

450th Anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism

Gaylin R. Schmeling
President, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
Mankato, Minnesota

The date January 19, 2013, marked the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism. As confessional Lutherans when we hear the word “catechism,” we generally think of Luther’s Small Catechism. However, at the time of the Reformation a number of catechisms were written. Even among Lutherans there were alternative catechisms, such as the catechism of Johannes Brenz used in southern Germany. The Heidelberg Catechism has its origin in the Palatinate and was intended to bring harmony among the various divisions in Protestantism at the time. While this was the intention of its writers, it is obvious to confessional Lutherans that the catechism embraces a mild form of Calvinism.¹ The Heidelberg Catechism today is a confession espoused by nearly all Calvinistic Reformed churches.

The Palatinate (*Rheinland-Pfalz* or *Kurpfalz*) and the Reformation

The Palatinate,² for which the Heidelberg Catechism was written, is located in the central-western part of Germany. This principality was ruled by the Wittelsbach family, the same noble family that ruled Bavaria. The Palatinate was the most progressive state in Germany at the time. Its commerce and industry far exceeded that of the eastern states of the Holy Roman Empire, such as Brandenburg. Its capital, Heidelberg, with its university, was a center of German culture. The Palatinate had early connections to Lutheranism. Luther’s famous disputation of 1518, where he defined the theology of the cross, occurred in Heidelberg. Also the Palatinate was the home province of Phillip Melanchthon.

The Lutheran Reformation penetrated the Rhenish Palatinate early, but the electors did not give official recognition to the Lutherans nor did they persecute them. In 1546, with the encouragement of the heir apparent, Ottheinrich, Frederick II declared the Palatinate Lutheran. Already the year before, Frederick and his wife had celebrated Easter by receiving communion in both kinds which was a clear indicator that he was moving toward Lutheranism.³ When Ottheinrich became elector (r. 1556–1559), he called Tilemann Heshusius (1527–1588) as general ecclesiastical superintendent of his lands in 1558.⁴ Heshusius championed the Gnesio-Lutheran standpoint and was leading the Palatinate in that direction. However, Ottheinrich died in 1559, and Frederick III (r. 1559–1576), a distant Wittelsbach relative, became elector.

¹ German Calvinism is distinct from other forms of Calvinism because it was strongly influenced by Melanchthonianism.

² The word *Pfalz* or Palatinate comes from the Latin *palatinum* for palace. This was one of the places where the Holy Roman Emperor had his residence. The Palatinate denoted at one time any territory ruled by a count palatine (*Pfalzgraf*), but today it refers to the province called “Rhineland-Palatinate.”

³ Lyle D. Bierma, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 27. See also LW 50:252–255.

⁴ Robert D. Preus, ed., *A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 44.

Frederick III and the Heidelberg Catechism

As Frederick III began his rule, there was a reaction against the Gnesio-Lutheran position of Heshusius especially in regard to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Frederick III was disturbed by the bitter controversy over the Lord's Supper in his lands. There was considerable controversy right in the center of Heidelberg, his capital. Here, at the Church of the Holy Spirit (*Heiliggeistkirche*), there was a virtual pulpit war between Heshusius and those who held a more Calvinistic view of the Lord's Supper. In reaction to Heshusius, Frederick III forbade the use of expressions such as "the Lord's body is in the bread" and "the Lord's body is under the bread" to confess Christ's presence in the Sacrament.⁵ He preferred the statement that the "bread is a communion of the body of Christ" (*koinonia*) based on 1 Corinthians 10:16. Heshusius was dismissed on September 16, 1559.

As Frederick III became more convinced of a Calvinist view of the Supper, he introduced the *fractio panis* (breaking of bread) in the Supper which was a definite confessional sign of Reformed doctrine.⁶ Hereafter he called Reformed professors to the University of Heidelberg. Hoping to find a middle ground between the doctrines that divided the Reformed and the Lutherans, he commissioned the production of a new catechism for his land. Two of his theologians, Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587) and Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583), a student of Melancthon, drafted the Heidelberg Catechism in 1563 with Elector Frederick's active participation. This modified statement of Calvinist doctrines, in which the controversial issues concerning the Lord's Supper were avoided and the Calvinist view of predestination was stated in a milder form, became the doctrinal norm for the elector and his territory and for other Reformed churches in Germany.

