

THIRD EDITION

understanding  
what you confess

robert de moor

# QUEST OF FAITH

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Grand Rapids, Michigan

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*To Margo, my dear partner on this journey of faith*



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# Introduction

*This brief overview of Reformed teachings is intended primarily for those of high school age or above who want to “think through” and deepen their faith.*

## AUDIENCE

*Quest of Faith* is especially aimed at those about to profess their faith or prepare for confirmation. Many will read and discuss this book as part of a pre-profession or pastor’s class. Others will use it to guide their personal study and reflection as they prepare to take the next step in their faith journey.

The quests that appear on these pages are questions that might be asked during a profession of faith or confirmation interview. The suggested answers are not the only “right” answers, but they should promote thinking and talking about the questions and searching for one’s own answers.

*Quest of Faith* is also an excellent resource for council members who are about to participate in a profession of faith or confirmation interview. It will help them ask the kinds of questions that elicit knowledgeable and sincere responses.

However, *Quest of Faith* needn’t be used exclusively in those settings. Churches might choose to present this book to inquirers to help them learn about the Reformed/Presbyterian faith; they’ll appreciate its clear format and simple explanations. Persons from non-Reformed traditions who have recently joined the church will find *Quest of Faith* a useful guide to the beliefs of their new congregation and denomination. Adult church school classes will profit from taking a deeper look at their faith as they discuss many of the questions raised in this book. And, of course, the book also lends itself to personal study by anyone seeking to brush up on the content of our Christian faith.

## FORMAT

The sixty-five quests in this book have been selected not only to prepare persons to profess their faith but also to deepen their insights and faith-responses to Reformed Christianity. Each quest offers several possible answers for personal reflection or for discussion. The answers conclude with “The Church Confesses,” an example of how the church’s creeds, confessions, and other formal statements of faith have responded to each question. Most of the selections are from the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Belgic Confession; several are from *Our World Belongs to God*, a contemporary testimony of faith of the Christian Reformed Church, and *Our Song of Hope*, a contemporary statement of faith of the Reformed Church in America.



“The Church Confesses” is followed by “Exploration Questions” designed to stimulate readers to think beyond standard answers and pat phrases to deeper, personal responses. An additional section, “Check It Out,” provides a sample of Bible references for further study. Participants may want to use these references for personal devotions during the week.

## GROUP SESSIONS

*Quest of Faith* has a flexible format that can be adapted to meet the needs of a variety of classes and groups. Its sixty-five quests are divided into seven major topics, each with ten quests, except for the final section, which has five quests. Most groups using the material will probably meet seven times (to cover the seven topics); groups preferring a slower pace can take five quests per session, for thirteen sessions; groups desiring an in-depth study could take only one or two quests per session, for up to a full year of weekly sessions.

Leaders should adapt the material to the interests and abilities of participants. Pre-profession or confirmation participants should not be given the impression that they must have an instant answer to all sixty-five quests; the intent is for the participants to think through their faith, not memorize it. Assignments of quests to be read at home prior to each session should be reasonable for all participants.

Leaders should select questions for discussion that are most important and interesting for participants. Questions that participants have on the material they’ve read should get top priority. The “Some Possible Answers” section provides a way for participants to review church teachings in response to each Quest. During the session the leader may ask participants to talk about any of the possible answers that resonated with them, and why. Participants might also offer questions raised by those possible answers or add other answers that came to mind. The “Exploration Questions,” too, may provoke considerable reflection and discussion. The leader can choose from among them.

Leaders will find it useful to frequently ask participants to answer questions in their own words. For variety, leaders may occasionally want to assign a participant to prepare thoroughly on just a single quest from the chapter, then present that quest to the group for discussion. Statements from the creeds and confessions can be used to summarize a given quest, possibly by asking a group member to read them aloud.

In some cases, especially when working with younger participants, leaders may want to provide one-on-one tutoring, perhaps not requiring participants to read the textbook but rather using it as a leader’s resource to help them frame questions for discussion.

*Quest of Faith* is flexible enough to satisfy a variety of audiences and purposes. Interacting with these questions and answers will help all readers to speak more clearly and honestly of the hope they have in Christ.

# FROM THE BEGINNING

(QUESTS 1-10)

- 1 Revelation
- 2 God
- 3 Creation
- 4 Humanity's Purpose
- 5 Providence
- 6 Human Choice
- 7 Rationalizing Sin
- 8 Sin's Effect
- 9 God's Judgment
- 10 Extent of Our Fallenness

QUEST  
1

**How do you know God is real in your life?**

*If God is not real, professing our faith is just a big joke. And if God does exist but ignores us, we would be foolish to commit our lives to such a god; we might as well pack in all the fun we can before death robs us of everything. Only if we're sure that God lives for us will it make sense for us to live for God.*

*Some Possible Answers*

**I feel God's nearness in worship, prayer, or song.** God often makes us draw close through experiences that “grab” us. For example, a song may strike a deep chord in our hearts, making our spirits soar. But because our feelings can lead us astray, this very real way of experiencing God cannot be the only way.

