

Editor's Note for the Heidelberg Catechism Project

In the 2010 *Haddington House Journal*, we included the first installment of an English translation from Andrew Murray's notes on the Heidelberg Catechism from *Die Heidelbergse Kategismus*, in the collected works of Murray – *Versamelde Werke Dr. Andrew Murray*. Those who enjoy technical questions about linguistics will find the language in which Murray wrote these notes of interest. Since it is thought that Murray's notes on the Heidelberg Catechism date to the 1860s or 1870s, or perhaps later but definitely in the second half of the nineteenth century, technical language naming here can be intriguing. Some sources continue to call this "Dutch" or "Cape Dutch" or a "Dutch dialect", yet in the late nineteenth century the term "Afrikaans" was also being used. Since the first full Afrikaans Bible did not appear until 1933, we are dealing here with the period before this. Thus Murray's language reflects an older dialect tradition of the Afrikaans language.



*Gerda and Leon
van der Merwe*

Gerda van der Merwe of Cullinan, South Africa has worked hard on these translations, for which we are most grateful. Her husband, Leon van der Merwe, has supplied us with a photograph (see journal cover) of the house in Graaff-Reinet, South Africa where Andrew Murray was born and spent his first ten years before going to Aberdeen, Scotland.

Readers should be aware of the role that Andrew Murray played as a "missionary-statesman" during his lifetime. We hope to explore this theme and the theme of Scottish influence in South Africa in future volumes of the *Haddington House Journal*.¹



J. C. W.

¹ A most helpful article exploring the Scottish influence in South Africa is Eddie Brown, "Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, Scottish Influences on", in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, Nigel M. De S. Cameron, org. ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 267-269.

**The Heidelberg Catechism, Twenty-Fifth Sunday:
The Sacraments**

**65 Q. It is by faith alone
that we share in Christ and all his blessings:
where then does that faith come from?**

A. The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts
by the preaching of the holy gospel,
and confirms it
through our use of the holy sacraments.

66 Q. What are sacraments?

A. Sacraments are holy signs and seals for us to see.
They were instituted by God so that
by our use of them
he might make us understand more clearly
the promise of the gospel,
and might put his seal on that promise.

And this is God's gospel promise:
to forgive our sins and give us eternal life
by grace alone
because of Christ's one sacrifice
finished on the cross.

**67 Q. Are both the word and the sacraments then
intended to focus our faith
on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross
as the only ground of our salvation?**

A. Right!
In the gospel the Holy Spirit teaches us
and through the holy sacraments he assures us
that our entire salvation
rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.

**68 Q. How many sacraments
did Christ institute in the New Testament?**

A. Two: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Heidelberg Catechism Twenty-Fifth Sunday: The Sacraments

Andrew Murray¹

*“It is the Spirit that makes alive,
the flesh profits nothing.
The words that I speak to you
are spirit and are life.” (John 6:63)*

During the previous Sunday we completed the discussion on faith. After the declaration of the articles of Faith (Sundays 7-22), the working and value of faith that brings justification were explained (Sundays 23, 24). At this point the question arises concerning the origin of that faith. Firstly, we are told (Question 65) that the Holy Spirit establishes faith through the Word and reinforces it through the sacraments. After this (Question 66) the meaning of the sacraments is explained as signs and seals of the promises that are given to us in the gospel, namely forgiveness and life through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. The following point (Question 67) again stresses the fact that it is the Holy Spirit alone Who teaches us that our salvation only exists in the eternal sacrifice that Christ accomplished on the cross. This section of the Catechism (Sundays 25-30) is summarized under the heading: *The Sacraments*. Using this heading as a thematic topic, the teaching of the Catechism will be discussed under the following points: 1. What the sacraments stand for; 2. The sacraments confirm the Word; 3. The sacraments strengthen faith; 4. The sacraments seal salvation; 5. The sacraments in the service of the Holy Spirit.

