

Reformed Confessions

of the 16th and 17th Centuries in
English Translation: Volume 2, 1552–1566



Compiled with Introductions by
James T. Dennison, Jr.



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in English Translation: Volume 2, 1552–1566*
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Confession of Marosvásárhley/ Vásárhelyi (1559)

The Reformation reached Hungary via merchants, itinerants, and students. Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* were read here in 1518, and by 1522 the Wittenberg don was being denounced from the Roman Catholic pulpits of the three national regions: Western/Royal Hungary (belonging to the Habsburgs); Central Hungary (the largest region); Eastern Hungary or Transylvania. The Jagiellon dynasty of Poland, which had ruled Hungary since 1490, was humiliated by the Turks/Ottomans under Suleiman I (The Magnificent, 1494–1566) at Mohács in 1526. All Hungarian history changed from that date. Islam aided John I Zápolyai (1487–1540), voivode of Transylvania, to ascend the throne succeeding Louis II (1506–1526) who lost his life on the infamous battlefield. It was not until 1695 that Islam's hold on Central Hungary would be broken.

Mohács was a disaster for the church and the state — much of the Roman Catholic hierarchy was slain on that field; and the nation was subject to the Ottomans and two kings: John I Zápolyai and Ferdinand I (1503–1564). Into the vacuum rushed the dissidents and aggrieved nobles who seized ecclesiastical lands and deemed the Roman Catholic catastrophe as divine retribution (and purgation) for crass corruption. An open door was presented for the winds of “new learning” blowing from Germany and Switzerland. Mathias Devác Biró (ca. 1500–1544/45) took up Luther's doctrine in 1529 and began preaching the gospel of salvation by Christ alone. He earned the moniker “the Hungarian Luther.” Stephen Kis of Szeged (alias Segedi, 1505–1572) also began his evangelical journey in Lutheranism. Other notables include: Martin Sánta Kálmáncsehi (ca. 1500–1557), Peter Mélius Juhász (1536–1572), Gáspár Károlyi (ca. 1520–1591) — each one a key figure in the Hungarian Reformation. In Transylvania, Johannes Honterus (1498–1549) became Lutheran pastor of Saxon Germans in

Brassó/Braşov/Kronstadt in 1544. The first Protestant “confession” is the Nagyvárad Theses of 1544, the full background to which as well as English translation of the document is found in James T. Dennison, Jr., “The Earliest Hungarian Protestant Confessions: Nagyvárad (1544) and Erdőd (1545). Introduction and Translation,” *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 23/1 (May 2008): 4–25.

By 1534, King Ferdinand I, ruler of Habsburg Hungary, was worried about the inroads of the Swiss “Pestilence,” i.e., Zwinglians bringing the Helvetian theology into western Hungary. By 1540, more Hungarian theologians and students were leaning towards Bucer (1491–1551), Bullinger (1504–1575), and the Geneva star, Calvin (1509–1564). When Luther died in 1546, Hungarian students sympathetic to Calvin at Wittenberg were expelled. But the shift from Lutheranism to Calvinism continued. Bullinger’s letters to Hungarian pastors and theologians accelerated the shift in the 1550s, while Magyar Calvinists were being fed by Wolfgang Musculus (1496–1563) and Theodore Beza (1519–1605) as well.

The Lutheran phase of the Reformation in Hungary included the First Erdőd Synod (Erdödi Első) of 1545 — an agreement on twelve articles, the final one of which adhered to the Augsburg Confession of 1530 (an English translation of this document is found in James T. Dennison, Jr., “The Earliest Hungarian Protestant Confessions: Nagyvárad [1544] and Erdőd [1545]. Introduction and Translation,” *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 23/1 (May 2008): 18–23). This was followed by the adoption of the 1549 *Confessio Pentapolitana* (“Confession of the Five [Saxon] Cities”) which had been drafted by Leonhard Stöckel (1510–1560), *Praeceptor Hungariae* and disciple of Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560). He, too, used the Augsburg Confession as the basis for his declaration. Alongside this confession may be placed the *Confessio Heptapolitana* (1548) which was adopted by the Saxon cities of upper Hungary. This confession recommended the Augustana Confession (*Variata*) and even Melancthon’s *Loci Communes*.

Inevitably, discussions between the Lutherans and Reformed parties centered on the Lord’s Supper. By 1552, Kálmáncsehi had embraced the Reformed view of the Eucharist. When Peter Mélius became pastor in Debrecen in 1558, he too proclaimed the Reformed views he had learned in Geneva, Strasbourg, and Zurich. Mélius composed the Confession of Marosvásárhely (Targu Mures in modern Romania) or Vásárhelyi (1559)

and led the movement to adopt the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) in Hungary in 1567. The future belonged to Calvinism — until the rise of the anti-Trinitarians and the Counter-Reformation.

Our translation is based on the Magyar text in Áron Kiss, *Magyar Református Zsinatok* (1881), 48–53. It should be noted that this is the first statement of faith in the Magyar tongue. It was sent to the faculty at Heidelberg who praised it as Calvinistic in character. A version published at Kolozsvár (Latin Claudiopolis) gave the confession the title *Confessio Claudiopolitana*. Thus the Confession of Marosvásárhely and “Claudopolitana” are identical. Busch prints a German text, 2/1:109–15.



