

SUMMARY: Dedicatory epistle to Oxford in John Brooke's *The Staff of Christian Faith*, published in 1577, a translation from the French of the 1561 Belgic Confession (*Confession de Foi des Églises Réformées*) written chiefly by Guy de Bres. On the title page Brooke identifies himself as 'John Brooke of Ashe next Sandwich' in Kent, and in the epistle as a servant of Oxford's. Because the nature of the book may shed light on Oxford's religious leanings at the time, two excerpts are given below from websites which provide information on Guy de Bres and the 1561 Belgic Confession.

To the right honourable and his singular good Lord and master, Edward de Vere, Lord d'Escales and Badlesmere, Viscount Bulbeck, Earl of Oxenford, and Lord Great Chamberlain of England, John Brooke wisheth long life with the increase of honour etc.

Although virtue, the root of well-doing, right honourable Lord, hath of itself sufficient force to withstand, repel, and overthrow both the open malice and secret slanders of evil tongues, yet notwithstanding, considering how dangerous, yea, how impossible a thing it is to escape that poisoned sting of Zoilus, and also that nothing hath ever been so well done but that this scorpion hath either openly or privily stung, I need not to doubt, nay, I may be right sure that these my labours shall come into the hands of some more curious than wise, more ready to nip and taunt, yea, even without fault, than friendly to admonish or amend. By occasion whereof, right honourable and my singular good Lord, I have not only thought it expedient, for hope of your Honour's favourable patronage towards these also my labours bestowed in translation, but also for respect of my particular duty towards your Honour, to offer and dedicate the same likewise to your favourable allowance and well-liking, for if in the opinion of all men there can be found no-one more fit for patronage and defence of learning that the skilful for that he is both wise and able to judge and discern truly thereof, I, understanding right well that your Honour hath continually, even from your tender years, bestowed your time and travail towards the attaining of the same, as also the university of Cambridge hath acknowledged in granting and giving unto you such commendation and praise thereof as verily by right was due unto your excellent virtue and rare learning, wherein verily Cambridge, the mother of learning and learned men, hath openly confessed, and in this her confessing made known unto all men that your Honour, being learned and able to judge as a safe harbour and defence of learning, and therefore one most fit to whose honourable patronage I might safely commit this my poor and simple labours, likewise remembering how much and many ways I am by duty bound unto your Honour, as also how unable I am to discharge the same, I have thought it in respect also of my behalf and duty most meet to offer and exhibit such travails as my ability and skill can reach unto to your Lordship as pledge and token of my dutiful and unfeigned goodwill, to the end that such profit as by this my travails may grow to my country and commonwealths may be received under your Lordship's approbation and defence, that all men which do reap benefit thereby should owe thanks unto you in whose duty and goodwill I am. Wherefore heartily requiring and humbly beseeching your Lordship to take on you the patronage and defence of these my labours by translation, that by your approbation and well-liking others may also the rather

like thereof, craving pardon for this my simple boldness, or rather bold simplicity, hoping also of the continuance of your Honour's accustomed goodness towards me, and instantly praying to God for your prosperous estate, I cease further at this time to solicit you,

Your Honour's obedient servant, John Brooke.

(<http://roxborough.com/Biographies/Mini%20Bio%205.htm>)

Guido De Brès, Protestant martyr and author of the *Belgic Confession*, born Mons, near Brussels, 1522, executed 31 May 1567. A refugee in London in 1548 because of his support for the Reformation including selling bibles and preaching, from 1552 he developed an itinerant ministry based in Lille. He was forced to move to Frankfurt in 1556. A meeting with Calvin led him to Geneva where he was ordained in 1558 before returning again to Belgium, to Tournai. There he married Cathérine Ramon. Caught in the Lowland revolt against Spain, from 1561 he was once more on the run. He was eventually captured, jailed and hung. His 'Belgic Confession' (*Confession de Foi des Églises Réformées*, Rouen, 1561) was translated and adopted by a number of synods, becoming after 1619 one of the major standards of the Dutch Reformed Church.

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds1.ix.iii.iii.html>

Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes. Volume I. The History of Creeds.

§ 64. The Belgic Confession. A.D. 1561.

#### GUIDO DE BRÈS.

The chief author of the Belgic Confession is Guido (or Guy, Wido) de Brès, a noble evangelist and martyr of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. He was born about 1523 at Mons, in Hennegau, educated in the Roman Church, and by diligent reading of the Scriptures converted to the evangelical faith. Expelled from his country, he sought refuge in London under Edward VI, where he joined the Belgic fugitives, and prepared himself for the ministry. Afterwards he studied at Lausanne, and became a traveling evangelist in Southwestern Belgium and Northern France -- from Dieppe to Sedan, from Valenciennes to Antwerp. After the conquest of French Flanders he was, together with a younger missionary from Geneva, Peregrin de la Grange, taken prisoner, put in chains, and hanged on the last day of May 1567 for disobedience to the commands of the court at Brussels, and especially for the distribution of the holy communion in the Reformed congregations. From prison the youthful martyr wrote letters of comfort to his brethren,

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his old mother, his wife and his children, and met his death as if it were a marriage-feast. [See, on Guy de Brès, the enlarged edition of Crespin's *Histoire des Martyrs*, Genève, 1617, pp. 731-750, and the Brussels edition of the *Conf. de foi*, p. 19.]

#### THE BELGIC CONFESSION.

The Belgic Confession was prepared in 1561 by Guido de Brès with the aid of Adrien de Saravia (professor of theology in Leyden, afterwards at Cambridge, where he died, 1613), H. Modetus (for some time chaplain of William of Orange), and G. Wingen, in the French language, to prove the Reformed faith from the Word of God. . . . It was revised by Francis Junius of Bourges (1545-1602) -- a student of Calvin, pastor of a Walloon congregation at Antwerp, and afterwards professor of theology at Leyden -- who abridged the sixteenth article, and sent a copy to Geneva and other churches for approval. It was probably printed in 1562, or at all events in 1566, and afterwards translated into Dutch, German, and Latin. It was presented to the bigoted Philip II, 1562, in the vain hope of securing toleration, and with an address which breathes the genuine spirit of martyrdom. . . .

The Confession was publicly adopted by a Synod at Antwerp (1566), then at Wesel (1568), more formally by a Synod at Emden (1571), by a national Synod at Dort (1574), another at Middelburg (1581), and again by the great Synod of Dort, April 29, 1619. But inasmuch as the Arminians had demanded partial changes, and the text had become confused, the Synod of Dort submitted the French, Latin, and Dutch texts to a careful revision. Since that time the Belgic Confession, together with the Heidelberg Catechism, has been the recognized symbol of the Reformed Churches in Holland and Belgium. It is also the doctrinal standard of the Reformed (Dutch) Church in America, which holds to it even more tenaciously than the mother Church in the Netherlands.

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The Belgic Confession contains thirty-seven Articles, and follows the order of the Gallican Confession, but is less polemical and more full and elaborate, especially on the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Church, and the Sacraments. It is, upon the whole, the best symbolical statement of the Calvinistic system of doctrine, with the exception of the Westminster Confession.