The use of the Heidelberg Catechism put the Palatinate in a precarious situation. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 gave religious freedom only to the Roman Church and to those adhering to the Augsburg Confession. The peace excluded the Calvinists. If the Heidelberg Catechism was not in agreement with the Augsburg Confession, as Gnesio-Lutherans such as Heshusius maintained, Frederick III was not abiding by the stipulations of the peace and could be outlawed by the emperor. Therefore he and his theologians tried to show that the catechism was indeed in agreement with the Augsburg Confession and that they were the true heirs of Luther. Luther always feared that the Reformed would make such a claim. He assumed that the Reformed, who had tried to change his manuscripts to fit their theology during his lifetime, could easily circulate rumors that he changed his doctrines at the end of his life.⁷

⁵ Bierma, 38.

⁶ Ernst Koch, *Das konfessionelle Zeitalter – Kathoizismus, Luthertum, Calvinismus (1563–1675)* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000), 262.

⁷ What Luther had expected took place as he said. Nineteen years after his death and five years after Melancthon's, that is, in the year 1565, several Heidelberg Reformed theologians, among whom were also the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, made public the following story:

A few days before Luther had journeyed to Eisleben for the last time, Ph. Melancthon had approached the good doctor in the cloister and, after discussing all sorts of things, noticed that Luther was in a good and jovial mood, and so he began to discuss with him the subject of the Lord's Supper, and he stated that he quoted a few passages of the ancient teachers and one of the things he stated to him was: Dear good doctor! For several years now I have diligently searched the writings of the ancient Christian teachers in this matter and truly, the doctrine of the Lord's Supper from Zurich agrees more completely with theirs than our own. Whereupon Luther was silent for a few moments, but then he spoke these words: Dear Philip! What more can we say? I confess that too much has been made

A most significant event occurred at the imperial diet at Augsburg in 1566. The emperor read a decree charging that Elector Frederick III had introduced changes in the government and the worship of his church and a catechism dissenting from the Augsburg Confession. After a recess, the elector appeared, accompanied by his son, John Casimir, who was carrying a Bible and the Augsburg Confession,⁸ underscoring that the doctrine of the Heidelberg Catechism was in agreement with Holy Scripture and with the Augsburg Confession. Any confessional Lutheran would have a difficult time accepting this viewpoint.

This was one of the first examples of what is usually designated the Second Reformation. This term is used to describe a situation in which a state that is Lutheran in confession is slowly converted to Calvinism. It is also referred to as Calvinization. The implication is that the Lutheran Reformation did not go far enough and therefore the Second Reformation was required.⁹ The two outward signs of the Second Reformation were the rejection of exorcism in Baptism and the innovation of the *fractio panis*, the breaking of bread in the Lord's Supper.¹⁰

Thomas Erastus (1524–1583), the personal physician of the elector and professor of medicine at Heidelberg, had Reformed sympathies and supported the theological direction of Frederick III.¹¹ In addition, he was an outspoken opponent of the consistory form of church government which was in vogue in Geneva. The Geneva consistory had virtually become a theocracy. Erastus preferred instead a strong secular government control of doctrines and discipline. This gave further support for Frederick III's right to manipulate the theology of his domain. In England and Scotland, this tendency toward a state church was called Erastian after him.

Ludwig VI and the Book of Concord

When Frederick III died in 1576, it appeared that his moderately reformed state would die with him. His son and successor, Ludwig VI (r. 1576–1583), reestablished Lutheranism in the Palatinate following the lead of his father's predecessor, Ottheinrich. One of the most important diplomatic efforts of the princes and theologians preparing the Formula of Concord was to win the new elector to their theological stand. In this they succeeded at least in part. Ludwig VI joined the two other secular electors, Elector August of Saxony and Elector John George of

of the matter of the Sacrament. But as Philip replied to him: Dear good doctor! Then for the good of the Church and to bring the truth into the light of day, let us publish some gentle compositions where we can clarify our thoughts to them. Dr. Luther went on to say: Dear Philip! I have also thought about doing that. But I might thus make the whole doctrine dubious. So I will commend the whole matter to God. But you also do something about it after my death.

