

REFORMATION 500 WEEK 46 DE BRES AND THE BELGIC CONFESSION

In 1521, Emperor Charles V, who regretted that he had not burned Luther at Worms, issued from Worms an edict to suppress heresy in the Lowlands, now known as Belgium. In 1522, Guido de Bres (pronounced GEE-doe de Bray) was born in a Belgium city called Mons. That year in Antwerp a “monastery was burned to the ground because some of its monks had listened to the Protestant heresy” (Van Halsema, *Glorious Heretic*, 102). “To Belgium belongs the honor of having furnished the first martyrs of evangelical Protestantism in Henry Voes and John Esch, two Augustinian monks, who were burned at the stake in Brussels, July 1, 1523, ... and who were celebrated by Luther in a stirring hymn” (Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 1:503).

Guido “was fourteen when the great Bible translator, William Tyndale of England, was strangled and burned to death near Antwerp.” Guido “was converted sometime before he became twenty-five,” and in 1548 he fled “to England where the boy king Edward VI had come to the throne” (Van Halsema, 104). There he benefited greatly from his contacts with other Protestant refugees (like Martin Bucer). But as soon as bloody Mary came to the throne, Guido decided to return to Belgium.

In October, 1555, Charles V (emperor of Germany, Spain, and the Lowlands, master of all the then known parts of Asia, Africa, and the New World) decided to become a monk. He was succeeded by his son Philip of Spain (whose third wife was bloody Mary). “It was his consuming passion to kill every person not faithful to the Church of Rome” (Van Halsema, 95). Guido fled to Geneva, Switzerland, where for the next several years “he learned from the preaching of John Calvin and the teaching of Theodore Beza...Guido became an expert in Hebrew and Greek,” and “learned to show mercy to people who were hurting” (William Boekestein, *Faithfulness under Fire*).

After three years of study, Guido boarded a river boat on the Rhine and arrived in a Belgian town called Doornik, where he became the pastor of the secret Protestant Church called The Church of the Palm. “He was thirty-seven years old, and in many ways his life of hiding and fleeing had been a lonely one.” He spoke of his love to a young woman named “Catherine Ramon and told her he could offer her only a life of uncertainty. It was enough, she answered, to love each other and to know their lives were in God’s good hands.” Sometime in 1559 they were married; the next year they had a son and “named him Israel” (Van Halsema, 107-108).

While Guido was hiding, he wrote his *Confession of Faith* (patterned after the *French Gallican Confession* of 1559 written by Calvin). In the copies of the Confession printed in 1561 the first pages contained an open letter to King Philip, asking him to stop fighting against the church (Guido secretly tossed his Confession with its introductory letter over the walls of the king’s castle). Guido said that he and his friends “were ready to obey the government in all lawful things, although they would ‘offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire, rather than deny the truth of God’s Word.’ ... Though the confession failed to stem the tide of persecution, it was instrumental in helping thousands understand the Reformed faith. Guido de Bres was eventually captured and he sealed his confession with martyr’s blood in 1567” (RCUS *Three Forms of Unity*, 52).

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REFORMATION 500 WEEK 46: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM QA 120-121

Question 120: WHY DID CHRIST COMMAND US TO ADDRESS GOD THUS: “OUR FATHER”? To awaken in us at the very beginning of our prayer that childlike reverence for and trust in God, which are to be the ground of our prayer, namely, that God has become our Father through Christ, and will much less deny us what we ask of Him in faith than our parents refuse us earthly things.

Christ commands us who believe in Him to call God *Father*, that at the very beginning of our prayer we may remember the ground or foundation of our prayer: “that the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...is for the sake of Christ, His Son, my God and my Father [John 20:17]” (Q&A 26); and, therefore, that we may pray the way God’s adopted children should pray: with childlike reverence for and trust in God. “A son honors his father...If then I am the Father, where is My honor?” (Mal. 1:6). “Or what man is there among you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ...If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him” (Matt. 7:9, 11).

Christ directs us to say *our* Father, and not *my* Father, first, “that He may excite in us a confidence of being heard: for since, we do not pray alone, but seeing that the whole church unites its voice with ours, God will not reject the prayers of the whole church, but hears them, according as it is said: ‘Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them’ [Matt. 18:20] Second, that He might admonish us to mutual love. Christians possessing mutual love should pray for one another [1 John 5:1-2]” (Ursinus, 628).

God has always been the Father of His chosen people. “I am a Father to Israel” (Jer. 31:9). OT believers were also called the children of God (Ex. 4:22); and they called God “Father.” “You, O LORD, are our Father” (Isaiah 63:16). “Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, *our Father*, forever and ever” (1 Chron. 29:10).

Question 121: WHY IS IT ADDED: “IN HEAVEN”? That we might have no earthly thought of the heavenly majesty of God, and from His almighty power expect all things necessary for body and soul.

The fact that God is said to be “in heaven” does not mean He is confined there. God is everywhere. Solomon prayed, “Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You” (1 Kings 8:27). God is said to dwell in heaven because heaven is like a royal palace where God manifests His glory and majesty in a more glorious way than He does on earth. Therefore, when we pray to our Father *in heaven*, we must remember that He is *not* an earthly father. He is not the man upstairs. We are not even to think of our Lord Jesus Christ in earthly terms (2 Cor. 5:16). God is eternal and all-powerful, infinitely higher and greater than the greatest earthly father. Our earthly parents make lots of mistakes, and they cannot love us perfectly. But our heavenly Father never makes a mistake. His love is unending and everlasting (Jer. 31:3)! “Being in heaven and being God, our Father can give us all things necessary for body and soul through Jesus Christ; and we can confidently expect Him to do so. Nothing is too hard for Him” [Gen. 18:14; Ps. 103:19; 115:3; Luke 2:37]” (Jones, *Study Helps*, 309).

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