**I see God in the wonders of the universe and the beauty of a rose.** We understand so much about artists from their art. Similarly, our Creator provides us with so much self-revelation through the creation. Swirling galaxies show God's power, the elegant rose God's skill. But this important way of experiencing God cannot be the only way either. Unless we know God more personally, we will overlook the telltale signature on the things our Creator has made.

**Looking back, I see how God guides my life.** Despite the setbacks, our lives may show God's guiding hand. Through everything we receive—home, friends, experiences, even hard times—we see that our Provider works in us and for us. We glimpse how God fits together the pieces of our lives. Of course, we cannot depend fully on this way of knowing God either. Life may throw us a curveball. Things may happen to us that we will never understand this side of heaven. Especially in those times we need a surer way of knowing we have a God who cares.

**My parents taught me about God.** Parents often offer us a major way of learning to know God. But this answer begs another question: Where do parents get this knowledge?

**God is revealed through the Bible.** The Bible is the clearest, most reliable, and most comprehensive way in which God speaks to us. Through many reliable witnesses it tells us the great things that only Almighty God could have done and why. By telling us that our heavenly Father sacrificed his only Son and raised him from the dead, the Bible assures us of two things: First, God lives. Only God could raise Jesus from the dead. Second, God cares, giving us the Son so that we may live with him forever. That reality makes our lives eternally important.

### *The Church Confesses*

We know God by two means:

First, by the creation, preservation, and government  
of the universe,  
since that universe is before our eyes  
like a beautiful book  
    in which all creatures,  
    great and small,  
    are as letters  
    to make us ponder  
    the invisible things of God:  
        God's eternal power and divinity,  
        as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20.  
All these things are enough to convict humans  
and to leave them without excuse.

Second, God makes himself known to us more clearly  
by his holy and divine Word,  
as much as we need in this life,  
    for God's glory  
    and for our salvation.

*(Belgic Confession Article 2)*

### *Exploration Questions*

1. When do you pay attention to the Almighty: when God *shouts* or when God whispers?
2. What should you do when you believe you're getting conflicting information about God from your church, from others, from science, or from your own experiences?
3. Should you read the Bible "with an open mind"? How "open"?

### *Check It Out*

Psalm 19:1-7; Romans 1:18-23; 2 Peter 1:12-21

QUEST

2

**What do you really need to know about God?**

*Our understanding of God determines our response. If we see God as an angry, demanding tyrant, we will not expect our relationship to be one of love. If we view God as the jolly, Santa-Claus type, we will not take God seriously. And if we see God as a weakling who helplessly watches the world self-destruct, we will not trust such a divine wimp. To get along with God, we need a clear picture of who God really is.*

*Some Possible Answers*

**God is almighty.** God is Spirit—unconstrained by the limitations of a physical body. Unlimited by time or space, God has no beginning and no end. Our Sovereign is all-powerful and all-knowing, so nothing can prevent God's plans from being fulfilled. Our faithful Provider is present everywhere and leaves no loose ends. Our lives and futures are always fully in God's divine good care.

**God is the great I AM.** God's covenant name, *Yahweh* ("I AM WHO I AM"), assures us that God is always present and always there for us in any and every age. God is faithful to the covenant promises made to us through Christ, because God always stays the same. God will not and cannot lie, cheat, or break those promises. We can fully rely on everything God tells us. Because receiving the divine promises is worth every sacrifice, we venture out in faith, doing what the great I am tells us to do. Our solid Rock is the one sure foundation to our lives.

**God is triune.** While the Trinity is sometimes pictured as a triangle, we might better think of God as a community of three persons, in perfect love and harmony with each other. Through sending his Son and through the gift of the Spirit, the Father calls us into an everlasting relationship of abiding love with our triune God.

**God is holy.** God lives in unapproachable light. As sinful, imperfect creatures, we can never reach God on our own. God's justice will not allow our sins and disobedience to be swept under the rug. We cannot coast along in life without seriously dealing with our relationship to the perfect God. By ignoring God's holiness, we commit spiritual suicide. But like a powerful bleach, God's complete purity holds out to us the promise that God will cleanse us from our sin and imperfection. If we believe, God will wash us clean in the blood of Christ. God's holiness trumps our unholiness.