I

What the sacraments stand for

We learn from the answer to Question 66 that the sacraments are visible *signs* and *seals* instituted by God so that by participating in these we are enabled to better understand the promise of the gospel and we are also sealed in this promise. These attributes may be considered to be of less importance but we should understand that the sacraments seal God’s promise to strengthen our faith in the assurance that we share in the promise of the gospel.

¹ The translator for “Twenty-Fifth Sunday” is Gerda van der Merwe of Cullinan, South Africa. This is part of the ongoing Heidelberg Catechism translation project. See *Haddington House Journal* 12 (2010): 15-18 for background details.

The distinction between the two workings of the sacraments can be illustrated by the transaction when purchasing a farm. The buyer wants the deed of transfer which contains a visible illustration of the property as well as a legal transfer signed by the owner. Even if the buyer has not seen the property physically, from the illustration he can determine whether the farm is square or triangular, which roads or rivers cross the property and if there are any houses built. But although it is of value to have an illustration or map of the property, in itself it is useless. The buyer must have the deed of transfer filed in the deeds office to prove that the farm is registered in his name. This document, however accurately prepared, is not genuine unless the stamp duty has been paid and the seal of the registration office is attached.

The sacraments are visible signs: portraits of the grace prepared for us in the two main works of Christ. First is the grace of the new birth, the beginning of the new life. Thereafter comes the sustaining grace, the pursuance and constant strengthening of the new life. Baptism is the sacrament of the rebirthing grace and initiation into the Church. The water of baptism symbolizes cleansing through the blood and the Spirit of Christ. Communion is the sacrament of sustaining grace. The bread and the wine lead us to understand the way that the body and blood of Christ become our inner strength and life. Only two sacraments were necessary; these two cover the totality of the Christian life.

It is however of little benefit if these sacraments are used as signs but do not become seals in one's life. Many people understand the meaning thereof, but do not know of the sealing, the glorious assurance of which Answer 69 speaks: *"Thus: That Christ appointed this external washing with water, adding thereto this promise, that I am as certainly washed by his blood and Spirit from all the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as I am washed externally with water, by which the filthiness of the body is commonly washed away."* Let this be clear to us: the sacraments are not only signs but also seals; God wants us to recognize His Godly affirmation of our faith in partaking in Christ through every contemplation or enjoyment of the sacraments.

The following question could now be raised: Why would God, in this ministry of the Spirit that differs so much from the old dispensation with its multiple ceremonies, now institute these two outward, visible signs? The answer points to the need of man who, because of his sinful nature, cannot be overcome at once: the tangible embodiment of his thoughts are of great assistance. There is something more. Man's body is also saved; the whole of nature will be saved. Through these signs borrowed from nature and enjoyed by the body, we have the prediction, as will be seen later, that the body, like a seed that first has to die, will be resurrected to enter into the glory of the Spirit. The sacraments are visible but holy signs and seals instituted by God.

II

The sacraments confirm the Word

This is a second noteworthy aspect. How closely the Word and the sacraments are linked becomes clear from the following three questions and answers. The answer to the Question (65), where faith comes from, states: *“From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments.”* They thus serve with the Word as the tools of the Holy Spirit working towards faith as the goal. In the following Question (66) we are taught that the sacraments *“are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof, he may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel.”* Then Question (67) is raised: *“Are both word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, as the only ground of our salvation?”* And the answer is: *“Yes, indeed: for the Holy Ghost teaches us in the gospel, and assures us by the sacraments, that the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which he offered for us on the cross.”*

Do not think that it is a coincidence or without meaning that the Word of God is mentioned so often in the Catechism’s teaching of the sacraments. It was necessary due to the misconception of the Roman Catholic Church and also the misconception which the human heart had reached by itself.

