

# THE BELGIC CONFESSION

## Article 1: The Only God

We all believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that there is a single and simple spiritual being, whom we call God—eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, infinite, almighty; completely wise, just, and good, and the overflowing source of all good.

## Article 2: The Means by Which We Know God

We know God by two means:

First, through the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: God's eternal power and divinity, as the apostle, Saint Paul, says in Romans 1:20.

All these things are enough to convict humans and to leave them without excuse.

Second, God communicates to us more clearly through the holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for God's glory and for our salvation.

## Article 3: The Written Word of God

We confess that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by "by human will," but that "men and women moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke from God," as Saint Peter says.<sup>1</sup> Afterward our God—because of a special care for us and our salvation—commanded the prophets and apostles, God's servants, to commit this revealed Word to writing. The two tables of the law were written with God's own finger. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.

## Article 4: The Canonical Books

We include in the Holy Scripture the two volumes of the Old and New Testaments. They are canonical books with which there can be no quarrel at all. In the church of God the list is as follows: In the Old Testament, the five books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; the books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth; the two books of Samuel, and two of Kings; the two books of Chronicles, called Paralipomenon; the first book of Ezra; Nehemiah, Esther; Job, the Psalms of David; the three books of Solomon—Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song; the four major prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah,\* Ezekiel, Daniel; and then the other twelve minor prophets—Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. In the New Testament, the four Gospels—Saint Matthew, Saint Mark, Saint Luke, and Saint John; the Acts of the Apostles; the fourteen letters of Saint Paul—to the Romans; the two letters to the Corinthians; to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians; the two letters to the Thessalonians the two letters to Timothy; to Titus, Philemon, and to the Hebrews; the seven letters of the other apostle—one of Saint James; two of Saint Peter; three of Saint John; one of Saint Jude; and the Revelation of Saint John, the apostle.

\* "Jeremiah" here includes the Book of Lamentations as well as the Book of Jeremiah.

## **Article 5: The Authority of Scripture**

We receive all these books and these only as holy and canonical, for the regulating, founding, and establishing of our faith.

And we believe without a doubt all things contained in them—not so much because the church receives and approves them as such but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they prove themselves to be from God.

For even the blind themselves are able to see that the things predicted in them do happen.

## **Article 6: The Difference Between Canonical and Apocryphal Books**

We distinguish between these holy books and the apocryphal ones, which are the third and fourth books of Ezra; the books of Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Jesus Sirach, Baruch; what was added to the Story of Esther; the Song of the Three Children in the Furnace; the Story of Susannah; the Story of Bell and the Dragon; the Prayer of Manasseh; and the two books of Maccabees.

The church may certainly read these books and learn from them as far as they agree with the canonical books. But they do not have such power and virtue that one could confirm from their testimony any point of faith or of the Christian religion. Much less can they detract from the authority of the other holy books.

## **Article 7: The Sufficiency of Scripture**

We believe that this Holy Scripture contains the will of God completely and that everything one must believe to be saved is sufficiently taught in it. For since the entire manner of service which God requires of us is described in it at great length, no one—even an apostle or an angel from heaven, as Saint Paul says—<sup>2</sup>ought to teach other than what the Holy Scriptures have already taught us. For since it is forbidden to add to the Word of God, or take anything from it,<sup>3</sup> it is plainly demonstrated that the teaching is perfect and complete in all respects.

Therefore we must not consider human writings—no matter how holy their authors may have been—equal to the divine writings; nor may we put custom, nor the majority, nor age, nor the passage of times nor of persons, nor councils, decrees, or official decisions above the truth of God, for truth is above everything else.

For all human beings are liars by nature and more vain than vanity itself.

Therefore we reject with all our hearts everything that does not agree with this infallible rule, as we are taught to do by the apostles when they say, “Test the spirits to see if they are from God,”<sup>4</sup> and also, “Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Article 8: The Trinity**

In keeping with this truth and Word of God we believe in one God, who is one single essence, in which there are three persons, really, truly, and eternally distinct according to their incommunicable properties—namely, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is the cause, origin, and source of all things, visible as well as invisible.

The Son is the Word, the Wisdom, and the image of the Father.

The Holy Spirit is the eternal power and might, proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Nevertheless, this distinction does not divide God into three, since Scripture teaches us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each have their own subsistence distinguished by characteristic—yet in such a way that these three persons are only one God.