A Common Christian Confession Concerning the Lord's Supper

Composed in a holy synod of Marosvásárhely and published for the edification of the holy church of Christ by Christian teachers from all over Hungary and Transylvania in the year 1559, on All Saints' Day.

About the True Partaking in the Flesh and Blood of Christ Jesus in the Lord's Supper

What is the Lord's Supper?

The Lord's Supper (as St. Paul says) is the true partaking in the flesh and blood of Christ, from the side of the recipient of the bread and wine through faith — faith which connects Christ Jesus to him in the promise, whilst [the recipient] clings to this promise with full hope and confidence. “My blood is shed for you” (Luke 22:20)—[which means, that the believer] partakes in Christ Jesus and in all His benefits, that is, in the eternal happiness, which He procured by His sacred death and the shedding of His blood.

How does this partaking take place?

It happens through true faith. For in the manner in which we receive the promise by faith, in the same fashion we also have to receive by faith the reality and fruit of the promise, which is the flesh of Christ Jesus broken

for our sake and His blood shed for the forgiveness of our sin. How this happens, we will explain in a short discourse, as follows.

God, willing to fulfill all His promises He had made to the human race from the beginning, gave His Son for our sake. And taking on human flesh for us, He suffered death for our salvation. Both His incarnation and death happened for our sake and all its benefits became ours to the extent that the assumption of His body became the reason why our own body did not perish altogether. His death and resurrection became the reason for us to live eternally. Therefore, His incarnation, death, and resurrection are our eternal life.

Nevertheless, in order that the remembrance of this benefaction does not fall from our minds and souls, Christ instituted the Last Supper, in which He reminds [us] of His benefactions through [the] elements, and, simultaneously, communicates these goods to believers through faith, in the same manner as He communicated them to the apostles during the Last Supper.

Consequently, when during the Last Supper Christ Jesus says about the bread that "this is my body," He does not mean anything else by it, but what St. John says in his gospel: "I am the bread of life." For there Christ Jesus does not mean anything else than that His body is our bread and food, by which our soul lives and is nourished (and the body through the soul, for the body lives from the soul).

Therefore, to eat the body and drink the blood of Christ Jesus, is nothing else than to believe with the full hope and confidence of the heart that His body¹ [*sic*] was shed for our sake and for the forgiveness of our sins, and that we are saved for eternal life only because of the sacrifice of His body and blood. In this manner we partake in the body and blood of Christ by faith.

Why is the eating of Christ's body said to be spiritual food?

Further, we say that this partaking is spiritual and not corporal, since the faith which receives it belongs to the soul and not to the body. Consequently, the goods we receive in the supper are also heavenly and spiritual goods, not bodily ones. In addition, the channel of this partaking of ours with Christ Jesus is the Holy Spirit, by whom Christ Jesus bestows upon us as

1. The text is most likely corrupted: instead of "body" it should read "blood."

well as communicates with us all His benefactions, as St. John says, "By this we know that he dwells in us, and we in him, because he has given us of his Spirit" (cf. 1 John 4:13).

How many kinds of eating are in the Lord's Supper?

Here we also have to understand that in the Lord's Supper there are two kinds of food, namely spiritual and corporal. The spiritual or heavenly one is the holy body and holy blood of Christ Jesus. The bodily one is the bread and the wine. Thus, as the nourishment is twofold, in the same manner the eating is also dual: corporal and spiritual. The body receives the corporal nourishment, i.e., the bread and the wine — a manner of eating, which is also called eating according to the sacrament [i.e., "sacramental eating"]. The soul receives in the promise the holy body and the holy blood of Christ Jesus.

In what manner is Christ present in the supper?

Further, we should also consider in what manner our Lord Christ Jesus is present in the supper.

Christ Jesus never departs from the holy church through His divine nature and power, as He Himself says, "I am with you always, to the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). I take care of you even in your old age. According to such promises of His, our Lord Christ Jesus is always present in the holy church. Nevertheless, beyond this presence, His body and blood are also present in the supper, for faith within the promise. [This happens] because faith has such a great power, that it receives even the remote realities as being present in the Word. Since for faith both the remote and the nearby places are one and the same.

It is in this sense that St. Paul writes to the Galatians, that it was before their eyes that Jesus Christ was crucified (cf. Gal. 3:1), although Christ Jesus Himself had not been crucified in Galatia, but in Jerusalem, a long time before.

The Lord Christ Jesus says about Abraham also, that Abraham saw His day and His time, in which Christ Jesus lived in the world in the flesh, yet Abraham died many hundred years before the birth of Christ Jesus.

Similarly, the holy body and holy blood of our Lord Christ Jesus is also present for believers today within the promise, through faith, in the same manner as the crucifixion of Christ Jesus was present for the Galatians, and as the day of Christ Jesus [was present] for the patriarch Abraham.

