



Zwingli's 67 Articles

There may be some persons of the Reformed faith and confession who do not know just what the Reformed faith is; and, likewise, there are many who have departed from it, or at least regard it lightly, that do not know from what they have departed or what they regard lightly. For this reason we will give a brief account of the background which lead up to the Reformed confessions and how they came about. In this connection we shall publish, as previously promised, some of the Reformed confessions.

As all know, two separate movements of reformation started at the very same time; the one in Germany with Luther, and the other in Switzerland with Zwingli. Both men worked independently: they did not know each other at first; neither did the one know anything about the writings of the other.

Zwingli was born in 1484. He began his work at Einsiedeln in 1516, and at Zurich, since 1519, he began to preach Christ more effectively from the pure fountain of the New Testament, and set him forth as the only Mediator and all-sufficient Saviour. The great historian, Dr. Schaff, compares Zwingli with Luther as follows:

"Zwingli was scarcely two months younger than Luther. Both were educated and ordained in the Roman Church. Both were men of strong mind, heroic character, fervent piety, and commanding influence over the people. Both were good scholars, great divines, and fond of poetry and music. Both labored independently for the same great cause of evangelical Protestantism — the one on a smaller, the other on a larger field. But their endowment, training, and conversion were different. Zwingli had less prejudice, more practical commonsense, clear discrimination, sober judgment, self-control, courtesy, and polish — Luther more productive genius, poetic imagination, overpowering eloquence, mystic depth, fire, and passion; and was in every way a richer and stronger, though rougher and wilder nature. Zwingli's eyes were opened by the reading of the Greek Testament, which he carefully copied with his own hand, and the humanistic learning of his friend Erasmus; while Luther passed through the ascetic struggles of monastic life, till he found peace of conscience in the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Zwingli broke more rapidly and more radically with the Roman Church than Luther. He boldly abolished all doctrines and usages not taught in the Scriptures; Luther piously retained what was not clearly forbidden. He aimed at a reformation of government and discipline as well as theology; Luther confined himself to such changes as were directly connected with doctrine. He was a Swiss and a republican; Luther, a German and a monarchist. He was a statesman as well as a theologian; Luther kept aloof from all political complications and preached the doctrine of passive obedience to established authority. They met but once in this world, and then as antagonists, at Marburg, two years before Zwingli's death. They could not but respect each other personally, though Luther approached the Swiss with the strongest prejudice, looking upon him as a fanatic and semi-infidel. They came to an agreement on every article of faith except the real presence in the eucharist (Lord's Supper). Zwingli proposed, with tears, peace and union, notwithstanding this difference, but Luther refused the hand of Christian fellowship, because he made doctrinal agreement the boundary-line of brotherhood."

What we are interested in here, however, is not so much the history of the Reformation, but the progress of the truth and the statement of faith in the creeds of the Reformed Churches. It is wonderful how the truth came to light again by men whom God chose to proclaim it. The wonders wrought by the preaching of the Gospel, blessed by the Spirit's efficacy, can be seen in the progress which truth made among the nations when the Reformation began. When we look at what

men like Zwingli, Beza, Calvin, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Ecolampadius, Melanchthon, Olevianus, Ursinus, Guy de Brés, Bullinger, Farel, Lasco, Cranmer, Knox, etc., did in their lifetime, we begin to see how mightily God wrought during the first part of the sixteenth century. There were also other people affected by evangelical preaching, but it resulted only in a kind of moral improvement of life, and in reforming some evils. These did not openly break with the Church of Rome, nor were they willing to suffer the consequences of accepting the full Gospel truth and the only way of salvation. In this respect that age was no different from ours.

It is to be remembered that nearly all the early reformers grew up in the Roman Church, under its teachings, superstitions, idolatry, and evil practices. Most of them came to the light by reading and studying the Scriptures, especially the New Testament in the original language. At first they preached the pure Gospel in the Church and sought to reform it to its original or apostolic purity; but the Church did not suffer them very long. Being excommunicated, they did not refrain from preaching the truth. It is natural that their preaching had to deal with many evils to which the people had accustomed themselves: such as, the mass, penance, invocation of saints, works of merit, fasts, devotion to priests and Pope, the latter claiming to be the vicar of Christ on earth, etc. For this reason, too, we find that the Ninety-Five Theses of Luther and Sixty-Seven Articles of Zwingli deal in part with these evils.