It is evident then that the Father is not the Son and that the Son is not the Father, and that, likewise, the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son.

Nevertheless, these persons, thus distinct, are neither divided nor fused or mixed together.

For the Father did not take on flesh, nor did the Spirit, but only the Son.

The Father was never without the Son, nor without the Holy Spirit, since all these are equal from eternity, in one and the same essence.

There is neither a first nor a last, for all three are one in truth and power, in goodness and mercy.

### **Article 9: The Scriptural Witness on the Trinity**

All these things we know from the testimonies of Holy Scripture as well as from the effects of the persons, especially from those we feel within ourselves.

The testimonies of the Holy Scriptures, which teach us to believe in this Holy Trinity, are written in many places of the Old Testament, which need not be enumerated but only chosen with discretion.

In the book of Genesis God says, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.” So “God created humankind in the divine image”—indeed, “male and female God created them.”<sup>6</sup> “See, humans have become like one of us.”<sup>7</sup>

It appears from this that there is a plurality of persons within the Deity, when God says, “Let us make humanity in our image”—and afterward God indicates the unity in saying, “God created.”

It is true that God does not say here how many persons there are—but what is somewhat obscure to us in the Old Testament is very clear in the New.

For when our Lord was baptized in the Jordan, the voice of the Father was heard saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved”;<sup>8</sup> the Son was seen in the water; and the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove.

So, in the baptism of all believers this form was prescribed by Christ: Baptize all people “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>9</sup> In the Gospel according to Luke the angel Gabriel says to 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 holy; he will be called Son of God.”<sup>10</sup>

And in another place it says: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”<sup>11</sup>

[“There are three who bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit—and these three are one.”]<sup>12</sup>

In all these passages we are fully taught that there are three persons in the one and only divine essence. And although this doctrine surpasses human understanding, we nevertheless believe it now, through the Word, waiting to know and enjoy it fully in heaven.

Furthermore, we must note the particular works and activities of these three persons in relation to us. The Father is called our Creator, by reason of divine power. The Son is our Savior and Redeemer, by his blood. The Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier, by living in our hearts.

This doctrine of the holy Trinity has always been maintained in the true church, from the time of the apostles until the present, against Jews, Muslims, and certain false Christians and heretics, such as Marcion, Mani, Praxeas, Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Arius, and others like them, who were rightly condemned by the holy fathers.

And so, in this matter we willingly accept the three ecumenical creeds—the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian—as well as what the ancient fathers decided in agreement with them.

### **Article 10: The Deity of Christ**

We believe that Jesus Christ, according to his divine nature, is the only Son of God—eternally begotten, not made or created, for then he would be a creature.

Christ is one in essence with the Father; coeternal; the exact image of the person of the Father and the “reflection of God’s glory,”<sup>13</sup> being like God in all things.

Christ is the Son of God not only from the time Christ assumed our nature but from all eternity, as the following testimonies teach us when they are taken together.

Moses says that God created the world;<sup>14</sup> and Saint John says that “all things came into being through the Word,”<sup>15</sup> which he calls God. The apostle says that God created the world through the Son.<sup>16</sup> He also says that God created all things through Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup>

And so it must follow that the one who is called God, the Word, the Son, and Jesus Christ already existed before creating all things.

Therefore the prophet Micah says that Christ’s origin is “from ancient days.”<sup>18</sup> And the apostle says that the Son has “neither beginning of days nor end of life.”<sup>19</sup>

So then, Christ is the true eternal God, the Almighty, whom we invoke, worship, and serve.

### **Article 11: The Deity of the Holy Spirit**

We believe and confess also that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son—neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but only proceeding from the two of them.

In regard to order, The Spirit is the third person of the Trinity—of one and the same essence, and majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son.

The Spirit is true and eternal God, as the Holy Scriptures teach us.

### **Article 12: The Creation of All Things**

We believe that the Father, deeming it good, created heaven and earth and all other creatures from nothing by the Word—that is to say, by the Son.

God has given all creatures their being, form, appearance, and their various functions for serving their Creator.

Even now God also sustains and governs them all, by his eternal divine providence, and by infinite divine power, that they may serve humanity, in order that humanity may serve God.

God has also created the angels good, that they might be messengers of God and serve the elect.

Some of them have fallen from the excellence in which God created them into eternal perdition; and the others have persisted and remained in their original state, by the grace of God.

