

THE BELGIC CONFESSION

1561

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Introduction

The first of the doctrinal standards of the Christian Reformed Churches is the Confession of Faith. It is usually called the Belgic Confession because it originated in the Southern Netherlands, now known as Belgium. Its chief author was Guido de Brès, a preacher of the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands, who died a martyr to the faith in the year 1567. During the sixteenth century the Churches in this country were exposed to the most terrible persecution by the Roman Catholic government. To protest against this cruel oppression, and to prove to the persecutors that the adherents of the Reformed faith were no rebels, as was laid to their charge, but law-abiding citizens who professed the true Christian doctrine according to the Holy Scriptures, de Brès prepared this Confession in the year 1561. In the following year a copy was sent to king Philip II, together with an address in which the petitioners declared that they were ready to obey the government in all lawful things, but that they would “offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to fire,” rather than deny the truth expressed in this Confession.

Although the immediate purpose of securing freedom from persecution was not attained, and de Brès himself fell as one of the many thousands who sealed their faith with their lives, his work has endured and will continue to endure for ages. In its composition the author availed himself to some extent of a Confession of the Reformed Churches in France, written chiefly by John Calvin and published two years earlier. The work of de Brès, however, is not a mere revision of Calvin’s work, but an independent composition. In The Netherlands it was at once gladly received by the Churches, and adopted by the National Synods, held during the last three decades of the sixteenth century. After a careful revision, not of the contents but of the text, the great Synod of Dort in 1618-19 adopted this Confession as one of the doctrinal standards of the Reformed Churches, to which all officebearers of the Churches were required to subscribe. Its excellence as one of the best symbolical statements of Reformed doctrine has been generally recognized.

True Christian Confession - Containing the Summary of the Doctrine of God and of the Eternal Salvation of Man

ARTICLE 1 - THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD

We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth that there is only one God, who is a simple and spiritual Being; He is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good.

ARTICLE 2 - HOW GOD MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO US

We know Him by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most beautiful book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many letters leading us to perceive clearly the invisible qualities of God namely His eternal power and deity, as the apostle Paul says in Rom 1:20. All these things are sufficient to convict men and leave them without excuse. Second, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word as far as is necessary for us in this life, to His glory and our salvation.

ARTICLE 3 - THE WORD OF GOD

We confess that this Word of God did not come by the impulse of man, but that men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God, as the apostle Peter says. Thereafter, in His special care for us and our salvation, God commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed word to

writing and He Himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.

ARTICLE 4 - THE CANONICAL BOOKS

We believe that the Holy Scriptures consist of two parts, namely, the Old and the New Testament, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged. These books are listed in the Church of God as follows.

The books of the Old Testament: the five books of Moses, namely, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther; Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The books of the New Testament: the four gospels, namely, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles; the thirteen letters of the apostle Paul, namely, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon; the letter to the Hebrews; the seven other letters, namely, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, Jude; and the Revelation to the apostle John.

ARTICLE 5 - THE AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith. We believe without any doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they contain the evidence thereof in themselves; for, even the blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are being fulfilled.

ARTICLE 6 - THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CANONICAL AND APOCRYPHAL BOOKS

We distinguish these holy books from the apocryphal, namely, 3 and 4 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, additions to Esther, the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men in the Furnace, Susannah, Bel and the Dragon, the Prayer of Manasseh, and 1 and 2 Maccabees. The Church may read and take instruction from these so far as they agree with the canonical books. They are, however, far from having such power and authority that we may confirm from their testimony any point of faith or of the Christian religion; much less may they be used to detract from the authority of the holy books.

ARTICLE 7 - THE SUFFICIENCY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

We believe that this Holy Scripture fully contains the will of God and that all that man must believe in order to be saved is sufficiently taught therein. The whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in it at length. It is therefore unlawful for any one, even for an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in Holy Scripture: yes, even if it be an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul says. Since it is forbidden to add to or take away anything from the Word of God, it is evident that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects.

We may not consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with the divine Scriptures; nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and lighter than a breath. We therefore reject with all our heart whatever does not agree with this infallible rule, as the apostles have taught us: Test the spirits to see whether they are of God. Likewise: If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting.