One of the main misconceptions of the Roman Catholic Church was that the sacrament generated power purely through the presentation thereof by a priest and without faith playing any role therein. Luther stated: *“Not the sacrament, but the faith that believes the sacrament is what removes sin – justifies.”*² The Roman Catholic Church demanded that he should retract this statement. The result of that misconception was that the Church reserved to itself the right to either issue or reserve blessings. And furthermore through utterly sad ignorance of their unsaved state, people trusted the Church to bless them. Our father³ felt, as did all the Reformers, that in order for the people to be brought to a reasonable and personal, believing relationship with God and Christ in the sacrament, the Word should be the central point of focus. We learnt that they have testified of these three things: the Holy Spirit does not use the sacraments to generate faith, but to strengthen faith that already exists through the Word; the purpose of the sacraments is to seal the

² Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Word and Sacrament I*, vol. 35, eds. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999, orig. 1960), 35:11. Dr. Murray used the Afrikaans word *“regverdig”* which means “to be justified / sanctified”. An internet reference to Luther’s statement translates this word as “removes sin”. (*trans.*)

³ From the context it would appear that Dr. Murray used the word “father” to refer to the church father Martin Luther. (*trans.*)

gospel that should already be known and accepted; and lastly, the Holy Spirit uses the Word and sacraments together to focus our attention on Christ.

Let no one then be of the opinion that because we are not Roman Catholics, there is no need for this explicit emphasis of the Word. No, like all Roman Catholic misconceptions, this one is also in accordance with the natural heart. How often do we see people with little or no regard for religion who would not willingly miss the sacrament of communion? How often do we see a large number of people sit at the communion table exhibiting a kind of reverence but who for themselves can give no account of what they believe or expect? How many people are there who secretly hope that their partaking of communion would cover their sins and open their road to heaven? In these days the Church needs to strongly emphasize that faith should firstly be aroused and fed by the Word; only then can the sacrament strengthen it. No government will supply a sealed deed of sale if there is no map illustrating what is being sealed; in no way can the Holy Spirit use the sacraments to seal that which is not understood and accepted through the Word.

This leads us to the next aspect.

III

The sacraments strengthen faith

In the sixty-seventh Question we read: “*Are both word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, as the only ground of our salvation?*” And the answer is “*Yes.*”

We know how God’s Word emphasizes faith as the one thing God asks of those who come to Him. We also realize that it is not that faith has any value in itself as a work of justification. No, faith is actually the acknowledging of the fact that we have nothing; the humbling of ourselves to live off what we receive and to trust that which belongs to another. Faith is an attitude that makes our mind receptive to receive only that which He gives. Faith is the one thing that God requires and blesses; not only at the beginning of a life in grace or at the hour of conversion and forgiveness, but throughout one’s life. As wide as the riches and fullness in Christ, and as complete as Christ wants every minute of our lives to be, so unique and everlasting is His call on our spirit to believe. The words “*just believe*” are, when understood correctly, words of unutterable meaning and power.

Nowhere was there a greater danger to our faith than exactly with something as tangible as the sacraments. How easily could the sight of the blood of Christ and His broken body as sacrifice and the participation in a certain ritual distract our attention from our faith.⁴ Our church order justly states that the sacraments should in the first place serve to strengthen our faith so that

⁴ Dr. Murray refers to the Roman Catholic ritual, as he knew it, of the bread and wine as transubstantiation of the body and blood of Christ. (*trans.*)

we can testify that: “. . . the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”⁵

The teaching regarding the sacraments is of great value. As often as we look forward to the service of the sacraments, we can expect that our faith will be strengthened. If we expect this, let us then approach it as a true exercise in faith. The first Question of this section today starts like this: “*Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only. . .*”⁶. Whenever we partake in the sacraments, let our hearts be wholly focused on Christ in Whom all blessings are. I always strive to be filled more and more with the thought that God has instituted the sacraments not to let us remain as children, but to let us grow in truth to become people of faith and bring Him the honour.

IV

The sacraments seal salvation

The Catechism offers clear testimony on this point. Faith in itself has no life-giving power. The power of faith is embedded in the object of our faith and the content thereof. Faith in itself is an empty vessel of clay; the treasure that God places into this vessel contains the blessing that saves.

