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Trinity College, University of Dublin

Reformed Confessions
of the 16th and 17th Centuries in
English Translation: Volume 3, 1567–1599

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James T. Dennison Jr.



REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS
Grand Rapids, Michigan

*Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries
in English Translation: Volume 3, 1567–1599*
© 2012 by James T. Dennison Jr.

Published by
Reformation Heritage Books
2965 Leonard St., NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525
616-977-0889 / Fax 616-285-3246
e-mail: orders@heritagebooks.org
website: www.heritagebooks.org

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Reformed confessions of the 16th and 17th centuries in English
translation : volume 1, 1523-1552 / compiled with introductions by James
T. Dennison.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-60178-044-7 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Reformed Church—Creeds. I. Dennison, James T., 1943-

BX9428.A1R445 2008

238:4209031—dc22

2008039005

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Busch 2/2 Eberhard Busch, et al, *Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften*, Bd. 2/2. 1562–1569. Neukirchener Verlag, 2009.
- Müller E. F. Karl Müller, ed. *Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche*. Waltrop: Hartmut Spenner, 1999 [1903].
- Niemeyer H. A. Niemeyer, *Collectio confessionum in ecclesiis reformatis publicatarum*. Lipsiae, 1840.
- Schaff Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1966 [1877].



The Synod at Szikszó (1568)

The rapidly spreading virus of anti-Trinitarianism, fed by the virulent Ferenc Dávid (ca. 1520–1579) from his Unitarian stronghold in Koloszvár (Cluj), preoccupied the champion of catholic and Reformed orthodoxy, Peter Mélius Juhász (1536–1572) and his co-laborers. The Synod of Gönc (1566) had failed to curtail the rapid rise of anti-Trinitarian popularity. Dávid vigorously used the (Unitarian) conversion and political support of his king, John II Sigismund (1540–1571), to advance his agenda. John II obliged with the famous Edict of Torda on January 28, 1568. Using religious toleration as his façade, Dávid actually positioned his anti-Trinitarian “gospel” for the conquest of Transylvania. He both preached and wrote voluminously in opposition to Mélius and catholic Trinitarian orthodoxy.

In the north Hungarian town of Szikscó (Szikszó), a synod met on January 6, 1568, and adopted twenty-four propositions against the “Samosatene Sabellians, Arians and Photinians” (i.e., anti-Trinitarians). Dávid would respond at a counter-synod at Gyulafehérvár (Alba Julia) on March 3, 1568. He also parodied the historic Christian doctrine of the Trinity as a “three-headed Cerberus” (cf. the illustration in his *De falsa et vera unius Dei Patris, Filii et Spiritus Sancti cognitione* [1568]). On March 8, 1568, a few days after the close of this synod, Melius and six other orthodox apologists met Dávid and Biandrata at Alba Julia. King John II Sigismund had invited the respective parties to debate the doctrine of the Trinity. For ten days, the principals jockeyed back and forth with no effect. The king dissolved the proceedings when it was clear that no agreement would be reached.

Our translation is from the Latin text of the propositions found in Lampe, *Historia ecclesiae Reformatae, in Hungaria et Transylvania* (1728), 180–87; cf. also Áron Kiss, *Magyar Református Zsinatok* (1881), 616–22.

We have attempted to completely identify all biblical citations in the original document, although in many cases the version of the Latin that appears does not precisely match the Vulgate edition of the Old and New Testament.



General Synod of Szikszó (1568)

*Propositions taken from the Word of God to be discussed
in the General Synod of Szikszó on January 6, 1568, against
the heresies of Samosatene Sabellius, Arius, and Photinus, which
have at this time been recalled afresh from the hell.*

I.

We believe and confess that God, who in the sacred language is said to be Jah and Jehovah, the infinite, eternal author of all good things, is the one and only [God].

II.

The Holy Scriptures call this God, who is one alone, Elohim, on account of the three distinct and hypostatic eternal properties, likewise on account of the sensibly and really distinct and clear dispensations and manifestations, i.e., the three giving testimony—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

III.