ARTICLE 8 - GOD IS ONE IN ESSENCE, YET DISTINGUISHED IN THREE PERSONS

According to this truth and this Word of God, we believe in one only God, who is one single essence, in which are three persons, really, truly, and eternally distinct according to their incommunicable properties; namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is the cause, origin, and beginning of all things visible and invisible. The Son is the Word, the wisdom, and the image of the Father. The Holy Spirit is the eternal power and might who proceeds from the Father and the Son. Nevertheless, God is not by this distinction divided into three, since the Holy Scriptures teach us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each has His personal existence, distinguished by Their properties; but in such a way that these three persons are but one only God.

It is therefore evident that the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Father, and likewise the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. Nevertheless, these persons thus distinguished are not divided, nor intermixed; for the Father has not assumed our flesh and blood, neither has the Holy Spirit, but the Son only. The Father has never been without His Son, or without His Holy Spirit. For They are all three co-eternal and co-essential. There is neither first nor last; for They are all three one, in truth, in power, in goodness, and in mercy.

ARTICLE 9 - SCRIPTURE PROOF OF THIS DOCTRINE

All this we know both from the testimonies of Holy Scripture and from the respective works of the three Persons, and especially those we perceive in ourselves. The testimonies of Scripture which lead us to believe this Holy Trinity are written in many places of the Old Testament. It is not necessary to mention them all; it is sufficient to select some with discretion.

In the book of Genesis God says: Let Us make man in our image after our likeness So God created man in His own image ...; male and female He created them. Also: Behold, the man has become like one of Us. From God's saying, Let Us make man in Our image, it appears that there are more divine persons than one; and when He says, God created, He indicates that there is one God. It is true, He does not say how many persons there are, but what seems to be somewhat obscure in the Old Testament is very plain in the New Testament. For when our Lord was baptized in the river Jordan, the voice of the Father was heard, who said, This is My beloved Son; the Son was seen in the water, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form as a dove. For the baptism of all believers Christ prescribed this formula: Baptize all nations into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. In the gospel according to Luke the angel Gabriel thus addressed Mary, the mother of our Lord: The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. Likewise: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. In all these places we are fully taught that there are three persons in one only divine essence.

Although this doctrine far surpasses all human understanding, nevertheless in this life we believe it on the ground of the Word of God, and we expect to enjoy its perfect knowledge and fruit hereafter in heaven.

Moreover, we must observe the distinct offices and works of these three Persons towards us. The Father is called our Creator by His power; the Son is our Saviour and Redeemer by His blood; the Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier by His dwelling in our hearts. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity has always been maintained and preserved in the true Church since the time of the apostles to this very day, over against Jews, Muslims, and against false Christians and heretics such as Marcion, Mani, Praxeas, Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Arius, and such like, who have been justly condemned by the orthodox fathers. In this doctrine, therefore, we willingly receive the three creeds, of the Apostles, of Nicea, and of Athanasius; likewise that which in accordance with them is agreed upon by the early fathers.

ARTICLE 10 - JESUS CHRIST TRUE AND ETERNAL GOD

We believe that Jesus Christ according to His divine nature is the only begotten Son of God, begotten from eternity, not made, nor created - for then He would be a creature - but of the same

essence with the Father, equally-eternal, who reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature, and is equal to Him in all things. He is the Son of God, not only from the time that He assumed our nature but from all eternity, as these testimonies, when compared with each other, teach us: Moses says that God created the world; the apostle John says that all things were made by the Word which he calls God. The letter to the Hebrews says that God made the world through His Son; likewise the apostle Paul says that God created all things through Jesus Christ. Therefore it must necessarily follow that He who is called God, the Word, the Son, and Jesus Christ, did exist at that time when all things were created by Him. Therefore He could say, Truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am, and He prayed, Glorify Thou Me in Thy own presence with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made. And so He is true, eternal God, the Almighty, whom we invoke, worship, and serve.

ARTICLE 11 - THE HOLY SPIRIT TRUE AND ETERNAL GOD

We believe and confess also that the Holy Spirit from eternity proceeds from the Father and the Son. He is neither made, created, nor begotten, but He can only be said to proceed from both. In order He is the third Person of the Holy Trinity, of one and the same essence, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son, true and eternal God, as the Holy Scriptures teach us.

ARTICLE 12 - THE CREATION OF ALL THINGS, ESPECIALLY THE ANGELS

We believe that the Father through the Word, that is, through His Son, has created out of nothing heaven and earth and all creatures, when it seemed good to Him, and that He has given to every creature its being, shape, and form, and to each its specific task and function to serve its Creator. We believe that He also continues to sustain and govern them according to His eternal providence and by His infinite power in order to serve man, to the end that man may serve his God.

