

Reformed Confessions
of the 16th and 17th Centuries in
English Translation: Volume 1, 1523–1552

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REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS
Grand Rapids, Michigan

INTRODUCTION

This multi-volume series is a compilation of many of the Reformed confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries translated into English. For many of these texts, this is their debut in the Anglo-Saxon vernacular. I hope therefore to provide the Western, English-speaking world a richer and more comprehensive window on the emergence and maturation of Reformed theology in these foundational centuries: foundational centuries for Reformed thought; foundational summaries of Reformed doctrine for these centuries. The regional aspect of the confessions will be obvious. Many of them are part of the so-called magisterial Reformation; all of them contain the genotype of the geographical community of faith of their origin. In the highly charged political atmosphere of the sixteenth century, the confessions also reflect the complex vicissitudes of the ecclesiastical politics of the era.

If we may label the Protestant Reformation a mega-shift in human learning and belief, then these artifacts of that revolutionary transformation are part of the ethos of that re-formation. Here, in English, are the paradigms of that immense mega-shift.

Each confessional statement is preceded by a brief introduction containing necessary historical and bibliographical background. I have composed these sketches from research sources too numerous to mention but which include standard encyclopedias, church history dictionaries, monographs, journal articles, and websites. Some readers may regard the lack of documentation as a major fault of my presentation. Nevertheless, I present my studies as a challenge to others to go further and deeper. I encourage you to learn even more than I have learned; improve and, if need be, correct what I have penned by way of introduction. No bill of infallibility is claimed for these short introductions. In the advance of scholarship it is inevitable that some—perhaps even most—of what I have written will be revised. God-speed that process in the interest of truth and accuracy! Nor are these “critical” editions of the documents involved. That is a project for future textual critics. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

The majority of our texts are set forth in the standard compilations of Niemeyer (*Collectio confessionum in ecclesiis reformatis publicatarum*), Müller (*Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche*) and Busch (*Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften*). The nomenclature of “confession” in these collections is sometimes broader than a statement of faith or “creedal symbol.” Often, disputations, outlines of polity, catechisms, and even theological treatises are included. Each document featured in our collection was pivotal to the development of Reformed Christianity in the region from which it arose. Presented here is a display of “confessional” Calvinistic theological thinking in the Old and New World during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from Transylvania to New England, from Brazil to Poland.

It is my intent to present these confessions chronologically from 1523 (Zwingli’s *Sixty-seven Articles*) to 1693 (Keach’s *Catechism*) in English. In the event that the translation of a document is providentially delayed beyond the deadline for publication in a particular volume, it will, *Deo Volente*, be included as an appendix at the close of the final volume of this series.

I am indebted to the board and faculty of Northwest Theological Seminary, Lynnwood, Washington, who have encouraged this project. Grace Mullen provided invaluable documentation and assistance. Benji Swinburnson generously volunteered his time to scan select documents. Dr. Graeme Murdock has been very helpful with Magyar documents. Dr. Frank Gumerlock rallied a number of the translators to this project and I would still be adrift without his kind and attentive interest. The translators, whose names appear at the end of the respective documents, are to be commended for bringing this compilation to fruition. *Gratias tibi ago, interpretes!*

The Sixty-Seven Articles of Huldrych Zwingli (1523)

After Martin Luther's (1483–1546) initial salvo in defense of reformation (October 31, 1517), Huldrych Zwingli's (1484–1531) *lectio continua* through the book of Matthew (January 1, 1519 at Grossmünster in Zurich) continued the broadside which earned the emerging Protestants the moniker “people of the Book” (the book being, of course, the Bible and the Bible alone). As Luther's German Reformation progressed, Zwingli advanced the evangelical cause in Switzerland. He was fêted as the people's priest at the great church in 1519 and launched his campaign to reform the city and its ruling council almost immediately. That he ministered compassionately (and at the risk of his own life) during the plague in 1519 endeared him to his congregation and his fellow citizens.