We have already pointed out the expression that says: “*We are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only.*” This is an expression of deep meaning. Much of the ailments of Christianity, the darkness and doubt in which so many Christians live, is due to the fact that they do not believe these words. They only seem to think about the blessings of Christ: the reconciliation, the righteousness of life, the light and the power they expect of Christ. What they do not understand is that we can expect nothing of Christ unless we become partakers of Him. This expression is derived from Scripture: “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.”⁷ As our faith is led to the living Christ and grows in Him, He will become our life.

A second expression regarding salvation is: “. . . *the promise of the gospel, (vis.), that he grants us freely the remission of sin, and life eternal, for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished on the cross.*”⁸ This does not imply, which is all too often the case, forgiveness of sins here and the right to eternal life hereafter, but forgiveness and eternal life both here. Justification and rebirth go together; out of redemption the sinner immediately receives life. The power of Christ’s sacrifice is so complete that we are absorbed into the love and life of God. Faith does not only receive the com-

⁵ Gal. 2:20b (KJV).

⁶ The Heidelberg Catechism. Lord’s Day 25, Question 65.

⁷ Heb. 3:14 (KJV).

⁸ http://www.pca.org/hc_text2.html#LDXXV : Gen. 17:11; Rom. 4:11; Ex. 12; Lev. 6:25; Acts 22:16; Acts 2:38; Mat. 26:28.

plete exemption of sin but also, as fruit thereof, the Godly power to live as a child of God.

The same is taught to us through a third expression: “. . . *the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which he offered for us on the cross.*”⁹ Because the death of Christ is also the exemption of our sins, it is the death of the old self. Not only has Christ’s death reconciled all, it has accomplished all. The complete power of sin has been broken there; the resurrection and transfiguration are the fruit of that sacrifice. Now we are not only partakers of the reconciliation but of everything that Christ has accomplished: His resurrection, transfiguration and the Spirit He has received. With our eyes fixed on Him we can now say: “*This God is a God of complete salvation.*”¹⁰ “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.”¹¹ The sacraments therefore lead us, in spite of our unworthiness and inabilities, to be strong in the faith that we are partakers of Christ and His blessings; to believe that we have, through Him, remission of our sins and eternal life; and finally, to know that the salvation obtained and ensured through His sacrifice is a complete salvation.

V

The sacraments in the service of the Holy Spirit

This next lesson may not be omitted. The Holy Spirit establishes faith through the Word and strengthens faith through the sacraments (Question 65). The Holy Spirit also (Question 67) teaches us through the Word and sacraments and affirms to us that complete salvation is only found in the eternal sacrifice of Christ that took place on the cross. This is consistent with the words of our Lord Jesus: “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”¹² All we have heard of the Word and the sacraments, of Christ and His blessings, of faith and the complete salvation in Christ, have their source of power and blessing in the life-giving Spirit.

This truth teaches us two lessons of the utmost importance. The first one is a warning. Take care that the use of the Word and the sacraments without the power of the Holy Spirit does not satisfy your soul. Through the creative use of the Word, deep meditation and excited emotions, we may be touched and strengthened while lacking the true life, the life from God. Take care that you are not carried away to a human faith in the gospel, accept and cling to the truth thereof, while you lack the regeneration, the rebirth of God. Be warned, not only through the Roman Catholic Church who search the bless-

⁹ http://www.pca.org/hc_text2.html#LDXXV: Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27.

¹⁰ This quotation has no reference in the text. See, “Die Heidelberge Kategismus”, in *Versamelde Werke Dr. Andrew Murray*, ed., [F. J. Liebenberg] (Stellenbosch: Die Christen-Studentevereniging Van S.A., 1945), X, 267, lines 14 and 15.

¹¹ Heb. 7:25 (KJV).