**God is love.** The deepest mystery we discover about God is the all-embracing love by which God binds us to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As a baby's life depends completely on the loving care of its parents, so we depend with our whole being on God's love. In John 3:16 we discover how deeply God cares for us: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

### *The Church Confesses*

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
and born of the virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended to heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic\* church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*\*that is, the true Christian church of all times and all places*

*(Apostles' Creed)*

### *Exploration Questions*

1. What is your favorite image of God? Why?
2. Where have you let your picture of God get lopsided?
3. Was there a time in your life when you began to see God very differently than before?

### *Check It Out*

Exodus 3:13-17; John 1:1-8; John 3:13-21

QUEST

3

Why is it important to you that God created everything?

*We need to look at our roots. Where we come from tells us who we are and where we are headed. This turns out to be truest of all when we look at the big picture: where did the universe itself come from? Because we belong to this world, the question turns into an intensely personal one: Why are we here? Does our life on this planet make any sense? Or are we just useless blobs of organic matter infecting a tiny dust ball lost in the empty blackness of a meaningless existence?*

### *Some Possible Answers*

**Because it gives my life meaning.** Many people believe the universe never had a beginning, that it always just was. They maintain that mere chance throws eternal stuff into ever-changing patterns that have no purpose. Everything happens by mere accident and will always continue to drift in endless variations that never get anywhere. Such people maintain that we are nothing more than temporary creations of that unthinking, uncaring mess. We have no reason for being. We just are. Against this hopeless, bleak view the Bible reassures us that things do not just happen: a good, loving, all-powerful God has created all things. Our Creator continues to control and to care for all that has been made, including us. God carefully designed us and formed us. God destines us to live forever in perfect fellowship. That gives us a future to really look forward to.

**Because it assures me that God will see me through everything the world can throw at me.** The apostle Paul writes, “I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39).

**Because it challenges me to care for this world.** Because our Creator made it, we are to treat the world with care and respect. Like a true artist, God created the universe to demonstrate the divine Artist’s genius, vision, and skill. Then God designed us to enjoy it, to give back praise for the wonder of it, and to make it even better. God invites us, as coworkers, to develop and unfold its riches. We are called to care for God’s seals, whales, wolves, and condors. God allows us to take what we need to live but not to loot, rob, foul up, or destroy this good earth.

Because our world belongs to God, and so do we. Our heavenly Father has every right to ask his daughters and sons to help in the family business: making the world a place that glorifies our Maker and sustains all God's creatures.

### *The Church Confesses*

The eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who out of nothing created heaven and earth  
and everything in them,<sup>1</sup>  
who still upholds and rules them  
by his eternal counsel and providence,<sup>2</sup>  
is my God and Father  
because of Christ the Son.<sup>3</sup>

I trust God so much that I do not doubt  
he will provide  
whatever I need  
for body and soul,<sup>4</sup>  
and will turn to my good  
whatever adversity he sends upon me  
in this sad world.<sup>5</sup>

God is able to do this because he is almighty God<sup>6</sup>  
and desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1-2; Ex. 20:11; Ps. 33:6; Isa. 44:24; Acts 4:24; 14:15

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 104; Matt. 6:30; 10:29; Eph. 1:11

<sup>3</sup> John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 1:5

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 55:22; Matt. 6:25-26; Luke 12:22-31

<sup>5</sup> Rom. 8:28

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 18:14; Rom. 8:31-39

<sup>7</sup> Matt. 7:9-11

*(Heidelberg Catechism A 26)*

### *Exploration Questions*

1. Does your lifestyle destroy or build up God's world?
2. Should we be concerned about species depletion, climate change, and pollution, or are those just political issues?
3. How can you contribute to a healthier planet? Will you?

### *Check It Out*

Genesis 1:2-3; Psalm 148; Acts 17:24-25



*Quest of Faith* is a study and discussion guide for all who are planning to profess their faith or preparing for confirmation, and for others who seek a deeper understanding of the faith they confess.

In this book Robert De Moor leads the reader through sixty-five basic questions about the Christian faith and the Reformed/Presbyterian heritage. For each question he suggests possible responses that stimulate readers to formulate their own answers and speak clearly and knowledgeably about what they believe.

*Quest of Faith* is an excellent resource for pre-profession classes, pastor's classes, adult study groups, or individual study. The questions are organized into seven units that participants read at home. The units provide ample discussion material for seven to thirteen (or more) class sessions.



Robert De Moor is a retired pastor in the Christian Reformed Church. He lives in Edmonton, Alberta. He has served as a pastor in four congregations, as editor-in-chief of Faith Alive Christian Resources, and as editor-in-chief of *The Banner*, the monthly magazine of the Christian Reformed Church. He has thoroughly enjoyed leading pre-profession classes and inquirers' groups. What he learned there has largely informed and shaped the content of this study.



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