Driven inexorably by the Word of God, Zwingli began to preach against the worship of the virgin, indulgences, asceticism, clerical celibacy, penance, and fasting. His sermon on March 23, 1522 (“Concerning Choice and Liberty Respecting Food...,” in S.M. Jackson, ed., *The Latin Works and the Correspondence of Huldrych Zwingli* [1912], 1:70–112) precipitated the famous “affair of sausages” in which Christoph Froschauer (†1564), a printer at Zurich, joined others in eating meat during the Lenten fast. While Zwingli did not join the group in breaking Lent, he did suggest that their actions comported with his biblical preaching. The Roman Catholic hierarchy was understandably not pleased. As tensions mounted, the city council scheduled a public debate (disputation) for January 29, 1523, pitting Zwingli against the Roman Catholic traditionalists. To prepare for this confrontation, Zwingli drafted sixty-seven articles (*Schlussreden*). Six hundred people gathered at the *Rathaus* (town hall) to hear the proponents spar in German, not Latin—i.e., the vulgar tongue—so that all present could understand the debate. Hugo von Hohenlandberg (1496–1529), the Catholic

Bishop of Constance (under whose authority Zurich lay), dispatched four representatives who were instructed to 'listen': Ritter Fritz Jakob (James) d'Anwyl (von Anwyl, ca.1460–ca.1537), Domherr Georg Vergenhaus, Dr. Martin Blausch (Plank), and Dr. Johann Fabri (Faber, 1478–1541). This famous First Zurich Disputation was actually more of a dialogue between Zwingli, d'Anwyl, and Faber. With nothing but the Bible in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin upon the center table, Zwingli argued for *sola Scriptura* ("I am ready to be instructed and corrected, but only from...Scripture") as well as *sola Christi* ("Christ is the only way to salvation," Article 3).

When the dust had settled, the city council agreed that Zwingli's position was to be the new law of the city: *nihil aliud instituere aut docere nisi quod Evangelicae doctrinae testimonio et Sacrae Scripturae auctoritate per ipsius proberi possit* ("Nothing is to be established or to be taught except what can be proved by the testimony of gospel doctrine and the authority of sacred Scripture by themselves"). The full text of the debate can be found in S. M. Jackson, ed., *Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531): Selected Works* (1922), 40–117.

Zwingli's triumph sent the Reformation fervor through Switzerland and into southern Germany. Preaching was to be based on Scripture alone. Zwingli published a commentary on his sixty-seven articles in July (cf. "The Exposition of the Sixty-Seven Articles," in *Huldrych Zwingli Writings, Volume One: The Defense of the Reformed Faith*, translated by E. J. Furcha [1984], 7–373). As yet, however, there was no break with the Mass or with Rome. But the preaching of the supremacy of Christ soon led to outbreaks of iconoclasm. In September, the crucifix of Stadelhofen was torn down. Though the offenders were jailed, Zwingli called for a second public disputation on images and the Mass. On October 26–28, 1523, nine hundred people gathered at the town hall to hear Zwingli argue against images (day one), and the Mass (day two). But gradual withdrawal was the program recommended rather than radical abolition. The council favored the suggestion of Konrad Schmidt that the people first be taught before a final abolition was declared.

A third disputation was scheduled for January 19–20, 1524. Roman Catholic reactionaries attempted to subvert the Reformation in Zurich, but they failed. Zwingli now moved to abolish the Mass entirely. On Easter Sunday (April 13, 1525), Zurich officially abolished the Mass. The Lord's Supper was instituted "in remembrance of" the Lord Jesus' atoning death; it

was not a bloodless re-sacrifice of Christ according to the Roman doctrine and rite. Zwingli's concept of the presence of Christ in communion was certainly not corporeal (either by transubstantiation or consubstantiation), yet he did maintain a Eucharistic presence in the Holy Spirit ("...but Christ is present in the Supper by his Spirit, grace, and strength," *Werk* [1828–42], VI, i, 758.33–36).

Our translation is taken from Furcha, *op. cit.*, *passim*. It appears here by kind permission of the publishers, Wipf & Stock, of Eugene, Oregon. For another English translation, see Cochrane, 36–44. For versions of the original text, see Niemeyer, 3–13; Müller, 1–6; Schaff, 3:197–207; and Busch 1/1, 86–95.



