative dogma:]

- Intolerance: now that there is no [specific national religion] ...and cannot be an exclusive national religion, one has to tolerate all those that tolerate the others, in as far as their dogmas contain nothing against the duties of the citizen (Hobbes DCS IV, 8).

These dogmas, published in 1762, were imposed especially by Robespierre after the 1789 Revolution. Rousseau's civil religion idea was based upon the model of Ancient pagan states that, according to him, assumed a kind of "identity between the divine and the laws of the state". The early and middle modern format of this would then be the laws of the sovereign as a mystical divinity created by the "social contract". Refusal to accept Rousseau's civil confession had to lead to banishment; accepting it and afterwards reneging, to capital punishment. Robespierre took this quite seriously. The elitism of modern rationalism, even in the careful liberal, Kant, shows how the liberal doctrine can become practically contradictory by establishing an authoritarian state. The scholarly elite can ruin all good intentions – emancipatory catechisms became a fashion but from a perspective of group elitism; this in some cases has been more murderous than that which it had fought against.¹⁷ As Rousseau – not a liberal but a rather authoritarian socialistic democrat – expressly said:

... whoever refuses to obey the general will, will be constrained by the whole body – this does not signify anything else but that they will force him to be free... (Rousseau 1762 DCS, I, 7)

Du contrat social appeared in 1762; Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif* in which we find four of the five essays entitled "Catechisme", in 1764-5. Voltaire's catechisms are different in the sense that they are satirical rejections of certain accepted doctrines, but they usually end at more or less the same doctrine as Rousseau's above, accepted already by the 1730s (as is clear from his essay: *Traité de*

17 One has to remember that apartheid had another name: "separate development" – you are behind; catch up on your own without help. The group elitism inherent in it was a heritage from the Batavian Republic and also from British colonialism: the Scottish ministers imported by Lord Charles Somerset were rooted in liberal, rationalistic elitism with its concomitant reduction of cultic religion to emotion, to be controlled by reason via the sentiments – precisely the Scottish heritage led to the idea in the Dutch Reformed churches of separate churches for blacks, since the ordinary services were considered way beyond their understanding.

métaphysique, 1734). One must remember that in those days different types of secret societies professed initiation ideas based upon Ancient mysteries, but the doctrines, those published at least, were all quite similar: a practicable rationality anticipating Kant's *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1975c) and a somewhat subordinate scientific rationality somewhere in between Descartes and Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1975b).

Voltaire's catechisms show these tendencies too: he even espouses the fatherhood of the state over human life, religion and education, for the sake of enduring peace (cf. *De la paix perpétuelle*, 1769). But these are to be discussed in a following article.

CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVE – A TREND TO BE RESEARCHED

The new secularism had thus adopted a deeply religious direction and leant against religious ways of teaching and announcing its doctrinal stance. Catechisms and other creedal documents flourished for at least six to seven decades, and although such clearly devotional terms are no more in use, the styles and doctrines are still around. Nobody less than the “post-modern” French thinker, J.F. Lyotard, noted this in his booklet, *Instructions païennes* (1977), arguing that the liberalised Communism of the late 1970s was still an attempt to impose justice from above and therefore not yet completely pagan.

Certain articles in the 1789 Revolution's *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (DDHC, 1789) show clearly the influence of Rousseau's doctrine of the General Will and state absolutism. It is a “solemn” declaration, recognising the “inalienable and sacred” “natural rights” of “man” as “members of the social corps” based upon “simple and incontestable” principles. The rights defended as absolute are “freedom, property, security, and resistance against oppression”. The more sloganist “freedom, equality, brotherhood” is not explicitly found in this form in the *Déclaration* itself. Noteworthy is the way in which the *Déclaration* relates these natural laws to the divinity: it says that the National Assembly “recognizes and declares in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of Man and Citizen”; also that the “principle of all sovereignty essentially resides in the Nation”, and the negative is even stronger: “No corps, no individual can exert any authority that does not emanate from it”.

The discourse of the French *Déclaration* is clearly in the line of Rousseau and Voltaire – there is a Supreme Being (the ancient All-seeing Eye that watches – *Ra/Helios/Sol*), but the real divine power lies in the natural rights as expressed in the Political Person – the Nation. It is related to the *U.S. Declaration of Independence*, its more liberal predecessor.