He also created the angels good, to be His messengers and to serve His elect. Some of these have fallen from the exalted position in which God created them into everlasting perdition, but the others have by the grace of God remained steadfast and continued in their first state. The devils and evil spirits are so depraved that they are enemies of God and of all that is good. With all their might, they lie in wait like murderers to ruin the Church and all its members and to destroy everything by their wicked devices. They are therefore by their own wickedness sentenced to eternal damnation and daily expect their horrible torments.

Therefore we detest and reject the error of the Sadducees, who deny that there are any spirits and angels; and also the error of the Manichees, who say that the devils were not created, but have their origin of themselves, and that without having become corrupted, they are wicked by their own nature.

ARTICLE 13 - THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

We believe that this good God, after He had created all things, did not abandon them or give them up to fortune or chance, but that according to His holy will He so rules and governs them that in this world nothing happens without His direction. Yet God is not the Author of the sins which are committed nor can He be charged with them. For His power and goodness are so great and beyond understanding that He ordains and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner, even when devils and wicked men act unjustly. And as to His actions surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire farther than our capacity allows us. But with the greatest humility and reverence we adore the just judgments of God, which are hidden from us, and we content ourselves that we are pupils of Christ, who have only to learn those things which He teaches us in His Word, without transgressing these limits.

This doctrine gives us unspeakable consolation, for we learn thereby that nothing can happen to us by chance, but only by the direction of our gracious heavenly Father. He watches over us with fatherly care, keeping all creatures so under His power that not one hair of our head - for they are all numbered - nor one sparrow can fall to the ground without the will of our Father. In this we trust, because we

know that He holds in check the devil and all our enemies so that they cannot hurt us without His permission and will.

We therefore reject the damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God does not concern Himself with anything but leaves all things to chance.

ARTICLE 14 - THE CREATION AND FALL OF MAN AND HIS INCAPABILITY OF DOING WHAT IS TRULY GOOD

We believe that God created man of dust from the ground and He made and formed him after His own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy. His will could conform to the will of God in every respect. But, when man was in this high position, he did not appreciate it nor did he value his excellency. He gave ear to the words of the devil and wilfully subjected himself to sin and consequently to death and the curse. For he transgressed the commandment of life which he had received; by his sin he broke away from God, who was his true life; he corrupted his whole nature. By all this he made himself liable to physical and spiritual death.

Since man became wicked and perverse, corrupt in all his ways, he has lost all his excellent gifts which he had once received from God. He has nothing left but some small traces, which are sufficient to make man inexcusable. For whatever light is in us has changed into darkness, as Scripture teaches us, The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it; where the apostle John calls mankind darkness.

Therefore we reject all teaching contrary to this concerning the free will of man, since man is but a slave to sin and no one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven. For who dares to boast that he of himself can do any good, when Christ says: No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him? Who will glory in his own will, when he understands that the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God? Who can speak of his knowledge, since the unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God? In short, who dares to claim anything, when he realizes that we are not competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but that our competence is from God? Therefore what the apostle says must justly remain sure and firm: God is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure. For there is no understanding nor will conformable to the understanding and will of God unless Christ has brought it about; as He teaches us: Apart from Me you can do nothing.

ARTICLE 15 - ORIGINAL SIN

We believe that by the disobedience of Adam original sin has spread throughout the whole human race. It is a corruption of the entire nature of man and a hereditary evil which infects even infants in their mother's womb. As a root it produces in man all sorts of sin. It is, therefore, so vile and abominable in the sight of God that it is sufficient to condemn the human race. It is not abolished nor eradicated even by baptism, for sin continually streams forth like water welling up from this woeful source. Yet, in spite of all this, original sin is not imputed to the children of God to their condemnation but by His grace and mercy is forgiven them. This does not mean that the believers may sleep peacefully in their sin, but that the awareness of this corruption may make them often groan as they eagerly wait to be delivered from this body of death.

In this regard we reject the error of the Pelagians, who say that this sin is only a matter of imitation.

ARTICLE 16 - DIVINE ELECTION

We believe that, when the entire offspring of Adam plunged into perdition and ruin by the transgression of the first man, God manifested Himself to be as He is: merciful and just. Merciful, in rescuing and saving from this perdition those whom in His eternal and unchangeable counsel He has elected in Jesus Christ our Lord by His pure goodness, without any consideration of their works. Just, in leaving the others in the fall and perdition into which they have plunged themselves.