The Holy Scriptures call the Son the one subsisting in the form of God and having life in Himself; just as these same Holy Scriptures call the Father, so also do they call the Holy Spirit Jehovah of Hosts and author, or God creating from Himself and the one nourishing created things and inspiring the prophets.

IV.

The unity and the trinity in three hypostases or in Jehovah Elohim do not make a fourfold entity, because the one Jehovah and Elohim are not so-called through conversion, and, as in natural things a unity and trinity of individual entities do not constitute some ὑπιστάμενον (“subsistent being”) besides the individual entities, so unity and trinity do not constitute some

ὕψιστόν besides the three witnesses in heaven, for it is written, “Outside of me, besides me, there is no other God” (cf. Isa. 43:11; 44:6, 8; 45:5, 6, 18, 21–22). Therefore unity and trinity is in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as it is said, “I am in the Father, and the Father is in me” (cf. John 10:38; 14:10, 11, 20; 17:21).

V.

Christ, the Son of God, is made coequal with the Father in three ways. In the first way, by nature. In the second, by operation. In the third, in the worship due to God alone. Likewise, Scripture teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinguished really and hypostatically in three ways. In the first way, by hypostatic and personal property. In the second, by the official dispensation distinctly belonging to the hypostatic properties. In the third, by diverse manifestation. Christ encompasses all these in a single statement in this way: “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30); and “These three, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit are one” (1 John 5:7).

VI.

Therefore, just as the Father is Jehovah God from eternity, subsisting, infinite, no less God than Father, for it is written, “I am God, and I do not change, and there has been and will be no other god before Me” (cf. Mal. 3:6; Isa. 43:10), so the Son is Jehovah God from eternity, the Creator, subsisting, the I AM, the I WILL BE, Wisdom, Power, the Image and Exact Representation (*character*) of the substance of the Father, and the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily (*somatice*) or really in Christ. Therefore, the Father could not and cannot exist, operate, or be worshiped separately without the Son and the Holy Spirit. Just as the Father is not in the Son as an accident and content (*contentive*), as it is said, “just as You, the Father, are in Me, and I am in You” (John 17:21), so also the Son is not in the Father as a quality and content, but according to identity of nature, as it is said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30), and “All that are Mine are Yours, and all that are Yours are Mine” (John 17:10).

VII.

Insofar as He is the Son of Man, Christ is less than the Father on account of His servile office and the flesh; but He is the eternal Son of God and completely of the Father from eternity, before creatures, and equal to

the Father according to His deity, namely insofar as he is the Λόγος and exact representation of the substance of the Father. And just as He was begotten of the Father from eternity, so also was Christ the Son of God from eternity. And as God was Father in real act (*actu reali*), so also, with respect to His deity, Christ was and is Son of God from eternity in act, not by predestination nor with respect to the flesh.

VIII.

Therefore, the one and the same Christ is of two natures in one hypostasis or person, without any division and confusion on account of ἀντιλυτρον (redemption) or His office of mediation. For we confess that He is our true Mediator according to both natures.

IX.

According to Scripture, we believe that the Holy Spirit, being Jehovah God, ought to be worshiped together with the Father and Son. In the first place, because these three are one and He is literally called Jehovah God and the Lord of Hosts. In the second place, because He creates, saves, regenerates, and is the author of all good works. But He who creates, saves, and regenerates ought to be worshiped, as is said, "Worship Him who made heaven and earth" (Rev. 14:7); likewise, "Grace to you and peace from the Father, Son, and the seven Spirits" (cf. Rev. 1:4).

X.

We call that which Scripture calls the form of God οὐσίαν or essence (*essentiam*). Therefore, as Christ is rightly said to be ὑπαρχον or subsisting in the form of God, so also we say with Paul that Christ is subsisting in the essence, or nature and majesty, of God; but with Paul we make use of "hypostasis" of the Father for "subsistence" and "person." For as "hypostasis" is attributed to the Father, so "person" is attributed to the Son (cf. Heb. 1:3; 2 Cor. 4:4).

XI.

