

# Post-Reformation Reformed sources and children<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*This article suggests that the topic “children” received considerable attention in the post-Reformation era – the period of CA 1565-1725. In particular, the author argues that the post-Reformation Reformed sources attest of a significant interest in the education and parenting of children. This interest not only continued, but intensified during the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation when much thought was given to the subject matter. This article attempts to appraise the aim of post-Reformation Reformed sources on the topic “children.”*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The theology of the post-Reformation era, which includes Puritanism, German Pietism and the *Nadere Reformatie* – a Dutch *intra*-ecclesiastical movement – has been appraised as a period of theological divergence from the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation (Corley, Lemke & Lovejoy 2002:119).<sup>2</sup> More precise, its theology has been characterized as dogmatic mostly rigid and polemic; that is an abstract doctrine with little or no regard for practical significance. Furthermore, the post-Reformation concern for doctrine has been regarded as leading to the relapse to Scholasticism and the neglect of the vitality of the Reformers’ humanism, such as John Calvin (1509-1564) (Ritschl 1880:86; Van der Linde 1976:47; Van’t Spijker 1993:13-14 & Graafland 1961:66). In addition, these and other scholars note an aberration in the theology of the *Nadere Reformatie* from the sixteenth-century

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper presented at the annual meeting of Church Historians of Southern Africa, University of Stellenbosch, 16-18 January, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> For studies that identify the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy with “dead” dogmatism and reaction to it, see, for example, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Hervormde Kerk*, by Ypeij and Dermout; *Geschichte des christlichen Lebens in der rheinisch-westphalischen evangelischen Kirchen*, by Goebel; *Das akademische Leben des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts mit besondere Beziehung auf die protestantisch-theologischen Fakultäten Deutschland*, by Tholuck; and *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der reformierten Kirche, namentlich der Niederlande*, by Heppe.

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Reformation theology. “One of the after-effects of the Synod of Dort (1618) was a rigid dogmatism in ecclesiastical and theological circles. In some instances faith was reduced to an arid system of doctrine” (Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:12).

Despite such appraisals about post-Reformation theology, more recent historical-theological assessments suggests a continuation, rather than a discontinuation of the intellectual thought of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation into the seventeenth- and perhaps to the early period of the eighteenth century (Muller 2003:60-83). The continuation rest herein, that certain intellectual trajectories can be traced via sixteenth-century Protestantism to the late medieval and particular to the Patristic era. In this context it has been argued that the *ad fontes* ideal of renaissance humanism intensified, for example in the field of exegesis, throughout the post-Reformation era – being it Lutheran or Reformed as it is also noted by some seventeenth-century Roman Catholics Bible commentators, such as Augustine Calmet (1676-1734) (Calmet 1724). As a result, and in particular for post-Reformation reformed theologians – also called the orthodox Protestant scholastics, Biblical exegesis and exegesis of Scriptures became foundational for the formulation of doctrine leading to practical implications. These resultants, of doctrine and practical concern, are probably a prolongation of the medieval concern of the nature of theology. One of the debates inherited by the Protestant scholastics from medieval theology concerns the character and purpose of the discipline as theoretical or practical.<sup>3</sup> Like the medieval doctors, the Protestant orthodox argued the question of whether theology was theoretical or practical or, if a “mixed” (*theoretico-practical*) discipline, whether it was more theoretical or more practical. The answer to this question is reflected in many seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox systems and designs of theology (Geesink 1897:29-45). Moreover, like the question itself, the meaning of the terms arose out of the medieval theological tradition, and not merely out the tradition of the scholastic system but also out of the tradition of piety and mysticism.

It is here, on the cross-roads of understanding of Scripture and piety by the post-Reformation reformed theologians, where one is interested to probe the topic “post-Reformation sources and children.” For example, the format of Lutheran and Calvinistic catechetical instruction for children,<sup>4</sup> probably arising

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<sup>3</sup> *Theoria* may be defined as a teaching (*doctrina*) known in and for itself and *praxis* as a teaching known for the sake of the end toward which it directs the knower. Cf Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:341.