In order to acquaint our readers with the first steps in the formation of our Reformed creeds, we shall present in full the Sixty-Seven Articles of Ulrich Zwingli, which were publicly discussed and successfully defended by him at the religious conference in Zurich on January 29, 1523. They prepared the way for the introduction of the Reformation in Switzerland. They exhibit the first creed of the Reformed Churches. Their form, consisting of short, concise propositions, is much better adapted for a creed than the lengthy discussions of many later and more authoritative confessions. These were victoriously defended by Zwingli in the presence of the civil magistrate and about 600 persons, against Dr. Faber, the General Vicar of the Bishop of Constance, who appeared to superintend the meeting rather than to defend the old doctrines, and was unwilling or unable to answer the arguments of a learned and powerful opponent. The magistrate passed a resolution on the same day approving of Zwingli's position, and requiring all the ministers of the canton to preach nothing but what they could prove from the Holy Gospel. The second disputation followed in October, on the use of images and the mass, before about 900 persons, including 300 priests and delegates from different cantons; a third disputation took place in January 1524. The result was the emancipation from popery, and the orderly and permanent establishment of the Reformed Church in the city and canton of Zurich.

These Articles resemble the Ninety-five Theses of Luther, which opened the drama of the Reformation in Germany, October 31, 1517, but they mark a considerable advance in Protestant conviction. They are full of Christ, as the only Savior and Mediator, and clearly recognize the Word of God as the only rule of faith. They attack the primacy of the Pope, the mass, the invocation of saints, the meritoriousness of human works, fasts, pilgrimages, celibacy, and purgatory as unscriptural traditions of men. (Schaff)

These Articles may be found in Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. III, pp. 199-207, but there they are given in High-German together with the Latin translation. Schaff gives a few specimens in English in Vol. I. p. 364. It was necessary for me to translate these Articles into English for our readers. This was not an easy task, for the German and Latin did not always agree.

(Articles 29 and 30 were not translated by Rev. Buehrer as he found it difficult to determine it from either the German or Latin, but what I included below was taken from a translation provided by "Christian History," Module 305. — Ed.)

The Sixty-Seven Articles

1. All who say that the Gospel is nothing without the approbation of the Church, err and cast reproach upon God.

2. The sum of the Gospel is, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has made known to us the will of his heavenly Father, and redeemed us by his innocence from eternal death, and reconciled us to God.
3. Therefore, Christ is the only way to salvation for all who were, who are and who shall be.
4. Whoever seeks or shows another door, errs — yea is a murderer of souls and a robber.
5. Therefore all those who liken any other doctrines to or judge them higher than the Gospel, err, and know not what the Gospel is.
6. For Christ Jesus is the Guide and Captain, promised and given by God to the whole human race;
7. That He might be an eternal salvation and head of all believers, who are his body, which without him is dead and can do nothing.
8. From this it follows: first, that all who live in this Head are members and children of God, and this is the Church or communion of saints, a mistress of Christ, *ecclesia catholica*.
9. Secondly, that, just as the members of the body can do nothing without the head, so likewise no one, belonging to the body of Christ, is capable of anything without the Head, namely, Christ.
10. Just as a foolish person, when the members of his body act without the head, lacerates and wounds himself; so likewise, when the members of Christ undertake something without the Head, namely, Christ, are most foolish, and burden and destroy themselves with the most imprudent laws.
11. Hence we gather, that the so-called traditions and laws of the churchmen, because of pride, wealth, position, titles and traditions, which they uphold and defend, are the cause of all follies; since they are not consistent with the Head, Christ.
12. Therefore they still rage, not because of the Head (whom by the grace of God all the godly diligently endeavor to establish), but because men will no longer suffer them to rage in fury. The upright desire to hear only the Head, Christ.
13. When men listen to the Word of God, they truly and sincerely learn the will of God. Hence men are drawn to God by his Spirit, and so transformed.
14. Therefore all Christians should be willing to do their utmost to see that the Gospel of Christ be sincerely preached everywhere.
15. Whoso believes the Gospel shall be saved; whoso believes nor the Gospel is damned. For in the Gospel the whole truth is clear.
16. In the Gospel we learn that the doctrines and traditions of men are of no use unto salvation.
17. Christ is the only eternal High Priest. Therefore, do they, who appropriate to themselves the high office of priesthood, oppose the glory and power of Christ and reject Christ.
18. Christ who offered himself once on the cross is the sufficient and perpetual sacrifice for the sins of all believers. Therefore, the mass is no sacrifice, but a commemoration of the sacrifice of the cross and a seal of the redemption through Christ.
19. Christ is the only Mediator between God and us.
20. God gives us all things through Christ and in Christ's name. Therefore it follows, that except for this life we need no Mediator other than Christ.
21. When we pray for one another here on earth, we do it because we trust that all things will be given us alone through Christ.