ARTICLE 17 - THE RESCUE OF FALLEN MAN

We believe that, when He saw that man had thus plunged himself into physical and spiritual death and made himself completely miserable, our gracious God in His marvellous wisdom and goodness set out to seek man when he trembling fled from Him. He comforted him with the promise that He would give him His Son, born of woman, to bruise the head of the serpent and to make man blessed.

ARTICLE 18 - THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD

We confess, therefore, that God has fulfilled the promise He made to the fathers by the mouth of His holy prophets when, at the time appointed by Him, He sent into the world His own only-begotten and eternal son, who took the form of a servant and was born in the likeness of men. He truly assumed a real human nature with all its infirmities, without sin, for He was conceived in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit and not by the act of a man. He not only assumed human nature as to the body, but also a true human soul, in order that He might be a real man. For since the soul was lost as well as the body, it was necessary that He should assume both to save both.

Contrary to the heresy of the Anabaptists, who deny that Christ assumed human flesh of His mother, we therefore confess that Christ partook of the flesh and blood of the children.

He is a fruit of the loins of David;

born of the seed of David according to the flesh;

a fruit of the womb of the virgin Mary;

born of woman;

a branch of David;

a shoot from the stump of Jesse;

sprung from the tribe of Judah;

descended from the Jews according to the flesh;

of the seed of Abraham, since the Son was concerned with the descendants of Abraham. Therefore He had to be made like His brethren in every respect, yet without sin.

In this way He is in truth our Immanuel, that is, God with us.

ARTICLE 19 - THE TWO NATURES IN THE ONE PERSON OF CHRIST

We believe that by this conception the person of the Son of God is inseparably united and joined with the human nature, so that there are not two sons of God, nor two persons, but two natures united in one single person. Each nature retains its own distinct properties: His divine nature has always remained uncreated, without beginning of days or end of life, filling heaven and earth. His human nature has not lost its properties; it has beginning of days and remains created. It is finite and retains all the properties of a true body. Even though, by His resurrection, He has given immortality to His human nature, He has not changed its reality, since our salvation and resurrection also depend on the reality of His body.

However, these two natures are so closely united in one person that they were not even separated by His death. Therefore, what He, when dying, committed into the hands of His Father was a real human spirit that departed from His body. Meanwhile His divinity always remained united with His human nature, even when He was lying in the grave. And the divine nature always remained in Him just as it was in Him when He was a little child, even though it did not manifest itself as such for a little while.

For this reason we profess Him to be true God and true man: true God in order to conquer death by His power; and true man that He might die for us according to the infirmity of His flesh.

ARTICLE 20 - THE JUSTICE AND MERCY OF GOD IN CHRIST

We believe that God, who is perfectly merciful and just, sent His Son to assume that nature in

which disobedience had been committed, to make satisfaction in that same nature; and to bear the punishment of sin by His most bitter passion and death. God therefore manifested His justice against His Son when He laid our iniquity on Him, and poured out His goodness and mercy on us, who were guilty and worthy of damnation. Out of a most perfect love He gave His Son to die for us and He raised Him for our justification that through Him we might obtain immortality and life eternal.

ARTICLE 21 - THE SATISFACTION OF CHRIST OUR HIGH PRIEST

We believe that Jesus Christ was confirmed by an oath to be a High Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek. He presented Himself in our place before His Father, appeasing God's wrath by His full satisfaction, offering Himself on the tree of the cross, where He poured out His precious blood to purge away our sins, as the prophets had foretold. For it is written, Upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole and with His stripes we are healed. Like a lamb He was led to the slaughter. He was numbered with the transgressors, and condemned as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, though he had first declared Him innocent. He restored what He had not stolen. He died as the righteous for the unrighteous. He suffered in body and soul, feeling the horrible punishment caused by our sins, and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground. Finally, He exclaimed, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? All this He endured for the forgiveness of our sins.

Therefore we justly say, with Paul, that we know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. We count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus our Lord. We find comfort in His wounds and have no need to seek or invent any other means of reconciliation with God than this only sacrifice, once offered, by which the believers are perfected for all times. This is also the reason why the angel of God called Him Jesus, that is, Saviour, because He would save His people from their sins.

ARTICLE 22 - OUR JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST

We believe that, in order that we may obtain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts a true faith. This faith embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, makes Him our own, and does not seek anything besides Him. For it must necessarily follow, either that all we need for our salvation is not in Jesus Christ or, if it is all in Him, that one who has Jesus Christ through faith, has complete salvation. It is, therefore, a terrible blasphemy to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something else is needed besides Him; for the conclusion would then be that Christ is only half a Saviour.

