

# Theodore Beza & Development of the Reformed Doctrine of Infant Baptism: The Colloquy of Montbéliard (1586)

## I. Introduction

- A. The current covenantal confusion within Reformed circles
- B. The need for research on the development of the reformed doctrine of baptism
  - 1. Continuities/discontinuities with Calvin
  - 2. Vis-a-vis Lutheranism
  - 3. Beza's consolidating contribution
- C. The Colloquy of Montbéliard's significance

## II. The Context of the Colloquy

- A. The immediate historical context: Huguenot refugees
- B. The Protestant League
- C. The legal status of Reformed churches & citizens
- D. The Peace of Augsburg (1555)
- E. The Augsburg Confession (1530)
  - 1. Melancthon's *Variata* (1541)
  - 2. The *Invariata* (1530)
- F. Reformed/Lutheran colloquies & relations
  - 1. Frankfurt and Göppingen (1557): Andreae vs. Beza & Farel
  - 2. Worms (1557): RC's vs. followers of Augsburg Confession
  - 3. Poissy Colloquy (1561): Andreae vs. Beza
  - 4. The Maulbronn Colloquy (1564): Andreae vs. Ursinus
  - 5. The Reichstag of 1566: attempt to unite Luth. & Ref.
  - 6. German Protestant princes declare a moratorium on all debates
  - 7. Württemberg's crusade for ubiquitarian Lutheranism
  - 8. The Formula of Concord (1577): Brenz, Andreae, & Chemnitz

9. *Harmonia Confessionum fidei* (1581): Reformed response to FC

G. The calling of the colloquy (March 22, 1586)

III. The Colloquators

- A. The Lutherans: Jacob Andreae (d. 1590) and Lucas Osiander.
- B. The Swiss Reformed (dream) team: Theodore Beza (d. 1605) and Athony La Faye from Geneva; Abraham Musculus and Peirre Hubner from Bern; and Claude Albery from Lausanne.

IV. The Content of the Colloquy

- A. Beza's request for a notarized record of the colloquy denied
- B. Agreed upon topics of discussion: The Lord's Supper & the person of Christ
- C. Andreae's additions: predestination, baptism, and music, statues, and paintings in churches.
- D. Procedure: Württemberg theses followed by open debate

V. The Controversy over Baptism

- A. Beza's futile attempt to try minimize the differences
- B. The Württemberg theses on Baptism

**Non controversial points:**

1. Baptism consists of water and the Word of God.
2. It replaces circumcision.
3. It is to be administered to infants.
4. Baptism is not just a sign and seal but actually confers regeneration in the Holy Spirit.
5. No one who is not regenerated can enter heaven.
6. Regeneration is not earned by human works but conferred by God's mercy.
7. To be baptized is to put on Christ, to die, to be buried, and to rise with Christ to a new life.

**Doctrines contrary to Scripture (by implication held by the Reformed)**

1. Baptism signifies but does not necessary effect what it signifies.
2. Baptism is thereby reduced to an unnecessary sign of membership in the external church.
3. Baptism is effective only in the elect and, even in the case of the elect, not necessarily at the time it is administered.
4. There is no need for midwives to provide emergency baptism.

C. Summary of the debate

1. On the instrumental efficacy of Baptism
2. On the temporal relationship between the sign and reality
3. On the instrumental necessity of faith for salvation
4. On the question of *fides infantum*
5. On the status of baptized babies
6. On baptism as consolation and assurance of salvation
7. On emergency baptisms

D. Evaluation of Beza's Reformed baptismal theology

1. Moving away from Calvin's strong instrumental view of the sacraments
2. The specter of the medieval *ex opera operato* doctrine of the sacraments spooks Reformed theology.
3. Shift from Calvin to Beza: baptism as sign of regeneration and adoption already possessed by the infant vs. baptism as a sign of the future regeneration and adoption of the child.
4. Contrast between Beza's and Calvin's view of *fides infantum*.

5. Beza's desire to maintain the relation of natural faculties to supernatural gifts (Reformed principle of the integrity of created nature).
6. Beza's dangerous move inwards: how do I know I am elect? By virtue of certain characteristic inner motions (*motus*) of the soul.
7. The presuppositional place that election plays in Beza's formulations. The covenantal/ecclesiastical perspective remains untapped. The full resources of Reformed theology are not brought to bear upon the question of meaning and efficacy of infant baptism.

#### VI. The Consequences of the Colloquy

- A. Beza desired unity on essentials; Andreae achieved conformity to FC
- B. Andreae's *Acta* (1587); Beza's *Responsio, prima pars* and *pars altera* (1587, 88); Andreae's *Epitome* (1589). Translated into Latin, German, French. 1000's of copies sold out!
- C. Support for Henry and the French Reformed partially achieved.
- D. Contributed towards the increasing intransigence of Lutheran and Reformed theology.
- E. Beza's doctrine of infant baptism takes center stage in Reformed theology, especially as it is transmitted and transformed by the English Puritans.

#### VII. Select Bibliography

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