Therefore, they who deny the unity and trinity and coeternal deity and nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit impiously speak nonsense. For as things are nothing without a substantial form, so the Father never existed and cannot be perfect God without His Son and Holy Spirit. For

the Father really and in act did not exist without His wisdom, power, deity, exact representation, and the *apaugasma*, or splendor, of His glory. But Christ and the Holy Spirit were and are the real power, wisdom, and love of the Father hypostatically and subsisting in themselves, because nature in God from eternity has been no accident. For this reason, they who perfidiously deny with Sabellius, Servetus, Gentilis, and refuse of this kind that the deity of the Son and Holy Spirit is eternal, hypostatic, and has life in itself and who speak the nonsense that the Father alone was from eternity *ἑαυτοῦθεον* (God Himself) and was operating without the Son and Holy Spirit and was worshiped by the fathers in the Old Testament—they believe, confess, worship, and teach that God is an alien god (*Mauzim*, cf. Dan. 11:39, Heb.), is foreign and unknown to the heavenly Scripture and the fathers. Since it is written, “Before me, besides me, after me there was and is no other God,” then he who denies the Son has not God.

XII.

They err exceedingly who speak the nonsense that the image of God in which man was made was the future humanity of Christ, since it is the virtues that are communicated to men: righteousness, holiness, wisdom (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). And the first man is said to be the form of the future, not the image of man.

XIII.

They also err who speak the nonsense that God is the cause of sin and of death, for these things are contrary to God. And God cannot do things through Himself that are contrary to His nature. “You cannot look at iniquity” (cf. Ps. 5:4–5; Gen. 18; Lam. 3). “I, God, do not desire the death of the sinner” (Ezek. 18:23; cf. 18:32; 33:11).

XIV.

Man fell of his own will through his disobedience without anyone forcing him; departing from the truth and giving heed to the spirit of error, he became a beast, under obligation to death, and he abused the truth and image of God (which was the cause of good).

XV.

Abusing his very good and holy liberty through a lie, exchanging the glory of God, deprived of causes of liberty because the image of God was lost

through sin, losing the habits of hearing, seeing, and doing heavenly things, man may not be able to be—he is not—he who may desire, who may do, because he became a beast, a man composed of air, an ox, a corpse, blind, mute; all men have turned aside.

XVI.

When they are born again, converted, illuminated, drawn by God, and reformed in the image of God by the Spirit of God from grace in Christ Jesus, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, they can know, desire, do good on account of the re-formed image of God or restored disposition (*habitus*). By the grace of God, by the merit of Christ, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, they can do all things through the Word and faith through Him who has made them able.

XVII.

The bare foreknowledge of God per se is not the cause of all things, but, with the will and decreed counsel of God, [it is the cause] of these things, namely, which God has decreed to will and do through Himself or through others, without a mediating force or with one. For it is written, whatever He has willed, He has done, because He does all things according to the intention of His will (cf. Eph. 1:11). Therefore, what He does not will, such as sin, He does not do; but He does and works those things that properly, naturally, and officially befit God. That is, He elects, predestines, disposes, creates, saves, summons, justifies, metes out punishments for sinners, but does not commit guilty acts. Therefore, nothing is done by fortuitous chance with respect to God. Sins are not done because God foresees them, but sins are done that He has willed and that He immutably foresees will be: “I foresaw you as a rebel from the womb; for this reason I called you a transgressor from the start” (cf. Isa. 48:8). [Sins are also done] because the causes of evil in secondary causes, namely disobedience, an evil will, and unbelief, do not change; but as sins are done by the necessity of consequence in vessels of wrath, so also it is proper that punishments are meted out by this same necessity.

XVIII.

Just as Scripture puts forward two things in God, mercy and justice, so also (that it might show both to be according to the riches of His grace) He

chose the remnant few in Christ from the beginning, before creation, in the sanctification of the Holy Spirit so that He might call, justify, and glorify these people in the glory of His grace which ought to be praised, that they might be holy and blameless (cf. Eph. 1:4–7). Thus, only those who believe have been chosen, just as only the elect are able to believe and hear and keep the Word of God (cf. John 5–6, 8, 10). “Those ordained to life believed” (cf. Acts 13:48). Only those written in the Book of Life are to be saved (cf. Rev. 1–5, 14, 20–22). “Many are called; few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14).