Therefore we rightly say with Paul that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith apart from works of law. Meanwhile, strictly speaking, we do not mean that faith as such justifies us, for faith is only the instrument by which we embrace Christ our righteousness; He imputes to us all His merits and as many holy works as He has done for us and in our place. Therefore Jesus Christ is our righteousness, and faith is the instrument that keeps us with Him in the communion of all His benefits. When those benefits have become ours, they are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.

ARTICLE 23 - OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE GOD

We believe that our blessedness lies in the forgiveness of our sins for Jesus Christ's sake and that there our righteousness before God consists, as David and teach us. They pronounce a blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works. The apostle also says that we are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Therefore we always hold to this firm foundation. We give all the glory to God, humble ourselves before Him, and acknowledge ourselves to be what we are. We do not claim anything for ourselves or our merits, but rely and rest on the only obedience of Jesus Christ crucified; His obedience is ours when we believe in Him.

This is sufficient to cover all our iniquities and to give us confidence in drawing near to God,

freeing our conscience of fear, terror, and dread, so that we do not follow the example of our first father, Adam, who trembling tried to hide and covered himself with fig leaves. For indeed, if we had to appear before God, relying - be it ever so little - on ourselves or some other creature, (woe be to us!) we would be consumed. Therefore everyone must say with David, O LORD, enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for no man living is righteous before Thee.

ARTICLE 24 - MAN'S SANCTIFICATION AND GOOD WORKS

We believe that this true faith, worked in man by the hearing of God's Word and by the operation of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and makes him a new man. It makes him live a new life and frees him from the slavery of sin. Therefore it is not true that this justifying faith makes man indifferent to living a good and holy life. On the contrary, without it no one would ever do anything out of love for God, but only out of self-love or fear of being condemned. It is therefore impossible for this holy faith to be inactive in man, for we do not speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls faith working through love. This faith induces man to apply himself to those works which God has commanded in His Word. These works, proceeding from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, since they are all sanctified by His grace. Nevertheless, they do not count toward our justification. For through faith in Christ we are justified, even before we do any good works. Otherwise they could not be good any more than the fruit of a tree can be good unless the tree itself is good.

Therefore we do good works, but not for merit. For what could we merit? We are indebted to God, rather than He to us, for the good works we do, since it is He who is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Let us keep in mind what is written: So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty." Meanwhile we do not deny that God rewards good works, but it is by His grace that He crowns His gifts.

Furthermore, although we do good works, we do not base our salvation on them. We cannot do a single work that is not defiled by our flesh and does not deserve punishment. Even if we could show one good work, the remembrance of one sin is enough to make God reject it. We would then always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be constantly tormented, if they did not rely on the merit of the death and passion of our Saviour.

ARTICLE 25 - CHRIST, THE FULFILMENT OF THE LAW

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ceased with the coming of Christ, and that all shadows have been fulfilled, so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians. Yet their truth and substance remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled.

In the meantime we still use the testimonies taken from the law and the prophets, both to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel and to order our life in all honour, according to God's will and to His glory.

ARTICLE 26 - CHRIST'S INTERCESSION

We believe that we have no access to God except through the only Mediator and Advocate Jesus Christ the righteous. For this purpose He became man, uniting together the divine and human nature, that we men might not be barred from but have access to the divine majesty. This Mediator, however, whom the Father has ordained between Himself and us, should not frighten us by His greatness, so that we look for another according to our fancy. There is no creature in heaven or on earth who loves us more than Jesus Christ. Though He was in the form of God, He emptied Himself, taking the form of man and of a servant for us, and was made like His brethren in every respect. If, therefore, we had to look for another intercessor, could we find one who loves us more than He who laid down His life for us, even while we were His enemies? If we had to look for one who has authority and power, who has more than He who is seated at the right hand of the Father and who has all authority in heaven and on

earth? Moreover, who will be heard more readily than God's own well-beloved Son?

Therefore it was pure lack of trust which introduced the custom of dishonouring the saints rather than honouring them, doing what they themselves never did nor required. On the contrary, they constantly rejected such honour according to their duty, as appears from their writings. Here one ought not to bring in our unworthiness, for it is not a question of offering our prayers on the basis of our own worthiness, but only on the basis of the excellence and worthiness of Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is ours by faith.