Nonetheless, understand this as happening through faith within the soul, and not in a corporal sense. For according to the body, Christ Jesus is sitting on the right hand of the Father, whence He shares all His benefits with us, according to His promise, vivifying, nourishing, as well as protecting [us].

And it is in this manner that we say also about the benefactions [availed to] believers that Christ Jesus is present, since these derive upon us from His body, according to His promises.

[Christ] calls Himself the head of the holy church, because as the members have their beginning and life from the head, in the same fashion, we live by a life taken from the merit of the body of Christ Jesus.

Further, He calls Himself the bridegroom of this holy church, because as the bridegroom nourishes and protects His faithful companion, in the same manner Christ guards and nourishes His holy church.

Nonetheless, the source of all these benefactions is the incarnation of Christ Jesus, inasmuch as He assumed our body and we imparted our body to Him, to the extent that (as St. Paul says) our flesh is of His flesh, and our bones are of his bones (cf. Eph. 5:30). For this reason it is impossible for Him to leave us and not to protect us with His power, just as one man cannot depart from His members, bones, and body.

Consequently, due to these benefactions as well as benefits, which derive upon us from the body of Christ Jesus, we say that Christ Jesus is present within this supper and shares all His benefits with us in His promise.

We also say, however, that this presence is not a corporal, but a spiritual one, since only faith can grasp and understand this, not the body — thus, unbelievers do not receive the holy body and holy blood of Christ.

Therefore, we do not confess such a presence of the body and blood of Christ Jesus, which is outside of faith, because Christ Jesus does not impart Himself to anyone beyond faith. Consequently, we deny that unbelievers receive the body of Christ Jesus.

If someone lacks the spirit of Christ Jesus within himself, he cannot receive the body of Christ Jesus. Unbelievers do not possess the spirit of Christ Jesus within themselves — since St. Paul says that Christ has nothing in common with Belial (cf. 2 Cor. 6:15) — thus, unbelievers cannot receive His body.

Further, Christ Jesus also says that the one who eats His body and drinks His blood will not perish. Unbelievers perish: thus, they do not eat His body and do not drink His blood.

St. Paul also, when speaking about the unworthy manner of eating and drinking at the supper, does not say that “whoever eats the body of Christ Jesus unworthily,” but that “whoever eats the bread or drinks from the cup in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (cf. 1 Cor. 11:27).

What does this mean? The same St. Paul also explains saying that [the one who eats or drinks unworthily] takes damnation to himself. Yet we know that the body of Christ Jesus is not damnation, but life.

Therefore, unbelievers neither receive the body of Christ Jesus according to its reality nor spiritually, but merely the signs of the body and blood of Christ Jesus, the wine and the bread.

Finally, Christ Jesus never ordered anything useless, which could be harmful for us. The reception of the body of Christ Jesus without faith is useless — so He does not order it. If He does not order it, then He does not want it either. Thus, we cannot take it from Him by force, regardless of how much we might give it verbally to unbelievers.

For what purpose do we have to perform the Lord’s Supper?

Finally, we also say and confess that the Lord exhorts and compels us to receive His body and blood within the Holy Supper.

First, it is a commandment of Christ Jesus who says, “Take, eat; drink from it, all of you.” And, “Do this in remembrance of Me,” etc.

Then the benefits we receive within the Lord’s Supper:

First, the reception of the Supper of Christ Jesus to ourselves strengthens our faith in the promises of Christ Jesus.

As the external elements do not deceive the senses of our mouth and eyes, in the same fashion, within the promises of Christ Jesus, the holy body and holy blood of Christ Jesus is truly given to believers through faith. From these, renewal and redemption derive upon us, as St. Augustine says, “Whoever wants to live, has a [source] from which he can live: let him come here, believe, and unite with Christ in order to become alive.”

Further, this Holy Supper urges us also to thanksgiving, thus to give thanks to our Lord Christ Jesus concerning the benefactions and benefits He provided for us, acquiring these by His death and resurrection. About which Christ Jesus speaks saying, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19); as well as St. Paul, “As often as you eat of the bread, proclaim the Lord’s death” (1 Cor. 11:26).

Thirdly, [the Lord's Supper] urges us to the love of our neighbor as well. For as the bread by which the body lives is made of many seeds of wheat, and the wine of many seeds of grape, in the same manner, we, who are members of one head, have to become one. About this St. Paul speaks, saying, "There is one bread, and we who are many are one body" (1 Cor. 10:17).

In the fourth instance, [the Lord's Supper] makes a distinction between us and unbelieving pagans, who are not members of the holy church. Simultaneously, it also comforts us concerning the persistence of the holy church until the end of the world, according to the words of St. Paul, who says, "As often as you eat of the bread and drink of the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

By seeing and understanding this, faithful and God-fearing Christians should not despise this sacred and redeeming doctrine, but rather ought to meditate upon it frequently for the consolation of their souls. From within a devoted heart and soul they should ask together with us, in the name of Christ Jesus, for the Holy Spirit, who will guide us into all truth and make us one in Jesus Christ so that He may have some pleasing achievements among us. Amen.

(Translation submitted by Dezso Buzogany; translation by
Pastor Kupan Istvan)