This story is commonly called by Lutheran theologians the **Heidelberg State Lie**, since it comes from hearsay and there is not a trace of it to be found in Melancthon's writings. But since Melancthon has been very often accused after Luther's death of falsifying Luther's doctrine, it is purely unthinkable that he himself would not have publicly used the accounted situation, had it actually occurred, in his own defense (*Der Lutheraner* [Baseley Translation] 2:12 [February 1846]: 47-48).

⁸ Of course this was a *variata* form of the Augsburg Confession.

⁹ When the Second Reformation occurred in Brandenburg-Prussia, it was implied that another Reformation was needed to "sweep the leftover papal dung completely out of Christ's stable" ("*...die noch hinterbliebene Unsauberkeit des Bapstums aus dem Schaffstall Christi vollend aufzufegen*") (Derk Visser, ed., *Controversy and Conciliation: The Reformation and the Palatinate 1559–1583* [Allison Park, Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1986], 163; see also Bodo Nischan, *Prince, People, and Confession: The Second Reformation in Brandenburg* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994], 292).

¹⁰ This is the normal use of the term Second Reformation. However, it has also been used when a Lutheran or Calvinist state was converted to Catholicism and when a Reformed state was converted to Lutheranism.

¹¹ Bierma, 41.

Brandenburg, in supporting the Formula and accepting the Book of Concord of which it became a part. Already in 1580, all the professors at the University of Heidelberg were to subscribe to the Book of Concord.

There was one caveat in Ludwig VI's subscription to the Book of Concord. The 1580 Book of Concord, produced in Dresden, included two appendages to Luther's Small Catechism. These appendages were a baptismal rite and a marriage rite. Several princes, including Ludwig VI, questioned these two rites. Ludwig VI especially had concerns regarding the baptismal rite with its exorcism. It had not been commonly used in the Palatinate, and he saw no reason to implement it. He did not want the baptismal rite to stand in the way of his reintroduction of Lutheranism.

However, several princes, including Ludwig VI of the Palatinate, and their theologians objected to Luther's baptismal service with its references to exorcism. As a result, despite pleas from Jakob Andreae, both appendices were removed from editions simultaneously produced elsewhere and from subsequent versions printed in Dresden. This excision was part of a lengthy dispute over the nature of baptism among Lutherans, especially led by those who, under the influence of some Reformed theologians, worried that Lutherans might understand baptism as effective without faith by the mere performance of the act.¹²

When Ludwig VI became elector, Ursinus and other Calvinist theologians at the University of Heidelberg left the Palatinate and established an anti-school at Neustadt an der Hardt. Here they were under the protection of John Casimir who was the younger brother of Ludwig VI. Casimir was inclined toward Calvinism. From Neustadt, Casimir and his theologians launched criticisms of the Formula of Concord with particular emphasis on Christology and the Lord's Supper. He even called together an assembly of German Reformed theologians at Frankfurt am Main hoping to establish a united front against the Concordianist movement, but the plan failed.¹³ He was more successful in encouraging his theologians to produce an official critique of the Book of Concord. This critique, authored mainly by Ursinus in 1581, was entitled, "Christian Admonition on the Book of Concord" (*Neostadiensium Admonitio*). The critique was intended to refute mainly the Lutheran doctrines of Christology, the Lord's Supper, and election.

The Lutherans gathered at Erfurt to draw up a defense of the Book of Concord. "Martin Chemnitz was there at the request of the elector of Brandenburg; Nikolaus Selnecker represented Saxony and Timotheus Kirchner the government of Ludwig of the Palatinate."¹⁴ The Lutherans responded to the Neustadt Admonition with the Apology of the Book of Concord (*Apologia oder Verantwortung des Christlichen ConcordienBuchs*, 1583). It is also referred to as the Erfurt Book. This apology was a detailed defense of the Lutheran doctrine of Christology, the Lord's Supper, and election.