The devils and evil spirits are so corrupt that they are enemies of God and of everything good. They lie in wait for the church and every member of it like thieves, with all their power, to destroy and spoil everything by their deceptions.

So then, by their own wickedness they are condemned to everlasting damnation, daily awaiting their torments.

For that reason we detest the error of the Sadducees, who deny that there are spirits and angels, and also the error of the Manicheans, who say that the devils originated by themselves, being evil by nature, without having been corrupted.

### **Article 13: The Doctrine of God's Providence**

We believe that this good God, after creating all things, did not abandon them to chance or fortune but leads and governs them according to the holy divine will, in such a way that nothing happens in this world without God's orderly arrangement.

Yet God is not the author of, and cannot be charged with, the sin that occurs. For the divine power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible that God's will is ordained and accomplished very well and justly even when the devils and the wicked act unjustly.

We do not wish to inquire with undue curiosity into what God does that surpasses human understanding and is beyond our ability to comprehend. But in all humility and reverence we adore the just judgments of God, which are hidden from us, being content to be Christ's disciples, so as to learn only what God shows us in the Word, without going beyond those limits.

This doctrine gives us unspeakable comfort since it teaches us that nothing can happen to us by chance but only by the arrangement of our gracious heavenly Father. He watches over us with protective care, keeping all creatures, so that not one of the hairs on our heads (for they are all numbered) nor even a little bird can fall to the ground “apart from our Father.”<sup>20</sup>

In this thought we rest, knowing that God holds in check the devils and all our enemies, who cannot hurt us without divine permission and will.

For that reason we reject the damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God does not get involved in anything and leaves everything to chance.

### **Article 14: The Creation and Fall of Humanity**

We believe that God created human beings from the dust of the earth and made and formed them in the divine image and likeness—good, just, and holy; able by the divine will to conform in all things to the will of God.

But when they were in honor they did not understand it<sup>21</sup> and did not recognize their excellence. But they subjected themselves willingly to sin and consequently to death and the curse, lending their ear to the word of the devil.

For they transgressed the commandment of life, which they had received, and by their sin they separated themselves from God, who was their true life, having corrupted their entire nature.

So they made themselves guilty and subject to physical and spiritual death, having become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all their ways. They lost all their excellent gifts which they had received from God, and retained none of them except for small traces which are enough to make them inexcusable.

Moreover, all the light in us is turned to darkness, as the Scripture teaches us: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”<sup>22</sup> Here Saint John calls the human race “darkness.”

Therefore we reject everything taught to the contrary concerning human free will, since humans are nothing but the slaves of sin and cannot do a thing unless it is given them from heaven.<sup>23</sup>

For who can boast of being able to do anything good by oneself, since Christ says, “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me”?<sup>24</sup>

Who can glory in one’s own will when they understand that “the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God”?<sup>25</sup> Who can speak of one’s own knowledge in view of the fact that “those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit”?<sup>26</sup>

In short, who can produce a single thought, since we know that we are “not able to think a thing” about ourselves, by ourselves, but that “our competence is from God”?<sup>27</sup>

And therefore, what the apostle says ought rightly to stand fixed and firm: “For it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for God’s good pleasure.”<sup>28</sup>

For there is no understanding nor will conforming to God's understanding and will apart from Christ's involvement, as he teaches us when he says, "Apart from me you can do nothing."<sup>29</sup>

### **Article 15: The Doctrine of Original Sin**

We believe that by the disobedience of Adam and Eve original sin has been spread through the whole human race.

It is a corruption of all human nature—an inherited depravity which even infects small infants in their mother's womb, and the root which produces in humanity every sort of sin. It is therefore so vile and enormous in God's sight that it is enough to condemn the human race, and it is not abolished or wholly uprooted even by baptism, seeing that sin constantly boils forth as though from a contaminated spring.

Nevertheless, it is not imputed to God's children for their condemnation but is forgiven by his grace and mercy—not to put them to sleep but so that the awareness of this corruption might often make believers groan as they long to be set free from the "body of this death."<sup>30</sup>

Therefore we reject the error of the Pelagians who say that this sin is nothing else than a matter of imitation.

### **Article 16: The Doctrine of Election**

We believe that— all human beings having thus fallen into perdition and ruin by the sin of the first pair—God exhibited divine character in mercy and justice.

God is merciful in withdrawing and saving from this perdition those who, in the eternal and unchangeable divine counsel, have been elected and chosen in Jesus Christ our Lord by his pure goodness, without any consideration of their works.