Therefore with good reason, to take away from us this foolish fear or rather distrust, the author of Hebrews says to us that Jesus Christ was made like His brethren in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because He Himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted. Further, to encourage us more to go to Him, he says: Since then we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. The same letter says: Therefore brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, etc. Also, Christ holds His priesthood permanently, because He continues forever. Consequently He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. What more is needed? Christ Himself says: I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by Me. Why should we look for another advocate? It has pleased God to give us His Son as our Advocate. Let us then not leave Him for another, or even look for another, without ever finding one. For when God gave Him to us, He knew very well that we were sinners.

In conclusion, according to the command of Christ, we call upon the heavenly Father through Christ our only Mediator, as we are taught in the Lord's prayer. We rest assured that we shall obtain all we ask of the Father in His Name.

ARTICLE 27 - THE CATHOLIC OR UNIVERSAL CHURCH

We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by His blood, and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

This Church has existed from the beginning of the world and will be to the end, for Christ is an eternal King who cannot be without subjects. This holy Church is preserved by God against the fury of the whole world, although for a while it may look very small and as extinct in the eyes of man. Thus during the perilous reign of Ahab, the Lord kept for Himself seven thousand persons who had not bowed their knees to Baal.

Moreover, this holy Church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world. However, it is joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith.

ARTICLE 28 - EVERYONE'S DUTY TO JOIN THE CHURCH

We believe, since this holy assembly and congregation is the assembly of the redeemed and there is no salvation outside of it, that no one ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself, no matter what his state or quality may be. But all and everyone are obliged to join it and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the Church. They must submit themselves to its instruction and discipline, bend their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and serve the edification of the brothers and sisters, according to the talents which God has given them as members of the same body.

To observe this more effectively, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate from those who do not belong to the Church and to join this assembly wherever God has established it. They should do so even though the rulers and edicts of princes were against it, and death or physical punishment might follow.

All therefore who draw away from the Church or fail to join it act contrary to the ordinance of God.

ARTICLE 29 - THE MARKS OF THE TRUE AND THE FALSE CHURCH

We believe that we ought to discern diligently and very carefully from the Word of God what is the true Church, for all sects which are in the world today claim for themselves the name of Church. We are not speaking here of the hypocrites, who are mixed in the Church along with the good and yet are not part of the Church, although they are outwardly in it. We are speaking of the body and the communion of the true Church which must be distinguished from all sects that call themselves the Church.

The true Church is to be recognized by the following marks: It practises the pure preaching of the gospel. It maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them. It exercises Church discipline for correcting and punishing sins. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head. Hereby the true Church can certainly be known and no one has the right to separate from it.

Those who are of the Church may be recognized by the marks of Christians. They believe in Jesus Christ the only Saviour, flee from sin and pursue righteousness, love the true God and their neighbour without turning to the right or left, and crucify their flesh and its works. Although great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life. They appeal constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of Jesus Christ, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins through faith in Him.

The false church assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God. It does not want to submit itself to the yoke of Christ. It does not administer the sacraments as Christ commanded in His Word, but adds to them and subtracts from them as it pleases. It bases itself more on men than on Jesus Christ. It persecutes those who live holy lives according to the Word of God and who rebuke the false church for its sins, greed, and idolatries.

These two Churches are easily recognized and distinguished from each other.

ARTICLE 30 - THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH

We believe that this true Church must be governed according to the Spiritual order which our Lord has taught us in His Word. There should be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments; there should also be elders and deacons who, together with the pastors, form the council of the Church. By these means they preserve the true religion; they see to it that the true doctrine takes its course, that evil men are disciplined in a spiritual way and are restrained, and also that the poor and all the afflicted are helped and comforted according to their need. By these means everything will be done well and in good order when faithful men are chosen in agreement with the rule that the apostle Paul gave to Timothy.

ARTICLE 31 - THE OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH

We believe that ministers of God's Word, elders, and deacons ought to be chosen to their offices by lawful election of the Church, with prayer and in good order, as stipulated by the Word of God. Therefore everyone shall take care not to intrude by improper means. He shall wait for the time that he is called by God so that he may have sure testimony and thus be certain that his call comes from the Lord. Ministers of the Word, in whatever place they are, have equal power and authority, for they are all servants of Jesus Christ, the only universal Bishop and the only Head of the Church. In order that this holy ordinance of God may not be violated or rejected, we declare that everyone must hold the

ministers of the Word and the elders of the Church in special esteem because of their work, and as much as possible be at peace with them without grumbling or arguing.