¹² Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 346–347. See also Irene Dingel, "The Preface of The Book of Concord as a Reflection of Sixteenth-Century Confessional Development," *Lutheran Quarterly* XV (2001): 373–395.

¹³ Charles P. Arand, Robert Kolb, and James A. Nestingen, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 278.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 280.

John Casimir and Another Second Reformation

When Ludwig VI died in 1583, his brother, John Casimir, became the guardian of his young son Frederick IV. Because of Casimir's inclination toward Reformed theology, the boy was raised as a Calvinist and the land again became Reformed and remained such. The Heidelberg Catechism was again introduced in the Palatinate and from there it spread to other Reformed states. From the Palatinate Calvinism spread into the lower Rhine Valley and East Friesland. The electors of the Palatinate were viewed as the defenders of the Reformed faith in the Holy Roman Empire. Frederick IV's son, Frederick V (1614-1632), also a staunch Calvinist, married Elisabeth, daughter of James I of England, and precipitated the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War by accepting the Bohemian crown in 1618, which the Catholic Habsburgs assumed belonged to them.

Brandenburg-Prussia – Second Reformation – Prussian Union

In the meantime, Palatinate Calvinists touched the Hohenzollern family, the rulers of Brandenburg in the east of Germany. John Sigismund (r. 1608-1619) of Brandenburg was educated at the University of Heidelberg where he was influenced by Reformed theology. When he became the elector of Brandenburg he converted to Calvinism in a Christmas Lord's Supper celebration in 1613. Part of the reason for his conversion was to obtain the land of Cleves in western Germany. In the Reformed churches that he established in Brandenburg, the Heidelberg Catechism was in common use. While he became Reformed, his wife, Anna, remained a staunch Lutheran, and the same was true of most of his people. In this way Prussia differed from the Palatinate where the people were forced to follow their leaders. This set the stage for the struggle in Brandenburg-Prussia between the Lutherans and Reformed, as is seen in the life of Paul Gerhardt, which climaxed in the Prussian Union in 1817. The union church subscribed to both the Heidelberg Catechism and the Augsburg Confession.

When the German people that were inclined toward the Prussian Union immigrated to America, they established the German Evangelical Synod of North America. In its confession it states

[It] acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the Word of God, the sole and infallible guide of faith and life, and accepts the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures as given in the symbolic books of the Lutheran and the Reformed Church, the most important being: The Augsburg Confession, Luther's and the Heidelberg Catechisms, in so far as they agree; but where they disagree the German Evangelical Synod of North America adheres strictly to the passages of Holy Scriptures bearing on the subject, and avails itself of the liberty of conscience prevailing in the Evangelical Church.¹⁵

This church body eventually merged into the Evangelical and Reformed Church and finally into the United Church of Christ.

¹⁵ German Evangelical Synod of North America, *Evangelical Catechism*, revised edition (St. Louis, MO: Eden Publishing House, 1896), 68-69.

The Content of the Heidelberg Catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism is divided into three main parts. *Part One: Man's Sin and Guilt – The Law of God* points out man's lost condition by nature and his rightful judgment under the law. *Part Two: Man's Redemption and Freedom – The Grace of God in Jesus Christ* centers in the doctrine of the Trinity, the person of Christ, and justification. It also includes the Sacraments and church discipline. *Part Three: Man's Gratitude and Obedience – New Life Through the Holy Spirit* directs one to the life of sanctification out of thanks for salvation. The questions in the catechism are divided into portions for each Lord's Day with portions for fifty-two Lord's Days.