God is just in leaving the others in their ruin and fall into which they plunged themselves.

### **Article 17: The Recovery of Fallen Humanity**

We believe that our good God, by marvelous divine wisdom and goodness, seeing that humans had plunged themselves in this manner into both physical and spiritual death and made themselves completely miserable, set out to find them, though humans, trembling all over, were fleeing from the divine presence.

And God comforted them, promising to give them the Son, "born of a woman,"<sup>31</sup> to crush the head of the serpent,<sup>32</sup> and to make them blessed.

### **Article 18: The Incarnation**

So then we confess that God fulfilled the promise made to the early fathers and mothers by the mouth of the holy prophets when sending the only and eternal Son of God into the world at the time appointed.

The Son took the "form of a slave" and was made "in human form,"<sup>33</sup> truly assuming a real human nature, with all its weaknesses, except for sin; being conceived in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, without male participation.

And Christ not only assumed human nature as far as the body is concerned but also a real human soul, in order to be a real human being. For since the soul had been lost as well as the body Christ had to assume them both to save them both together.

Therefore we confess, (against the heresy of the Anabaptists who denied that Christ assumed human flesh from his mother) that Christ shared the very flesh and blood of children,<sup>34</sup> being the “fruit of the loins” of David “according to the flesh,”<sup>35</sup> “descended from David according to the flesh”;<sup>36</sup> the “fruit of the womb” of the virgin Mary,<sup>37</sup> “born of a woman”;<sup>38</sup> the “seed of David”;<sup>39</sup> the “root of Jesse”;<sup>40</sup> “descended from Judah,”<sup>41</sup> having descended from the Jews according to the flesh; descended from Abraham, having assumed descent from Abraham and Sara, and made “like his brothers and sisters,” yet without sin.<sup>42</sup>

In this way Christ is truly our Immanuel—that is: “God with us.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Article 19: The Two Natures of Christ**

We believe that by being thus conceived the person of the Son has been inseparably united and joined together with human nature, in such a way that there are not two Sons of God, nor two persons, but two natures united in a single person, with each nature retaining its own distinct properties.

Thus his divine nature has always remained uncreated, without beginning of days or end of life,<sup>44</sup> filling heaven and earth.

Christ’s human nature has not lost its properties but continues to have those of a creature—it has a beginning of days; it is of a finite nature and retains all that belongs to a real body. And even though he, by his resurrection, gave it immortality, that nonetheless did not change the reality of his human nature; for our salvation and resurrection depend also on the reality of his body.

But these two natures are so united together in one person that they are not even separated by his death.

So then, what he committed to his Father when he died was a real human spirit which left his body. But meanwhile his divine nature remained united with his human nature even when he was lying in the grave; and his deity never ceased to be in him, just as it was in him when he was a little child, though for a while it did not show itself.

These are the reasons why we confess him to be true God and truly human—true God in order to conquer death by his power, and truly human that he might die for us in the weakness of his flesh.

### **Article 20: The Justice and Mercy of God in Christ**

We believe that God—who is perfectly merciful and also very just—sent the Son to assume the nature in which the disobedience had been committed, in order to bear in it the punishment of sin by his most bitter passion and death.

So God made known justice toward the Son, who was charged with our sin, and he poured

out his goodness and mercy on us, who are guilty and worthy of damnation, giving to us the Son to die, by a most perfect love, and raising him to life for our justification, in order that by him we might have immortality and eternal life.

### **Article 21: The Atonement**

We believe that Jesus Christ is a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek—made such by an oath—and that he presented himself in our name before his Father, to appease the Father’s wrath with full satisfaction by offering himself on the tree of the cross and pouring out his precious blood for the cleansing of our sins, as the prophets had predicted.

For it is written that “the punishment that made us whole” was placed on the Son of God and that “by his bruises we are healed.” He was “like a lamb that is led to slaughter”; he was “numbered with the transgressors,”<sup>45</sup> and condemned as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, though Pilate had declared that he was innocent.

So he paid back what he had not stolen,<sup>46</sup> and he suffered—the “righteous for the unrighteous,”<sup>47</sup> in both his body and his soul—in such a way that when he sensed the horrible punishment required by our sins “his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.”<sup>48</sup> He cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”<sup>49</sup>

And he endured all this for the forgiveness of our sins.