— ARTICLES —

1. Everyone who says that the Gospel is nothing without the sanction of the Church, errs and blasphemes God.
2. The summary of the gospel is that our Lord Christ, true Son of God, has made known to us the will of his Heavenly Father and has redeemed us from death and reconciled us with God by his guiltlessness.
3. Therefore, Christ is the only way to salvation of all who were, are now, or shall be.
4. Whoever seeks or points to another door, errs. Indeed, he is a murderer of the soul and a thief.
5. Therefore, all who regard other teachings equal to or higher than the Gospel, err. They do not know what Gospel is.
6. For Christ Jesus is the guide and captain, promised by God and given to the entire human race.
7. That he is an everlasting salvation and head of all believers who are his body, which is dead and incapable of doing anything, apart from him.
8. From this follows, first of all, that all who live in the head are members and children of God. And this is the church or communion of saints, a bride of Christ, *ecclesia catholica*.
9. It follows secondly, that as the physical members are incapable of doing

anything without the head managing them, so it is impossible for anyone in the body of Christ to do anything without Christ, the head.

10. As a person is demented when the members of his body effect something without the head, tearing, wounding and damaging themselves, so are the members of Christ demented, beating and burdening themselves with unwise laws, whenever they undertake something without Christ, their head.
11. From this we see the statutes of the so-called clerics with all their pomp, riches, status, titles and laws to be the cause of every folly; for they do not in any way correspond to the head.
12. Thus they still rave, not on account of the head, (for the latter—by God's grace—one eagerly tries to uphold in our age), but because they are not allowed to rage any more but are forced, rather, to heed the head alone.
13. Whenever we give heed to the word, we acquire pure and clear knowledge of the will of God and are drawn to him by his Spirit and transformed into his likeness.
14. Hence all Christians should do their utmost so that everywhere only the gospel of Christ be preached.
15. For belief in the gospel constitutes our salvation, and unbelief, our damnation; for all truth is clear in it.
16. In the gospel we learn that human teaching and statutes are of no use to salvation.
17. That Christ is the one eternal high priest; from this we deduce that all those who pretend to be high priests, oppose the honor and power of Christ; indeed, they reject it.
18. That Christ who offered himself up once as a sacrifice, is a perpetual and valid payment for the sin of all believers; from this it follows that the mass is not a sacrifice, but a memorial of the sacrifice and a seal of the redemption which Christ has manifested to us.
19. That Christ is the sole mediator between God and us.
20. That God wants to give us all things in his name. It follows from this that we need no other mediator but him beyond the present time.
21. When we pray for one another here on earth, we do so in the confidence that all things are given us through Christ alone.

22. Christ is our righteousness. From this we conclude that our works [*sic*] are good insofar as they are Christ's; but insofar as they are ours, they are neither right nor good.
23. Christ rejects the riches and pomp of this world. From this we conclude that those who gather up riches for themselves in his name slander him greatly since they use him to cloak their own greed and wantonness.
24. Every Christian is free of any of the works which God did not command and is allowed at all times to eat everything. From this we learn that the dispensations concerning cheese and butter are a Roman fraud.
25. Times and places are subjected to Christians and not vice versa; from this we learn that those who tether times and places, rob Christians of their freedom.
26. Nothing is more displeasing to God than hypocrisy. From this we learn that everything that stimulates goodness to human eyes is utter hypocrisy and infamy. This applies to vestments, insignia, tonsures, etc.
27. All Christians are brothers of Christ and of one another and no one ought to be elevated to be called Father. This brings to naught religious orders, sects and illegal gatherings.
28. Everything which God permits or which he has not forbidden, is lawful. From this we learn that it is proper for everyone to marry.
29. That all those whom we call "spiritual" sin when, having discovered that God did not grant them the ability to remain chaste, they, nonetheless, do not protect themselves through marriage.
30. Those who take a vow of chastity childishly or foolishly undertake too much. We learn from this that anyone who accepts such vows, does injustice to good people.

CONCERNING THE BAN

31. No private person may impose the ban on anyone, except the church, i.e. the community of those among whom the person to be excommunicated lives, together with its guardian, i.e. the minister.
32. Only the person who causes public offense may be banned.
33. Ill-gotten possessions which cannot be restored to their rightful owner, are not to be given to temples, cloisters, monks, priests and nuns, but to the poor.