The story is told concerning a German Lutheran who was asked to explain the difference between German Lutherans and German Reformed. The man stated that the Lutherans say "Vater Unser" (Father our) in praying the Lord's Prayer while the Reformed say "Unser Vater" (our Father). The Lutherans use unleavened bread for communion while the Reformed use leavened bread.¹⁶ In addition, the Reformed enumerate the Ten Commandments in a different way than Lutherans.¹⁷ As far as the man knew, that was about all the difference there was between Lutherans and Reformed. This man certainly missed something in confirmation class. There is a considerable difference between Lutheranism and the Reformed theology of the Heidelberg Catechism. For example, the Heidelberg Catechism places the Ten Commandments at the end of the catechism, emphasizing the third use of the Law. Luther's Small Catechism, on the other hand, places the Ten Commandments at the beginning of the catechism, before the Creed, showing that the second use of the Law must always remain predominant. The Reformed play down the means of grace in general and the Sacraments in specific, as will be seen in the next section of the essay. Zwingli's statement that the Holy Spirit does not need a wagon still pervades Reformed theology.¹⁸

The Heidelberg Catechism and Baptism

For Lutherans the sections of the Heidelberg Catechism on Baptism and the Lord's Supper are most provocative. Question 69 in the Heidelberg Catechism asks,

How does holy Baptism remind and assure you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross avails for you?

In this way: Christ has instituted this external washing with water and by it has promised that I am as certainly washed with his blood and Spirit from the uncleanness of my soul and from all my sins, as I am washed externally with water which is used to remove the dirt from my body.¹⁹

The questions and answers in the catechism concerning the Sacraments tend to be rather vague. One could understand this statement in a Lutheran way: as one is washed with the baptismal waters, his sins are washed away. Baptism washes away our sins through the blood of Christ.

¹⁶ The unleavened host commonly used among Lutherans was considered to be too Roman by the German Reformed.

¹⁷ The Reformed designate the second commandment as "You shall not make any graven images, etc." and they unite the two commandments on coveting into the tenth commandment.

¹⁸ *Dux vel vehiculum Spiritui non est necessarium* (Zwingli, *Fidei Ratio* [ed. Niemeyer, p. 24] quoted in F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. III [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953], 146).

¹⁹ *The Heidelberg Catechism*, 400th anniversary edition 1563-1963 (New York: United Church Press, 1962), 68.

More likely, however, the catechism teaches that as one is washed with water, he is reminded that he was washed with the blood of Christ when he was brought to faith in the Savior. There is no real connection between the baptismal water and the washing that saves.

Question 73: Then why does the Holy Spirit call baptism the water of rebirth and the washing away of sins?

God does not speak in this way except for a strong reason. Not only does he teach us by Baptism that just as the dirt of the body is taken away by water, so our sins are removed by the blood and Spirit of Christ; but more important still, by the divine pledge and sign he wishes to assure us that we are just as truly washed from our sins spiritually as our bodies are washed with water.²⁰

Here the catechism does not say that Baptism washes away sin, but it says that it is a sign or a pledge that assures us that we are washed from our sins. Again, there is no direct connection between the washing of Baptism and the washing away of sin. It should also be noted that the words “pledge” and “sign” are used in a different way by the Reformed than by Lutherans. For Lutherans, a pledge or a sign gives what it signifies. It is a sign that gives the reality to which it points. For the Reformed, there is no connection between the pledge and the reality. When a Lutheran says that Baptism is a pledge of the forgiveness of sins, he means that it gives the forgiveness of sins. When the Reformed say the same thing, they merely mean that it points to the forgiveness of sins.

While the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism used language that could be understood as in agreement with Luther and Scriptures, it is clear that they are really inclined to a view quite different. It appears that for the authors of the catechism, Baptism is not a powerful means of grace which washes away sin and gives rebirth causing one to trust in Christ as the only Savior from sin as Luther taught. Rather Baptism is merely a sign or a reminder that one is washed in the blood of the Lamb when he comes to trust in the Savior. The truth that Baptism is a powerful means of grace imparting rebirth and the forgiveness of sins, delivering from death and the devil, could be read into the catechism, but it is easier to view the document as teaching that Baptism is a mere sign of forgiveness and rebirth. This is the vagueness that the authors of the catechism intended.