Therefore we rightly say with Saint Paul that we “know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified”;<sup>50</sup> we “regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>51</sup> We find all comforts in his wounds and have no need to seek or invent any other means to reconcile ourselves with God than this one and only sacrifice, once made, which renders believers perfect forever.

This is also why the angel of God called him Jesus—that is, “Savior”—because he would save his people from their sins.<sup>52</sup>

### **Article 22: The Righteousness of Faith**

We believe that for us to acquire the true knowledge of this great mystery the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts a true faith that embraces Jesus Christ, with all his merits, and makes him its own, and no longer looks for anything apart from him.

For it must necessarily follow that either all that is required for our salvation is not in Christ or, if all is in him, then those who have Christ by faith have his salvation entirely.

Therefore, to say that Christ is not enough but that something else is needed as well is a most enormous blasphemy against God—for it then would follow that Jesus Christ is only half a Savior. And therefore we justly say with Saint Paul that we are justified “by faith alone” or “by faith apart from works.”<sup>53</sup>

However, we do not mean, properly speaking, that it is faith itself that justifies us—for faith is only the instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness.

But Jesus Christ is our righteousness in making available to us all his merits and all the holy works he has done for us and in our place. And faith is the instrument that keeps us in communion with him and with all his benefits.

When those benefits are made ours they are more than enough to absolve us of our sins.

### **Article 23: The Justification of Sinners**

We believe that our blessedness lies in the forgiveness of our sins because of Jesus Christ, and that in it our righteousness before God is contained, as David and Saint Paul teach us when they declare that man blessed to whom God grants righteousness apart from works.<sup>54</sup>

And the same apostle says that we are "justified by God's grace as a gift, through redemption that is in Jesus Christ."<sup>55</sup> And therefore we cling to this foundation, which is firm forever, giving all glory to God, humbling ourselves, and recognizing ourselves as we are; not claiming a thing for ourselves or our merits and leaning and resting on the sole obedience of Christ crucified, which is ours when we believe in him.

That is enough to cover all our sins and to make us confident, freeing the conscience from the fear, dread, and terror of God's approach, without doing what our first parents did, who trembled as they tried to cover themselves with fig leaves.

In fact, if we had to appear before God relying—no matter how little—on ourselves or some other creature, then we would be swallowed up.

Therefore everyone must say with David: "Lord, do not enter into judgment with your servants, for no one living is righteous before you."<sup>56</sup>

### **Article 24: The Sanctification of Sinners**

We believe that this true faith, produced in us by the hearing of God's Word and by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates us and makes us new creatures,<sup>57</sup> causing us to live a new life<sup>58</sup> and freeing us from the slavery of sin.

Therefore, far from making people cold toward living in a pious and holy way, this justifying faith, quite to the contrary, so works within them that apart from it they will never do a thing out of love for God but only out of love for themselves and fear of being condemned.

So then, it is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being, seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls "faith working through love,"<sup>59</sup> which leads people do by themselves the works that God has commanded in the Word.

These works, proceeding from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable to God, since they are all sanctified by God's grace. Yet they do not count toward our justification—for by faith in Christ we are justified, even before we do good works. Otherwise they could not be good, any more than the fruit of a tree could be good if the tree is not good in the first place.

So then, we do good works, but not for merit—for what would we merit? Rather, we are indebted to God for the good works we do, and we are not creditors of God, "who is at work in

us, enabling us both to will and do for God's good pleasure"<sup>60</sup>—thus keeping in mind what is written: "When you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done.'"<sup>61</sup>

Yet we do not wish to deny that God rewards good works—but it is through grace that God's own gifts are crowned.

Moreover, although we do good works we do not base our salvation on them; for we cannot do any work that is not defiled by our flesh and also worthy of punishment. And even if we could point to one, memory of a single sin is enough for God to reject that work.

So we would always be in doubt, tossed back and forth without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be tormented constantly if they did not rest on the merit of the suffering and death of our Savior.

### **Article 25: The Fulfillment of the Law**

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended with the coming of Christ, and that all foreshadowings have come to an end, so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians. Yet the truth and substance of these things remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled.

Nevertheless, we continue to use the witnesses drawn from the law and prophets to confirm us in the gospel and to regulate our lives with full integrity for the glory of God, according to the will of God.

### **Article 26: The Intercession of Christ**

We believe that we have no access to God except through the one and only Mediator and Intercessor: Jesus Christ, "the righteous."<sup>62</sup>

Christ, therefore, was made a human being, uniting together the divine and human natures, so that we human beings might have access to the divine Majesty. Otherwise we would have no access.