<sup>4</sup> M Luther, *Kleine Katechismus* (Wittenberg 1529); Ph Melanchton, *Kurze Auslegung der zehn Gebote* (Frankfurt 1527); idem, *Kurze Auslegung des Vaterunsers*, (Frankfurt 1527); M Bucer, *Das Büchlein für die Laien und die Kinder und seine Bearbeitungen* (Strasburg: Ording 1525); J Calvin, *Instruction et Confession de Foy* (Geneve: Olivier 1537).

from the medieval books of confession, was widely adopted and enhanced in the churches throughout Europe (Verboom 1987:356-366). Moreover, the content of these instructions intended to foster a Biblical knowledge applied in the Christian life. The question may arise: do similar instructions of the post-Reformation era continue this intention. This question is relevant in particular as scholarly literature on the seventeenth-century post-Reformation has increased significantly over the last two decades.<sup>5</sup> The attention given to this period originated in Germany (Goebel 1849; Tholuck 1854 & Heppe 1879) and culminated in the Netherlands (from the late nineteenth century [Los, Krull, Visscher, Proost 1880] and into the twentieth century with scholars such as Van der Linde, Graafland, Van Asselt, and De Reuver) (Van der Linde 1954:215-225). Furthermore it expanded internationally (South Africa: Hofmeyr, Raath; USA: Muller, Beeke, and England: Trueman) and widened, particular with Dutch scholarship, the scope from theology to other areas of interest such as philosophy (Verbeek 1991:211-223), literature (Strengholt 1976), printing of books (Verkruisje 1991:225-242), and last but not least “children”. Furthermore, the recent and rising number of reprints of seventeenth-century works on children, including translations into the English language, may heighten the interest of our subject matter. Previous research paid attention to topics such as child-rearing or parenting, children’s education and child-death in the seventeenth-century (Verboom 2002:35-51).

Nevertheless, we observe a lack of attention in the scholarly literature addressing the question of the *aim* of these post-Reformation sources on children. This quest may also contribute to the aforementioned continuity/discontinuity debate. Therefore, a brief survey of these sources will introduce our subject – attempting to answer what kind of attention was given to children in the post-reformation era. Secondly, a descriptive analysis will be provided of some selected works – attempting to characterize these sources. Finally, I conclude with a preliminary appraisal to what the aim was of these seventeenth-century writings.

## 2. SURVEY OF POST-REFORMATION SOURCES AND CHILDREN

A review of works, published by the proponents of German Pietism, Puritanism and the *Nadere Reformatie*, show a diverse spectrum of interest for children. Focusing on early German Pietism, one notes the rise of catechetical books for the instruction of children after the 1563 publication of the Heidelberg Catechism (Osiander 1567 & Matthaeus 1564). Children in

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<sup>5</sup> See for a comprehensive overview Huisman, F W (2001). *Bibliografie van het gereformeerd Pietisme in Nederland to 1800*. Woudenberg: Uitgeverij Op Hoop.

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school and church were taught in Bible and doctrinal knowledge. Later German Pietism continued the teaching of Scripture and its doctrines and extended its attention considerable to the total well-being of children. It was August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) who was impressed by some Pietists instructing even three-year old children in spiritual matters – “an experience that helped shape Francke’s lifelong dedication to religious instruction at all levels of life” (Gritsch 2002:147) Moreover, under his leadership the attention to children turned also to building orphanages – providing shelter, food and clothing and primary schools – for general education and religious education to care and form students with a Biblical foundation for practical Christianity (Gritsch 2002:148). In sum, the focus on children in German Pietism attained to religious education and practical skills to function in society. Turning to Puritanism, and first the New England Puritans, one may observe their lead in many respects. For the first time in American history,<sup>6</sup> it were the Puritans who formed the first formal school in 1635 – and free schooling offered for all children – called the Roxbury Latin School. Four years later, the first College was established – Harvard in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Normally, children aged 6-8 attended a “Dame school” where the teacher – usually a widow, taught reading. Since the arrival of printing press in 1638, Boston became around 1700 the second largest publishing center of the English Empire. The Puritans were also the first to write books for children, and to discuss the difficulties in communicating with them. At a time when other Americans were physically blazing trails through the forests, the Puritans efforts in areas of study were advancing the country intellectually. The Geneva Bible stimulated their corporate intellect by promoting discussions of literature. Greek classics of Cicero, Virgil, Terence and Ovid were taught, as well as poetry and Latin verse. They were encouraged to create their own poetry: religious in content and often related to children. Illustrative are the works of Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) – considered as one of the earliest feminist and poet in the American colonies (Hensley 1967) and Taylor, both who wrote very moving poetry about the deaths of their children (Earle 2001:144). Further, the New England Puritans wrote about their children – who, like other children, enjoyed playing. Their games, we learn, included various forms of tag: stone tag and cross-tag; singing games such as *London Bridge is falling down* and *Here we go round the Mulberry bush*; winter games including “coasting” or sledding and ice-skating; and boys games included kite-flying, dancing round May-pole; marbles, fishing, cricket, kick-ball, and various other games of ball. Only foot-ball was sternly disapproved (Earle 2001:144). The English Puritans