The Heidelberg Catechism and Lord's Supper

The controversy concerning the Lord's Supper in the Palatinate precipitated the writing and printing of the Heidelberg Catechism in 1563. The doctrine concerning the Eucharist in the catechism presents the same ambiguity as the teaching concerning Baptism.

Question 75: How are you reminded and assured in the holy Supper that you participate in the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross and in all his benefits?

In this way: Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat of this broken bread, and to drink of this cup in remembrance of him. He has thereby promised that his body was offered and broken on the cross for me, and his blood was shed for me, as surely as I see with my eyes that the bread of the Lord is broken for me, and that the cup is shared with me. Also, he has promised that

²⁰ Ibid., 71.

he himself as certainly feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life with his crucified body and shed blood as I receive from the hand of the minister and actually taste the bread and the cup of the Lord which are given to me as sure signs of the body and blood of Christ.²¹

Notice that the answer to question 75 refers to the broken bread which points to the *fractio panis* that the Reformed considered essential to the institution of the Supper. Lutherans have chosen not to use the *fractio panis* as a confessional stand against the Reformed symbolism in the Sacrament. Lutherans confess that they receive the true body and blood of Christ with the mouth, while the Reformed teach that they receive Christ's body spiritually with their heart through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Notice that the catechism states, "Also, he has promised that he himself as certainly feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life with his crucified body and shed blood as I receive from the hand of the minister and actually taste the bread and the cup of the Lord which are given to me as sure signs of the body and blood of Christ." A Lutheran would understand this as saying that one receives the crucified body and shed blood of Christ with the elements distributed by the minister. On the other hand, the Reformed would understand this as saying while one merely receives bread and wine in the service, he is assured that Christ will feed him with Himself by faith.

Question 76: What does it mean to eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink his shed blood?

It is not only to embrace with a trusting heart the whole passion and death of Christ, and by it to receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. In addition, it is to be so united more and more to his blessed body by the Holy Spirit dwelling both in Christ and in us that, although he is in heaven and we are on earth, we are nevertheless flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, always living and being governed by one Spirit, as the members of our bodies are governed by one soul.²²

In this answer, the connection between Christ's body and the communicant is the Holy Spirit. It does not say that the communicant is united with Christ by receiving His body with the mouth. Rather the connection is the Holy Spirit who either lifts the communicant in spirit up to Christ in heaven or gives Christ spiritually to the communicant by faith.

The Reformed teach that Christ's body after the ascension is in one location in heaven and therefore cannot be on many altars at once in the Supper. This teaching is confessed by saying "although he is in heaven and we are on earth."²³

Question 78: Do the bread and wine become the very body and blood of Christ?

No, for as the water in baptism is not changed into the blood of Christ, nor becomes the washing away of sins by itself, but is only a divine sign and confirmation of it, so also in the Lord's Supper the sacred bread does not become

²¹ Ibid., 73–74.

²² Ibid., 74.

²³ See also Heidelberg Catechism, Questions 46–49.

the body of Christ itself, although, in accordance with the nature and usage of sacraments, it is called the body of Christ.²⁴

The strongest statement of Reformed doctrine is evident in this question. First, the Roman transubstantiation is rejected by saying that the bread and wine are not changed into the very body and blood of Christ. Then it states that the Sacrament is only a divine sign or symbol of Christ's body and blood. Remember for the Reformed a sign is always an empty sign, not a sign or pledge bringing what the sign signifies.