ARTICLE 32 - THE ORDER AND DISCIPLINE OF THE CHURCH

We believe that, although it is useful and good for those who govern the Church to establish a certain order to maintain the body of the Church, they must at all times watch that they do not deviate from what Christ, our only Master, has commanded. Therefore we reject all human inventions and laws introduced into the worship of God which bind and compel the consciences in any way. We accept only what is proper to preserve and promote harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God. To that end, discipline and excommunication ought to be exercised in agreement with the Word of God.

ARTICLE 33 - THE SACRAMENTS

We believe that our gracious God, mindful of our insensitivity and infirmity, has ordained sacraments to seal His promises to us and to be pledges of His good will and grace towards us. He did so to nourish and sustain our faith. He has added these to the Word of the gospel to represent better to our external senses both what He declares to us in His Word and what He does inwardly in our hearts. Thus He confirms to us the salvation which He imparts to us. Sacraments are visible signs and seals of something internal and invisible, by means of which God works in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the signs are not void and meaningless so that they deceive us. For Jesus Christ is their truth; apart from Him they would be nothing. Moreover, we are satisfied with the number of sacraments which Christ our Master has instituted for us, namely, two: the sacrament of baptism and the holy supper of Jesus Christ.

ARTICLE 34 - THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

We believe and confess that Jesus Christ, who is the end of the law, has by His shed blood put an end to every other shedding of blood that one could or would make as an expiation or satisfaction for sins. He has abolished circumcision, which involved blood, and has instituted in its place the sacrament of baptism. By baptism we are received into the Church of God and set apart from all other peoples and false religions, to be entirely committed to Him whose mark and emblem we bear. This serves as a testimony to us that He will be our God and gracious Father for ever.

For that reason He has commanded all those who are His to be baptized with plain water, into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. By this He signifies to us that as water washes away the dirt of the body when poured on us, and as water is seen on the body of the baptized when sprinkled on him, so the blood of Christ, by the Holy Spirit, does the same thing internally to the soul. It washes and cleanses our soul from sin and regenerates us from children of wrath into children of God. This is not brought about by the water as such but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God, which is our Red Sea, through which we must pass to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, that is, the devil, and enter into the spiritual land of Canaan.

Thus the ministers on their part give us the sacrament and what is visible, but our Lord gives us what is signified by the sacrament, namely, the invisible gifts and grace. He washes, purges, and cleanses our souls of all filth and unrighteousness, renews our hearts and fills them with all comfort, gives us true assurance of His fatherly goodness, clothes us with the new nature, and takes away the old nature with all its works.

We believe, therefore, that anyone who aspires to eternal life ought to be baptized only once. Baptism should never be repeated, for we cannot be born twice. Moreover, baptism benefits us not only when the water is on us and when we receive it, but throughout our whole life. For that reason we reject the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with a single baptism received only once, and who also condemn the baptism of the little children of believers. We believe that these children ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as infants were circumcised in Israel on the basis of

the same promises which are now made to our children. Indeed, Christ shed His blood to wash the children of believers just as much as He shed it for adults. Therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of what Christ has done for them, as the Lord commanded in the law that a lamb was to be offered shortly after children were born. This was a sacrament of the passion and death of Jesus Christ. Because baptism has the same meaning for our children as circumcision had for the people of Israel, Paul calls baptism the circumcision of Christ.

ARTICLE 35 - THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

We believe and confess that our Saviour Jesus Christ has instituted the sacrament of the holy supper to nourish and sustain those whom He has already regenerated and incorporated into His family, which is His Church.

Those who are born anew have a twofold life. One is physical and temporal, which they received in their first birth and it is common to all men. The other is spiritual and heavenly, which is given them in their second birth and is effected by the word of the gospel in the communion of the body of Christ. This life is not common to all but only to the elect of God.

For the support of the physical and earthly life God has ordained earthly and material bread. This bread is common to all just as life is common to all. For the support of the spiritual and heavenly life, which believers have, He has sent them a living bread which came down from heaven, namely, Jesus Christ, who nourishes and sustains the spiritual life of the believers when He is eaten by them, that is, spiritually appropriated and received by faith.

To represent to us the spiritual and heavenly bread, Christ has instituted earthly and visible bread as a sacrament of His body and wine as a sacrament of His blood. He testifies to us that as certainly as we take and hold the sacrament in our hands and eat and drink it with our mouths, by which our physical life is then sustained, so certainly do we receive by faith, as the hand and mouth of our soul, the true body and true blood of Christ, our only Saviour, in our souls for our spiritual life.