¹² John 6:63 (KJV).

ing without heeding the Word but as much through the error of the Reformed Church who think that they have all that is necessary if they use the Word and the sacraments. Please take this warning seriously so that it does not become a testimony or judgement against you. Whenever we use the Word or the sacraments, we should be deeply and completely dependent on the Holy Spirit. Only the Spirit can establish and strengthen the living hope within us, teach us and seal our complete salvation in Christ.

The second lesson is an encouragement. Thank the Lord that He sent the Holy Spirit. If anyone uses the Word and the sacraments but feels convicted in his heart that he has not yet submitted to the Lord and received His Spirit, then listen to the good news of the gospel. If anyone has submitted to the Lord but still doubts that the Spirit of God lives in his heart or thinks that it is just all in the mind of man, let him listen. The Holy Spirit was sent! The sacrifice of Christ on the cross was unique, eternal and complete; the Father gave Jesus the Spirit and the power to pour Him out, even on those who are slow to believe. If there is one thing we can be sure of, it is this: the Father wants to and will give you the Spirit today. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”¹³ Kneel in all humility before God. Turn to the compassionate God. You have the right to believe that He will pour out His spirit upon you. Take heart, for as sure as the Word and the sacraments, Christ and His blood, the Father gives the Holy Spirit to those who seek Him in prayer.

To you who know that you are children of God and also know that the Spirit of the Lord lives in you but complain that the work of the Holy Spirit is so weak within yourself, I say: take heart. Maybe you do not know why your use of the Word and the sacraments does not work more powerfully in your life. You may not know why Christ and His blessings are not a greater power in your life. I can tell you this – the Lord tells you: it is because of your unbelief. Please understand that the Father did not give His grace in Christ as a deep well from which you can only draw with the greatest difficulty. Child of God, believe that God is in your heart like a still, deeply hidden but full spring. Be still in the presence of God; practise the faith that will allow the Father, through the Spirit, to do His Godly work in the depth of your soul.

As often as you turn to the agents of grace, the sacraments and to Christ, first let your heart grow still to say: the Spirit of God is in me.¹⁴ Then you will experience the complete blessing in Christ and grasp the infinite value of the only sacrifice through which you are eternally pleasing to God. The Spirit will fulfill your every need in Jesus Christ. The knowledge of the vital role that the Spirit plays in the Word and the sacraments will not depress you. It

¹³ Matt.7:11 (KJV).

¹⁴ See Andrew Murray, “Heidelberg Catechism Twentieth Sunday: On God, the Holy Spirit”, *Haddington House Journal* 12 (2010): 28-33.

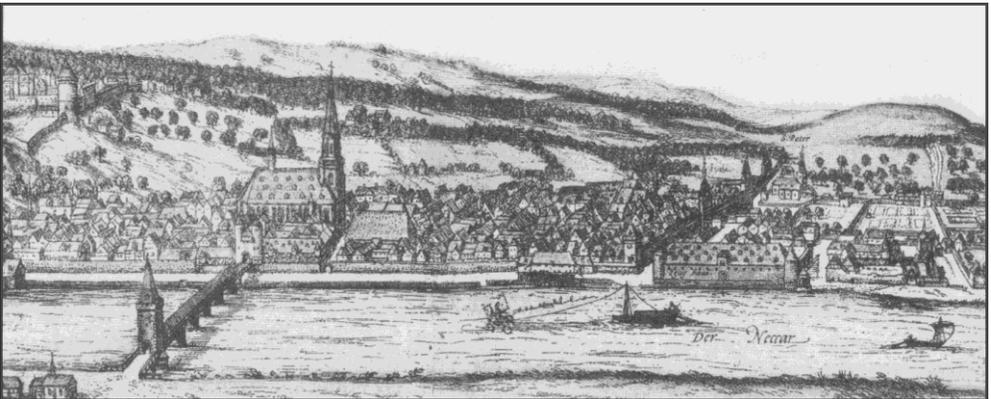
will become the secret of your only comfort; it will become the source of an unutterable joy and unceasing thanksgiving. Amen.



Zacharias Ursinus



Caspar Olevianus



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