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<sup>6</sup> Here we follow closely Kizer’s argument. Kay Kizer Website accessed on September 20, 2005, [www.nd.edu/~rbarger/www7/puritans.html](http://www.nd.edu/~rbarger/www7/puritans.html).

varied in success – measured by number of publications, even with the publications of catechetical instruction for children. Some works have been published once, and found their way to dusty and rare bookrooms of university libraries – for example; Scarbrough’s *The summe of all godly and profitable catechismes, reduced into one. Or a mite cast into the treasury of the church, and bequeathed as a spirituall legacy vnto children, and to all poore ignorant soules ... And more specially intended for the instruction and building vp of mine owne family, and people of St Georges parish in Buttolph-Lane, London*, (probably the title is discouraging enough to consider a reprint). Others, such as Dorothy Leigh’s *The mother’s blessing: Or, the Godly counsaile of a gentlewoman ... left behind for her children* went through ten printings in six years.<sup>7</sup> It was Richard Baxter in England, who turned his attention to the parents of children. His *Duties of parents for their children* (Baxter 1830:449-454), provides a wide interest and advice to parenting. Although his main theme of the book is the religious instruction and salvation of children, he also was concerned about the children’s physical well-being. Baxter (1636-1699) wrote, “For sports and recreations, let them be such, and so much, as may be needful to their health and cheerfulness” (Baxter 1830:465). In summary, we observe that the Puritans, both from England and New England, gave ample attention to children, in particular to catechetical instruction and parenthood. Finally, we turn our attention to the Dutch post-Reformation reformed movement, the *Nadere Reformatie* – once and partly formative of the Reformed theology of early South Africa. Theologians such as, Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676), who gave catechetical instruction to orphanages in Utrecht on Tuesday morning’s before proceeding to the university to hold scholastic disputations, Jacobus Borstius (1612-1680), Johannes de Swaef (1665-1720), Johannes d’Outrein (1662-1722) and Petrus Wittenwongel (1609-1662), who in particular wrote a major work on the family, including the relationship of parents and children (Wittewrongel 1655), are but a few of the many academics and ministers who showed a wide interest in children (d’Outrein 1696), including child-birth, breastfeeding, child-game playing,

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<sup>7</sup> The reprints took place between 1621-1627. According to Harvey Darton, the Puritans produced the first children’s books in England – that is, books not intended to be used in school, but for leisure reading. Relying on a dour pedagogy, Janeway’s *A token for children*, first published in 1672 and reprinted well into the middle of the nineteenth century, leads its readers through a gallery of terrifying death-bed scenes. Darton however says that the woodcuts were clearly expected to have aesthetic value in showing, for example, a child without terror contemplating a corpse in a coffin. John Bunyan’s originally unillustrated *Divine emblems* (1686) uses poems to draw spiritual lessons from homely (and sometimes odd) objects such as a top, stinking breath, or an hourglass. The verses of Issac Watts’ *Divine songs* (1715) were composed of easy, often pretty lines, which gave more emphasis to praise and thankfulness as suitable religious emotions for a child, and displayed gentleness new for his time, though the Puritan emphasis on the innate wickedness of children is still evident.

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child-bible knowledge, schooling, parenting, and child death.<sup>8</sup> However, it was Jacobus Koelman (1630-1703) and Abraham Hellenbroek (1658-1731) who made at this point the *Nadere Reformatie* unforgettable. The former – as translator of many Puritan works, marked with his *Duty of parents*, in particular, the attention of the *Nadere Reformatie* to children and their parents – a work that went through several reprints and a recent translation into English. The latter, with his publication of 1706 called *A specimen of divine truths* that is still in print and used in the Netherlands, USA and Canada. In summary, like the German Pietists and Puritans, the *Nadere Reformatie* paid considerable attention to the catechetical instruction of children. However, with the Puritans, the *Nadere Reformatie* writers also had a deep interest about issues related to parenthood. Our initial survey of post-Reformation works shows that probably two major concerns can be distinguished. First, these sources attest that the transmission of Biblical doctrine is of utterly importance. Secondly, the attention to assist parents in educating their children or child-rearing seemed likewise imperative. These two identified distinctions, then, in post-Reformation literature on children invites for a more in depth-view to what the aim is of such writings.