XIX.

According to legal justice, the vessels of wrath have been set for destruction on account of their sins, so that in these He might manifest His wrath and power. And as He would necessarily save the vessels of mercy, and for these Christ the Word is power, health, life, the savor of life, [and] all things work for the good for these [vessels], so it is necessary that the vessels of wrath perish on account of their sins. For these, Christ the Word is foolishness, a stumbling block, having set them aside unto destruction.

XX.

Even if the merits of Christ and the fruits of the Holy Spirit are extinguished in the converted elect, those born again of the grace of God, nevertheless the root of grace and mercy is not removed from them; as it is said, “I will not remove my Spirit from you” (cf. Ps. 51:11). “Who will separate us from the love of God?” (cf. Rom. 8:35). If they sin, I will strike them, but I will not remove My mercy from them. Return joyous salvation and re-form a right spirit, i.e., restore the lost and extinguished fruits of faith, but do not remove Your Holy Spirit (cf. Ps. 51:11–12). The fruits and leaves of a tree perish often, but the root remains. “I have prayed to My Father for you that your faith may not fail” (Luke 22:32).

XXI.

Therefore, just as we condemn the heresies of Sabellius, Arius, Samosata, [and] Servetus, so also we condemn those who assert that there is free will in the dead, the wicked, and those who have not been born again. Likewise, [we condemn those] who, from a foul and incongruous exercise of reasoning taken from a mere exposition, understanding, and distortion of the universality of God’s commandments, exhortations, and promises, attribute

powers of doing, understanding, seeing, and believing heavenly things to men and assert election as a universal phenomenon. [We condemn these] since their argument has no validity in light of the impossible command to the subject or unequal doer, from the disparate inequalities, from light to darkness, from righteousness to the conformity and equality and consent of sin: light orders the blind, the darkness that it sees; righteousness requires of sin that it be righteousness, that a leopard change his spots, that a dead man live, that a deaf man hear, that a mute man speak. God, the Light, the highest Righteousness commands hatred to be love, enmity to God to be friendliness. Therefore, it cannot happen that the law which is righteousness, the light requiring perfect love from men (who are sin, darkness, the enemies of God) be fulfilled.

XXII.

Infant Baptism

Scripture commands that all adults and children or infants offered to the church (who are not dogs and pigs or contemptuous of the heavenly ministry, as Christ says in Matthew 7:6) be baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and this on account of the covenant of God, which is suitable also for infants of the elect and on account of the universal command of God; likewise from the similarity to circumcision.

XXIII.

We deny polygamy and say that spouses ought to be bound together in loyalty. First, because the joining of spouses naturally encompasses a mutual covenant. For every firm covenant is established by an oath, as is said (cf. Ezek. 16:59ff.). We say this next because spouses were formerly bound by the covenant of God, and Christ binds His bride to Himself. And we say that this is profitable and necessary on account of the perfidiousness and fickleness of being joined in marriage.

XXIV.

We teach that the Lord's Supper, instituted by Christ, ought to be administered according to the variety of Scripture with common bread or with the unleavened bread approved in the holy writings. Both Christ and the apostles used them. But for the following reasons, we condemn and reject

the papal host, and we do not concede that it can be administered as the Lord's Supper:

First, because it is the head and cause *sine qua non* of an idolatrous Mass. Second, because Scripture commands the name, memory, figure, use, and signs of idolatry to be abolished. Third, because on account of the idolatrous form (which is the transparent brightness) since the image of the crucifix cannot be converted to pious use. There cannot be a true and corresponding sign of the thing signified in the eating, for, although an idol and other instruments are made from the same wood, it does not follow that a table is an idol and vice versa, as God testifies in Isaiah 44. Thus the same use and end of things is improperly gathered from the identity of the material thing, since, on account of diverse forms and species of things, there are also diverse uses and ends of things, such as of a shield and spear, a hat and cloak.

(Translated by Atria A. Larson)