But this Mediator, whom the Father has appointed between God and us, ought not to terrify us by his greatness, so that we have to look for another one, according to our fancy. For neither in heaven nor among the creatures on earth is there anyone who loves us more than Jesus Christ does. Although "in the form of God," Christ nevertheless "emptied himself," taking "human form" and "the form of a slave" for us,<sup>63</sup> and he made himself "like his brothers and sisters in every respect."<sup>64</sup>

Suppose we had to find another intercessor. Who would love us more than he who gave his life for us, even though "we were his enemies"?<sup>65</sup> And suppose we had to find one who has prestige and power. Who has as much of these as he who is seated at the right hand of the Father,<sup>66</sup> and who has "all authority in heaven and on earth"?<sup>67</sup> And who will be heard more readily than God's own dearly beloved Son?

So the faithless practice of honoring the saints as intercessors, in fact dishonors them. That

was something the saints never did nor asked for, but which in keeping with their duty, as appears from their writings, they consistently refused.

We should not plead here that we are unworthy—for it is not a question of offering our prayers on the basis of our own dignity but only on the basis of the excellence and dignity of Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is ours by faith.

Since the apostle for good reason wants us to get rid of this foolish fear—or rather, this unbelief—he says to us that Jesus Christ was “made like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest” to purify the sins of the people.<sup>68</sup> For since he suffered, being tested, “he is able to help those who are tested.”<sup>69</sup>

And further, to encourage us more to approach 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 do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace, to help in time of need.”<sup>70</sup>

The same apostle says that “we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus. Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith...”<sup>71</sup>

Likewise, Christ “holds his priesthood permanently. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”<sup>72</sup>

What more do we need? For Christ himself declares: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”<sup>73</sup> Why should we seek another intercessor?

Since it has pleased God to give us the Son as our Intercessor, let us not leave him for another—or rather seek, without ever finding. For, when giving Christ to us, God knew well that we were sinners.

Therefore, in following the command of Christ we call on the heavenly Father through Christ, our only Mediator, as we are taught by the Lord’s Prayer, being assured that we shall obtain all we ask of the Father in his name.

## **Article 27: The Holy Catholic Church**

We believe and confess one single catholic or universal church—a holy congregation and gathering of true Christian believers, awaiting their entire salvation in Jesus Christ being washed by his blood, and sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

This church has existed from the beginning of the world and will last until the end, as appears from the fact that Christ is eternal King who cannot be without subjects.

And this holy church is preserved by God against the rage of the whole world, even though for a time it may appear very small in the eyes of humans—as though it were snuffed out.

For example, during the very dangerous time of Ahab the Lord preserved seven thousand men who did not bend their knees to Baal.<sup>74</sup>

And so this holy church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain people. But it is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world, though still joined and united in heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith.

### **Article 28: The Obligations of Church Members**

We believe that, since this holy assembly and congregation is the gathering of those who are saved and there is no salvation apart from it, believers ought not to withdraw from it, content to be by themselves, regardless of their status or condition.

But all people are obliged to join and unite with it, keeping the unity of the church by submitting to its instruction and discipline, by bending their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and by serving to build up one another, according to the gifts God has given them as members of each other in the same body.

And to preserve this unity more effectively, it is the duty of all believers, according to God's Word, to distinguish themselves from those who do not belong to the church, in order to join this assembly wherever God has established it, even if civil authorities and royal decrees forbid and death and physical punishment result.

And so, all who withdraw from the church or do not join it act contrary to God's ordinance.

### **Article 29: The Marks of the True Church**

We believe that we ought to discern diligently and very carefully, by the Word of God, what is the true church—for all sects in the world today claim for themselves the name of "the church."

We are not speaking here of the company of hypocrites who are mixed among the good in the church and who nonetheless are not part of it, even though they are physically there. But we are speaking of distinguishing the body and fellowship of the true church from all sects that call themselves "the church."

The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head. By these marks one can be assured of recognizing the true church—and no one ought to be separated from it.

As for those who can belong to the church—we can recognize them by the distinguishing marks of Christians: namely by faith, and by their fleeing from sin and pursuing righteousness, once they have received the one and only Savior, Jesus Christ. They love the true God and their neighbors, without turning to the right or left, and they crucify the flesh and its works.