It is beyond any doubt that Jesus Christ did not commend His sacraments to us in vain. Therefore He works in us all that He represents to us by these holy signs. We do not understand the manner in which this is done, just as we do not comprehend the hidden activity of the Spirit of God. Yet we do not go wrong when we say that what we eat and drink is the true, natural body and the true blood of Christ. However, the manner in which we eat it is not by mouth but in the spirit by faith. In that way Jesus Christ always remains seated at the right hand of God His Father in heaven; yet He does not cease to communicate Himself to us by faith. This banquet is a spiritual table at which Christ makes us partakers of Himself with all His benefits and gives us the grace to enjoy both Himself and the merit of His suffering and death. He nourishes, strengthens, and comforts our poor, desolate souls by the eating of His flesh, and refreshes and renews them by the drinking of His blood.

Although the sacrament is joined together with that which is signified, the latter is not always received by all. The wicked certainly takes the sacrament to his condemnation, but he does not receive the truth of the sacrament. Thus Judas and Simon the sorcerer both received the sacrament, but they did not receive Christ, who is signified by it. He is communicated exclusively to the believers.

Finally, we receive this holy sacrament in the congregation of the people of God with humility and reverence as we together commemorate the death of Christ our Saviour with thanksgiving and we confess our faith and Christian religion. Therefore no one should come to this table without careful self-examination, lest by eating this bread and drinking from this cup, he eat and drink judgment upon himself. In short, we are moved by the use of this holy sacrament to a fervent love of God and our neighbours. Therefore we reject as desecrations all additions and damnable inventions which men have mixed with the sacraments. We declare that we should be content with the ordinance taught by Christ and His apostles and should speak about it as they have spoken.

ARTICLE 36 - THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT

We believe that, because of the depravity of mankind, our gracious God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers. He wants the world to be governed by laws and policies, in order that the licentiousness of men be restrained and that everything be conducted among them in good order. For that purpose He has placed the sword in the hand of the government to punish wrongdoers and to protect those who do what is good. Their task of restraining and sustaining is not limited to the public order but includes the protection of the Church and its ministry in order that¹ the kingdom of Christ may come, the Word of the gospel may be preached everywhere, and God may be honoured and served by everyone, as He requires in His Word.

Moreover, everyone - no matter of what quality, condition, or rank - ought to be subject to the civil officers, pay taxes, hold them in honour and respect, and obey them in all things which do not disagree with the Word of God. We ought to pray for them, that God may direct them in all their ways and that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way.

For that reason we condemn the Anabaptists and other rebellious people, and in general all those who reject the authorities and civil officers, subvert justice, introduce a communion of goods, and confound the decency that God has established among men.

ARTICLE 37 - THE LAST JUDGMENT

Finally, we believe, according to the Word of God, that when the time, ordained by the Lord but unknown to all creatures, has come and the number of the elect is complete, our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, bodily and visibly, as He ascended, with great glory and majesty. He will declare Himself Judge of the living and the dead and set this old world afire in order to purge it. Then all people, men, women, and children, who ever lived, from the beginning of the world to the end, will appear in person before this great Judge. They will be summoned with the archangel's call and with the sound of the trumpet of God.

Those who will have died before that time will arise out of the earth, as their spirits are once again united with their own bodies in which they lived. Those who will then be still alive will not die as the others but will be changed in the twinkling of an eye from perishable to imperishable. Then the books will be opened and the dead will be judged according to what they have done in this world, whether good or evil. Indeed, all people will render account for every careless word they utter, which the world regards as mere jest and amusement. The secrets and hypocrisies of men will then be publicly uncovered in the sight of all. And so for good reason the thought of this judgment is horrible and dreadful to the wicked and evildoers but it is a great joy and comfort to the righteous and elect. For then their full redemption will be completed and they will receive the fruits of their labour and of the trouble they have suffered. Their innocence will be known to all and they will see the terrible vengeance that God will bring upon the wicked who persecuted, oppressed, and tormented them in this world.

The wicked will be convicted by the testimony of their own consciences and will become immortal, but only to be tormented in the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. On the other hand, the faithful and elect will be crowned with glory and honour. The Son of God will acknowledge their names before God His Father and His elect angels. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and their cause - at present condemned as heretical and evil by many judges and civil authorities - will be recognized as the cause of the Son of God. As a gracious reward, the Lord will cause them to possess such a glory as the heart of man could never conceive. Therefore we look forward to that great day with a great longing to enjoy to the full the promises of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!