This answer probably also speaks against Lutheran theologians that spoke of a change in the Sacrament. For example, Martin Chemnitz, one of the formulators of the Formula of Concord, wrote concerning the Supper,

We grant, with Irenaeus, that after the blessing in the Eucharist the bread is no longer common bread but the Eucharist of the body of Christ, which now consists of two things—the earthly, that is, bread and wine, and the heavenly, that is, the body and blood of Christ. *This is certainly a great, miraculous, and truly divine change*, since before it was simply only ordinary bread and common wine. What now, after the blessing, is truly and substantially present, offered, and received is truly and substantially the body and blood of Christ. Therefore we grant that *a certain change takes place*, so that it can truly be said of the bread that it is the body of Christ. But we deny that it follows from this that we must therefore assert the kind of transubstantiation which the papalists teach.²⁵

Lutherans maintain the power of the consecration which Calvin considered to be pure medieval magic.²⁶ The Lutheran Confessions teach that the words of institution, by virtue of our Lord's original command, are the effecting cause of the Sacrament.²⁷ There is a change as a result of the consecration; the elements are not merely bread and wine, but the body and blood of the Lord are so intimately united with the bread and wine that it can be said of the bread, "This is the true body of Christ," and of the wine, "This is the true blood of Christ."²⁸

Question 79: Then why does Christ call the bread his body, and the cup his blood, or the New Covenant in his blood, and why does the apostle Paul call the Supper "a means of sharing" in the body and blood of Christ?

Christ does not speak in this way except for a strong reason. He wishes to teach us by it that as bread and wine sustain this temporal life so his crucified body and shed blood are the true food and drink of our souls for eternal life. Even more, he wishes to assure us by this visible sign and pledge that we come to share in his true body and blood through the working of the Holy Spirit as surely as we receive with our mouth these holy tokens in remembrance of him,

²⁴ Ibid., 77.

²⁵ Martin Chemnitz, *The Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part 2, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 2:257–258.

²⁶ John Calvin, *Calvin's Institutes*, 17:15 (Mac Dill AFB, FL: MacDonald Publishing Company), 731.

²⁷ FC SD VII, 75 (Triglotta, p. 999).

²⁸ Gaylin R. Schmeling, *Bread of Life From Heaven* (Mankato, MN: Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary Press, 2009), 127.

and that all his sufferings and his death are our own as certainly as if we had ourselves suffered and rendered satisfaction in our own persons.²⁹

This answer seems to say that we receive Christ's true body and blood through the working of the Holy Spirit in the Supper, and this is how a Lutheran would like to understand the statement. Yet the statement seems to be an allusion to Calvin's thought that the body of Christ is in heaven, and it is through the power and virtue of the Spirit that the believer is joined to that body and blood and receives its benefits.³⁰ This is usually called Calvin's "virtualism."³¹ The answer never states that there is a direct connection between the receiving of the bread and wine and receiving Christ's true body and blood.

Because of the Calvinist idea that we eat Christ's body spiritually by faith through the working of the Holy Spirit, Lutherans are very concrete in their explanation of the real presence. According to Lutheran theology, the one who subscribes to the scriptural doctrine of the real presence will confess that in the Supper: 1) He receives the very body, born of Mary, and the very blood which ran from His wounds. 2) He receives the Lord's body and blood not only by faith but also with his mouth (*Manducatio oralis*). 3) The unbeliever also receives Christ's body and blood, but to his harm (*Manducatio indignorum*).

Conclusion

The foreword of the 400th anniversary edition of the Heidelberg Catechism states, "After a quarrel between two representatives of the Lutheran and Reformed parties at the altar of the Church of the Holy Spirit in Heidelberg, Frederick [III] ordered a catechism to be written in an attempt to bring the people together."³² The Heidelberg Catechism had its origin in the Palatinate and was intended to bring harmony among the various divisions in Protestantism at the time. Did the writers of the catechism accomplish their goals? Did they bring harmony? The Reformed would say that while unity between the Lutherans and Reformed was not accomplished, the Heidelberg Catechism was the best hope of the same. In fact, it became the most commonly used confession among the Reformed. Lutherans, on the other hand, would contend that while there are many ambiguous statements within the confession that could be understood to agree with Lutheran theology, in general the Heidelberg Catechism adheres to a mild form of Calvinism. Thus Protestantism remained divided in the Reformation Era and continues to be so today.

²⁹ *The Heidelberg Catechism*, 78.

³⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 17:10 (MacDonald edition, 728).

³¹ Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought*, volume III (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 153–155.

³² *The Heidelberg Catechism*, 5.