Though great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their lives, appealing constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of the Lord Jesus, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins, through faith in him.

As for the false church, it assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God; it does not want to subject itself to the yoke of Christ; it does not administer the sacraments as Christ commanded in his Word; it rather adds to them or subtracts from them as it pleases; it bases itself on humans, more than on Jesus Christ; it persecutes those who live holy lives according to the Word of God and who rebuke it for its faults, greed, and idolatry.

These two churches are easy to recognize and thus to distinguish from each other.

### **Article 30: The Government of the Church**

We believe that this true church ought to be governed according to the spiritual order that our Lord has taught us in his Word. There should be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments. There should also be elders and deacons, along with the pastors, to make up the council of the church.

By this means true religion is preserved; true doctrine is able to take its course; and the evil are corrected spiritually and held in check, so that also the poor and all the afflicted may be helped and comforted according to their need.

By this means everything will be done well and in good order in the church, when such persons are elected who are faithful and are chosen according to the rule that Paul gave to Timothy.<sup>75</sup>

### **Article 31: The Officers of the Church**

We believe that ministers of the Word of God, elders, and deacons ought to be chosen to their offices by a legitimate election of the church, with prayer in the name of the Lord, and in good order, as the Word of God teaches.

So all must be careful not to push themselves forward improperly, but must wait for God's call, so that they may be assured of a divine calling and be certain that they are chosen by the Lord.

As for the ministers of the Word, they all have the same power and authority, no matter where they may be, since they are all servants of Jesus Christ, the only universal bishop, and the only head of the church.

Moreover, to keep God's holy order from being violated or despised, we say that everyone ought, as much as possible, to hold the ministers of the Word and elders of the church in special esteem, because of the work they do, and be at peace with them, without grumbling, quarreling, or fighting.

### **Article 32: The Order and Discipline of the Church**

We also believe that, although it is useful and good for those who govern the churches to establish and set up a certain order among themselves for maintaining the body of the church, they ought always to guard against deviating from what Christ, our only Master, has ordained for us.

Therefore we reject all human innovations and all laws imposed on us, in our worship of God, which bind and force our consciences in any way.

So we accept only what is proper to maintain harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God.

To that end excommunication, with all it involves, according to the Word of God, is required.

### **Article 33: The Sacraments**

We believe that our good God, mindful of our crudeness and weakness, has ordained sacraments for us to seal the promises in us, to pledge the good will and grace of God toward us, and also to nourish and sustain our faith.

God has added these to the Word of the gospel to represent better to our external senses both what God enables us to understand by the Word and does inwardly in our hearts, confirming in us the salvation imparted to us.

For they 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. So they are not empty and hollow signs to fool and deceive us, for their truth is Jesus Christ, without whom they would be nothing.

Moreover, we are satisfied with the number of sacraments that Christ our Master has ordained for us. There are only 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, in whom the law is fulfilled, has by his shed blood put an end to every other shedding of blood, which anyone might do or wish to do in order to atone or satisfy for sins.

Having abolished circumcision, which was done with blood, Christ established in its place the sacrament of baptism. By it we are received into God's church and set apart from all other people and alien religions, that we may be dedicated entirely to the one whose mark and sign we bear. It also witnesses to us that God, being our gracious Father, will be our God forever.

Therefore God has commanded that all those who belong to God be baptized with pure water "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."<sup>76</sup>

In this way God signifies to us that just as water washes away the dirt of the body when it is poured on us and also is seen on the body of the baptized when it is sprinkled on them, so too the blood of Christ does the same thing internally, in the soul, by the Holy Spirit. It washes and cleanses it from its sins and transforms us from being the children of wrath into the children of God.

This does not happen by the physical water but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God, who is our Red Sea, through which we must pass to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, who is the devil, and to enter the spiritual land of Canaan.

So ministers, as far as their work is concerned, give us the sacrament and what is visible, but our Lord gives what the sacrament signifies—namely the invisible gifts and graces; washing, purifying, and cleansing our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts and

filling them with all comfort; giving us true assurance of God's sustaining goodness; clothing us with the "new self" and "stripping off the 'old self' with its practices."<sup>77</sup>

For this reason we believe that anyone who aspires to reach eternal life ought to be baptized only once without ever repeating it—for we cannot be born twice. Yet this baptism is profitable not only when the water is on us and when we receive it but throughout our entire lives.