CONCERNING [TEMPORAL] AUTHORITY

34. So-called spiritual authority cannot justify its pomp on the basis of the teaching of Christ.
35. But temporal [authority] derives strength and affirmation from the teaching and work of Christ.
36. All judicial authority and the administration of justice which the so-called priestly estate appropriates to itself, really belongs to temporal authority inasmuch as it seeks to be Christian.
37. Furthermore, all Christians, without exception, owe obedience to them.
38. All Christians without exception owe obedience to them, provided they do not command anything which is opposed to God.
39. Therefore all their laws ought to conform to the divine will so that they protect the oppressed person, though he may not actually lay a charge.
40. They alone are entitled to impose the death penalty and then only on those who give public offence, without thereby incurring the wrath of God, unless he commands something else.
41. When they provide just counsel and aid to those for whom they will have to give account before God, these in turn, are duty-bound to give them physical support.
42. Should they become unfaithful and not act according to the precepts of Christ, they may be deposed in the name of God.
43. In short, the dominion of the one who rules with God alone is the best and most stable; but the dominion of the one who rules by his own whim, is the worst and most insecure.

ON PRAYER

44. True worshipers call on God in spirit and in truth, without any clamoring before people.
45. Hypocrites do their works to be seen by people, they receive their reward in this world.

46. Thus it follows that chanting and loud clamor, without true devotion and done for money only, either seek human praise or else material gain.

CONCERNING OFFENCES

47. A person should suffer physical death rather than offend or disgrace a Christian.
48. One who, because of infirmity or ignorance, tends to take offence without any cause, should not be left weak or ignorant. Rather, he should not be strengthened so that he may not regard as sinful what is not sinful at all.
49. I know of no greater offence than to forbid priests to have wives, yet allow them to engage prostitutes.

ON REMISSION OF SIN

50. God alone remits sin through Jesus Christ his Son, our only Lord.
51. Whoever ascribes this to a creature, robs God of his honor and gives it to one who is not God. That is sheer idolatry.
52. Therefore, confession which is made to a priest or to a neighbor should not be advocated as the remission of sin, but simply as seeking advice.
53. Imposed works of penance derive from human counsel—with the exception of the ban. They do not remove sin and are imposed merely to deter others.
54. Christ has borne all our pain and travail. Hence, whoever attributes to works of penance what is Christ's alone, errs and blasphemes God.
55. Whoever refuses to remit any sin of a penitent person, cannot claim to be acting in the name of God or Peter, but in that of the devil.
56. Whoever remits certain sins for money alone, is fellow to Simon and Balaam and the very messenger of the devil.

CONCERNING PURGATORY

57. The true Holy Scriptures know nothing of purgatory after this life.
58. The sentence of those who have died, is known only to God.
59. And the less God has let us know about it, the less we should undertake to know about it.

60. That a person, out of concern for the dead, calls on God to show them mercy, I do not disapprove. But to stipulate a time for this and to lie for the sake of gain, is not human, but devilish.

ON THE PRIESTHOOD

61. Of an [indelible] character which priests have appropriated to themselves in recent times, scripture knows nothing at all.
62. It [scripture] knows of no priests other than those who proclaim the word of God.
63. To them [who proclaim God's word], scripture bids us show respect by giving them physical sustenance.

CONCERNING THE REDRESSING OF ABUSES

64. All who acknowledge their errors, should not be forced to make amends, but are to be allowed to die in peace, and their endowments are then to be administered in a Christian spirit.
65. Those who are unwilling to recognize their error, will be dealt with by God. Therefore, no violence is to be done to their bodies, unless, of course, they behave in such an unseemly fashion that one cannot do without it.
66. All clerical superiors are to humble themselves instantly and erect the cross of Christ only and not the money box. Otherwise they will perish; the axe is laid to the root of the tree [cf. Mt. 3:10].
67. Should anyone wish to discuss with me interest rates, tithes, unbaptized children or confirmation, I declare myself willing to respond.