### **3. DESCRIPTIVE-ANALYSIS**

We restrict our succinct descriptive-analysis to two writings of the post-Reformation reformed era, and in particular of the *Nadere Reformatie*: Abraham Hellenbroek's *Voorbeeld der Goddelijke waarheden* or *A specimen of divine truths* and Jacobus Koelman's *De Plichten der ouders* or *The duties of parents*. The former is a representative work to gain some insight in the catechetical instruction for children and the latter may also sheds light on our quest to the aim of these seventeenth-century works on children.

Hellenbroek's<sup>9</sup> work contains twenty chapters that describe the Reformed teaching in question and answer format. Each answer is supported by a reference to Scripture. Elsewhere, I have argued that the so-called proof-text theory in post-Reformation reformed theology is no longer tenable (Neele 2005:134-135). A closer look to these chapters reveals the structure of the six Reformed *loci* of theology, preceded by a kind of prolegomena – dealing with

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<sup>8</sup> See for a seventeenth century overview of works Benthems, H L (1698). *Holländischer Kirch-und Schulen Staat*. Frankfurt und Leipzig: Nicolaus Försters.

<sup>9</sup> Abraham Hellenbroek (1658-1731), studied at the Amsteram and Leiden Academy and served as pastor the congregations of Zwammerdam, Zwijndrecht, Zaltbommel and Rotterdam, the Netherlands. He was an able exegete and wrote commentaries on the book of Isaiah and Old and New Testament texts. Raath suggests that Hellenbroek, with Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711), was one of the major influences of Reformed theology in the Cape colony. Cf Raath, A W G "Abraham Hellenbroek se werk".

the knowledge of God and Scripture: Theology proper, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology and Eschatology of which the doctrine of Christ and salvation (salvation proper and sanctification) is a major part of the work. The entire work of approximately seventy pages closes with a brief treatise on the topic of the covenant: the *Council of Peace*, and a polemic against non-Reformed teachings. The reading of this work gives the initial impression that Hellenbroek's aim was the transmission of Biblical doctrines alone, as Hellenbroek states: "seek to memorize this brief, complete; instruction book as you're A B's ... increasing your knowledge" (Hellenbroek 1998). Though this is certainly one of the objectives, Hellenbroek had more in mind. When one read the preface to the work, he advised how to study. In summary, he urged for reading, prayer and meditation (Hellenbroek 1998:3-5). Here, the medieval pattern of the proper understanding of Scripture comes to mind: a life of reading, prayer, and meditation – the *Lectio Divina* of the late medieval time, stimulated by Bernardus. The Christian Scriptures is to be read (*lectio*) and followed by prayer (*oratio*). The meditation (*meditatio*) concentrated on the content of the Biblical text (Neele 2005:142). Likewise, for Hellenbroek, the questions and answers should be a prayerful and reflective reading leading to "offer body and soul unto the Lord, with longing and conviction, that the Lord so use, fulfill, govern and work in them as will honor Him most" (Hellenbroek 1998:3). The study of Biblical doctrine, thus, for Hellenbroek is not a theoretical endeavor alone, it must lead to the *praxis*. He states, "it is your duty to manifest those truths, since it is a doctrine that leads to godliness .... [they] do not consist in words only ... but be practiced." In short, Hellenbroek's instruction for children, in preparation for confession of faith (Hellenbroek 1998:1), aimed for a *theoretico*-practical theology – offered at the comprehension level of children. Children were acquainted early on with the foundational structure and content of Reformed theology: the aforementioned six *loci* of theology and could continue their studies in theology to university level still recognizing the basic contours of Reformed theology. This suggests a high degree of compatibility within the teachings of the Reformed doctrine for all age groups. Further, it may be observed that Hellenbroek's instruction was not only to be studied around 1700 – even today, there are children of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, who acquaint themselves with the same material, which instruction format and approach to theology dates back via the Protestant Reformation and medieval church to the early church. Its aim – a *theoretico*-practical theology for salvation and sanctification – for doctrine and life, underscores the continuity and catholicity of the Hellenbroek's teaching with the sixteenth-century and medieval doctors as well as the Patristic Fathers of the church.