The real hinge term here is that of “natural law” or “laws of nature”. One ought to distinguish at least two meanings of the term: firstly the Medieval one, according

to which the term “nature” includes all things God created (including the “rational”) as opposed to the “supernatural” or sphere of God’s direct intervention after creation; secondly the reductionist Cartesian one, that reduced “nature” to the sub-rational. However, the 18th century panto-deist *philosophes* still insisted that it is “divine law” that speaks through the sub-rational into the rational.¹⁸ The so-called “historical natural law” was usually an idealistic recovery of “natural law” from the sub-rational – a double game played quite well by Kant (cf. 1975a). Further research into the term “catechism” in Modern secularism depends most seriously on this shift in the meaning of “nature” and “natural law” in Modernity.

In Europe in the aftermath of the French Revolution, a number of catechisms appeared. The 1789 *Déclaration...* and all the accompanying legislation avoided certain issues: (i) only the propertied class got active citizenship; and then (ii) only males, in spite of female revolutionary activism; (iii) the ease with which the whole revolution fell on its face in the Robespierrian reign of terror and the Napoleonic Neo-Classicist single “consulship”; (iv) the shift in the allegiance of the remaining nobility to the middle class; (v) the acceptance of the doctrine of the enlightened monarchy; (vi) the reactionary patterns of thought among the powerful beyond the borders of France; (vii) the intransigent theology of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. All these issues are observable in the succeeding confessional documents.

A notable early one came from the pen of Jean-Baptiste Say (1767-1832) *Catéchisme d'économie politique* (1815), a scientific¹⁹ introduction to economics for the lay. At least since Turgot the doctrine of a material base that determines a mental superstructure had taken form in Physiocratic terms (Turgot 1766). Soon after, in 1823, Claude-Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) published his *Catéchisme des industriels* and two years later, in 1825, his *Nouveau Christianisme*. Both these works are catechetical, and propose to elevate the working class to the governing position. The “class” concept had already been formulated by Turgot some decades before (cf. Turgot 1766, ch. 7ff). In *Nouveau Christianisme* he gives a religious base to this: he argued that all the forms of Christianity of his day were heretic, for they did not love the majority class, the workers, as their brothers, as instructed by Christ – they had to create a caring church-state for workers.

One catechism that became famous as a political manifesto, was the *Communist confession of faith* (1847) – adopted on the last day of the Congress of the League of the Just in London. Friedrich Engels hi-jacked the Congress to establish the Communist League and wrote the *Communist confession of faith*. In 1848 The

18 This is the reason why Marx and Engels rejected the conception of “natural law” – it still supposed a divinity. They therefore opted for a double *Hineininterpretieren* [reading in]: Engels on the one hand read the “human” (planning) back into the amoeba; the two of them then, using Hegelian dialectical logic as their method, read the sub-rational into the historical and produced a deterministic, personal, divine history in the superstructure. (cf. further Engels, *The part played by labour...* 1876; also Engels and Marx *Manifest...* 1848).

19 See footnote 16 above.

Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei made its appearance with Marx and Engels as authors.

One of the most forgotten, yet influential, catechisms was the *Catéchisme positiviste* of Auguste Comte (1852). It is a summary of Comte's philosophy in question-and-answer format, in which Comte plays the priest for his own humanistic religion, based upon faith, hope, love, and a law order – and attempts to bring the physical and moral together via the laws of the intellect. This religion is based upon the great works of a person, which will unify that person with history after death. The title page contains the following:

Western Republic. Order and Progress. Live for others. Positivist catechism or summary of the universal religion in eleven systematic treatises between a woman and a priest of HUMANITY, by Auguste Comte... Love as a principle. Order as a base. And progress as aim. Paris: at the Author. And at the Library of the Corps of bridges and of mines. October 1852. Sixty-fourth year of the great Revolution.

Every one of these words have philosophical and religious significance: Eurocentrism, the faith in progress based upon a fixed order, a catechism, a priest teaching a woman, the religion of humanity; also technicism given the *Corps* that are addressed in this catechism.

The ontological shift in Modernity to sub-rational “nature” as *arché* created a serious tension: how to be a naturalist and a humanist at the same time? Marx and Engels followed Hegelian dialectics – “nature” in some sense produces its “opposite”. Comte tried Quesnay's fusion, allowing history to take its course by focusing on the human rather than the animal. A religion of humanity – a being unto death.

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