22. Christ is our righteousness. From this it follows that our works are good so far as they are Christ's, but not good so far as they are our own.
23. Because Christ despised the riches and pride of the world, it follows, that they who gain riches unto themselves under the label of Christ, do greatly dishonor him, when they use him as a protector of their avarice and wantonness.
24. Christians are not bound to any works which Christ has not commanded; they may at all times eat every kind of food. From this it follows, that the letters of the pontiff, which are sent for cheese and butter, are a Roman fraud.
25. Time and place are subjected to man, and man is not subjected to them. Therefore, they who bind men to time and place, rob and strip Christians of their rightful liberty.
26. Nothing is more displeasing to God than hypocrisy. Hence we learn that hypocrisy is a grave and shameful audacity whereby men pretend to be holy before men. Here fall cowls, signs and shaved crowns, etc.
27. All Christians are brothers in Christ, and brethren among themselves, and no one on earth should be called father. Here fall the parties and sects.
28. What God allows, and has not forbidden, is good. From this we learn that marriage is equally proper to all persons.
29. That all who are known as clergy sin when they do not protect themselves by marriage after they have become conscious that God has not enabled them to remain chaste.
30. That those who promise chastity (outside of matrimony) take foolishly or childishly too much upon themselves, from which is learned that those who make such vows do wrong to the pious being.
31. No person shall be excommunicated by any private person, but only by the Church together with her shepherd, namely, the pastor, that is, the communion of those among whom he, who deserves the ban, dwells.
32. Only he, who has become a public scandal, shall be excommunicated.
33. Unlawful goods, such as are not returnable to its rightful owner, shall not be given to the temples, cloisters, monasteries, priests or nuns, but to the needy.
34. The power of the Pope and the bishops has no foundation in the Holy Scriptures and the doctrines of Christ.
35. But the power of civil magistrates is confirmed by the teachings and acts of Christ.
36. Civil authority and the right to rule, which the spiritual order claims for itself, belongs altogether to the present rulers, if at all it wants to be Christian.
37. All Christians, without exception, are duty bound to obey the public rulers;
38. Providing they do not command anything contrary to God.
39. The laws of the rulers should be conformable to the rule of the divine will, to defend the oppressed as much as possible, even if they do not complain.
40. Rulers may punish only lawfully, if they are not restrained by God, or if God commands something else; but only those who offend publicly.
41. When they (the rulers) serve those for whom they must give an account to God with counsel and help, they in return are indebted to the rulers for material aid.
42. But if they become unfaithful and reign not according to the rule of Christ, they may be deposed (with God?).

43. His kingdom is the very best and the firmest, who rules according to God and with God; his (is) the most wicked and most uncertain, who rules according to his own fancy.
44. One who truly prays, calls upon God in spirit and in truth, praying from the heart, and not making a loud cry before the people.
45. Hypocrites perform all their works that they might be seen of men; therefore they accept wages in this world.
46. Therefore it follows, that singing in temples and incantations made without devotion are merely for wages, seeks either honor or advantage from the people.
47. Men should rather be willing to die, than to offend a Christian or to bring him to shame.
48. He who without cause is offended through infirmity or ignorance, should not be left weak or small, but should be made strong, that he might not regard as sin that which is no sin.
49. I know of no greater scandal than the prohibition of lawful marriage to priests, while they are permitted for money to have concubines.
50. God alone forgives sins only through Jesus Christ our Lord.
51. Those who attribute to creatures the power to forgive sins, rob God of his glory: this is idolatry.
52. Therefore confessions, which are made to a priest, should not be regarded as remissions of sins, but merely as consultations.
53. Works of penance, imposed by priests according to human traditions (except excommunication), do not remove sins, but are imposed on others for a terror.
54. Christ bore all our grief and distress: whosoever really attributes to the works of penance what belongs to Christ alone, errs and blasphemes God.
55. Who, therefore, refuses to forgive any penitent persons any kind of sin, acts not the part of God or of Peter, but of the devil.
56. Who remits alone some sins for wages and money, is a partner with Simon and Balaam and is Satan's true ambassador.
57. The Scriptures know nothing of a purgatory after this life.
58. The judgment concerning the departed is known only to God.
59. The less God has revealed to us about this, the less we should try to know about it.
60. When a person, concerned about those that died, calls upon God that He may have mercy on them, this I do not condemn; but to determine the time of it (seven years for a sin unto death) and to lie for the sake of gain, is not human but devilish.
61. Of the character of consecration, lately invented by the priests, the divine Scriptures know nothing.
62. The Scriptures know no other presbyters or priests except those who preach the Word of God.
63. Those presbyters, of which we speak, which preach the Word of God, the divine Scriptures commend that they should be supplied with their bodily necessities.
64. Those who confess their sins, should not be asked to pay a penalty, but be left to die in peace, and whatever effects he wills to the Church, should afterwards be dealt with in a Christian way.
65. Those who do not acknowledge their error, God will indeed deal with them; therefore no bodily harm should be inflicted on them, unless their condition is so abusive, that such punishment becomes necessary.
66. Those who hold positions in the Church should immediately humble themselves, bear the cross of Christ (not a chest), or their perdition is sure - the axe is laid unto the root.

67. If any one desires to discuss with me – interest, tithes, unbaptized children, confirmation – I am most willing to give an answer.

No one should here undertake a controversy by resorting to sophistry and relying on human wisdom; but let him come, having the Scriptures (for they breathe the spirit of God) as his judge, that the truth may either be found, or, if it has been found, as I hope, may be maintained.

Emil Buehrer

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