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We now, turn our attention to the second major aspect of post-Reformation reformed writing on children: parenting. For this, a succinct descriptive-analysis of Jacobus Koelman's *The duty of parents*<sup>10</sup> – the title reminds of Richard Baxter's work *The duties of parents for their children*. In the dedication to his congregation, Koelman outlines his main ideas on parenting. In summary, his main concern is to direct parents to their important responsible task of bringing up children: in particular, the task of leading children to a godly life (Koelman 1749). This admonition is an echo of Koelman's earlier work *Catechism on the practice of Godliness* – a work on practical Christianity. In the *Duty of parents*, however, he addresses "rules" for expecting parents, teaching the little ones, instruction of children, teaching them: virtues, how to overcome sin and to pray.

With respect to the structure and content of Koelman's *Duty of parents*, one should not think of a writing of a theory of parenting in the modern sense of the word: thus, a systematic approach regarding pedagogic conduct. On the other hand Koelman's writing is practical instruction to parents providing many examples how they should bring up their children. For example, on prayer, Koelman offers six rules how to teach a child to pray, including, the words to address God, confession of sin, intercession for others, thanks and praise (Koelman 1749:80-106). The book offers, as a whole, attainable and implemental guidelines for parents: how to handle misbehavior, patience in teaching children, on parent-child relationship, and when to admonish or praise a child. N F Noordam (Koelman 1982:18-19) – a historian of pedagogy, who can hardly be considered an adherent of the *Nadere Reformatie* theology, appraises this work with high marks. He regards Koelman in his approach, as one of the figures who laid the foundation for Dutch educational theory. In this context, he praises the *Duty of parents* as a standard work of Christian pedagogy, rating it better than August Hermann Francke's book *On the education of youth for godliness and wisdom*. Noordam was intensely struck by Koelmans's great interest in children – children were treated as children, not as miniature adults. Parents are assisted in raising their children with this understanding, stimulation and favoring an organically connected family life.

This approach by Koelman, specific on the relationship between parents and children which can be characterized as a "humanization of human relations", a matter in which Koelman, according to Noordam, was far ahead

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<sup>10</sup> Jacobus Koelman (1632-1695), studied at the University of Utrecht, obtaining a doctorate in theology in 1655. He served as minister of the Dutch embassies at Copenhagen and Brussels and was pastor in Sluis, the Netherlands. A translator of many theological works of English and New England Puritans, he is one of the most influential representatives of the *Nadere Reformatie*.



of his time. The value of the *Duty of parents* is for the parent and child one's personal attitude in life to his/her neighbor and underscores the practical dimension of Koelman's approach to parenting: the art of living to God.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

I conclude my brief survey of post-Reformation sources and succinct acquaintance with two works from a Reformed perspective on children by placing them in the wider context of post-Reformation reformed studies.

First, the example of Hellenbroek and Koelman suggests that, though these writings are different in genre and written for different readers, contains a single purpose: a Biblical-reformed teaching with a practical dimension – a living to God. This teaching may reflect the widespread adopted definition of seventeenth-century Reformed theology: *theologia est doctrina vivendi Deo*. Further, the *theoretico-practica* aim of the teachings of Hellenbroek and Koelman may also reflect the continuity – rather than a discontinuity with the Protestant Reformation and the medieval theologians.

Secondly, if the two identified themes in these post-Reformation sources, that of catechetical instruction and parenting are correct, one may observe an intensification of these themes compared to the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation suggesting, in this respect, that the theology of the post-Reformation is a positive working out of the former. Nevertheless, more study is required to determine the degree of this identified continuity. For example, in respect to catechetical instruction, Verboom suggests a shift from Calvin's theory-practice paradigm to a more emphasize on theory alone in the *Nadere Reformatie* (Verboom 1987:300).

Thirdly, the writings of Hellenbroek and Koelman make it no longer attainable to consider such works of the seventeenth-century as dogmatic and polemic: for them doctrine arises from Scripture and should be practiced.

Finally, the (w)hol(e)-istic approach of the orthodox Protestant scholastics to children – the attention to their material, physical and spiritual well-being attests to foster a unity of *leer* and *leven*: doctrine and practice.

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