For that reason we regret the error of the Anabaptists who are not content with a single baptism once received and also condemn the baptism of the children of believers. We believe our children ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as little children were circumcised in Israel on the basis of the same promises made to our children.

And truly, Christ has shed his blood no less for washing the little children of believers than he did for adults.

Therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of what Christ has done for them, just as the Lord commanded in the law, that by offering a lamb for them, the sacrament of the suffering and death of Christ would be granted them shortly after their birth. This was the sacrament of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, baptism does for our children what circumcision did for the Jewish people. That is why Paul calls baptism the "circumcision of Christ."<sup>78</sup>

### **Article 35: The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper**

We believe and confess that our Savior Jesus Christ has ordained and instituted the sacrament of the Holy Supper to nourish and sustain those whom he has regenerated and ingrafted into his family, which is his church.

Now those who are born again have two lives in them. The one is physical and temporal: they have it from the moment of their first birth, and it is common to all. The other is spiritual and heavenly, and is given them in their second birth: it comes through the Word of the gospel in the communion of the body of Christ; and this life is common to God's elect only.

Thus, to support the physical and earthly life God has prescribed for us an appropriate earthly and material bread, which is as common to all people as life itself also is. But to maintain the spiritual and heavenly life that belongs to believers, God has sent a living bread that has come down from heaven: namely Jesus Christ, who nourishes and maintains the spiritual life of believers when eaten—that is, when appropriated and received spiritually by faith.

To represent to us this spiritual and heavenly bread Christ has instituted an earthly and visible bread as the sacrament of his body and wine as the sacrament of his blood. He did this to testify to us that, just as truly as we take and hold the sacrament in our hands and eat and drink it with our mouths, by which our life is then sustained, so truly we receive into our souls, for our spiritual life, the true body and true blood of Christ, our only Savior. We receive these by faith, which is the hand and mouth of our souls.

Now it is certain that Jesus Christ did not prescribe his sacraments for us in vain, since he works in us all he represents by these holy signs, although the manner in which he does it

goes beyond our understanding and is incomprehensible to us, just as the operation of God's Spirit is hidden and incomprehensible.

Yet we do not go wrong when we say that what is eaten is Christ's own natural body and what is drunk is his own blood—but the manner in which we eat it is not by the mouth, but by the Spirit through faith.

In that way Jesus Christ remains always seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven—but he never refrains on that account to communicate himself to us through faith.

This banquet is a spiritual table at which Christ communicates himself to us with all his benefits. At that table he makes us enjoy himself as much as the merits of his suffering and death, as he nourishes, strengthens, and comforts our poor, desolate souls by the eating of his flesh, and relieves and renews them by the drinking of his blood.

Moreover, though the sacraments and what they signify are joined together, not all receive both of them. The wicked certainly take the sacrament, to their condemnation, but do not receive the truth of the sacrament, just as Judas and Simon the Sorcerer both indeed received the sacrament, but not Christ, who was signified by it. He is communicated only to believers.

Finally, with humility and reverence we receive the holy sacrament in the gathering of God's people, as we engage together, with thanksgiving, in a holy remembrance of the death of Christ our Savior, and as we thus confess our faith and Christian religion. Therefore people should not come to this table without examining themselves carefully, lest by eating this bread and drinking this cup, they "eat and drink judgment against themselves."<sup>79</sup>

In short, by the use of this holy sacrament we are moved to a fervent love of God and our neighbors.

Therefore we regret as misunderstandings of the sacraments all the muddled ideas and inventions\*\* that humans have added and mixed in with them. And we say that we should be content with the procedure that Christ and the apostles have taught us and speak of these things as they have spoken of them.

### **Article 36: The Civil Government**

We believe that because of the depravity of the human race, our good God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers. God wants the world to be governed by laws and policies so that human lawlessness may be restrained and that everything may be conducted in good order among human beings.

For that purpose God has placed the sword in the hands of the government, to punish evil people and protect the good.

And the government's task is not limited to caring for and watching over the public domain

*\*\*The original reads "we reject as profanations of the sacraments all the muddled ideas and damnable inventions."*

but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry, with a view to removing and destroying all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist; to promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ; and to furthering the preaching of the gospel everywhere; to the end that God may be honored and served by everyone, as required in God's Word.

Moreover everyone, regardless of status, condition, or rank, must be subject to the government, and pay taxes, and hold its representatives in honor and respect, and obey them in all things that are not in conflict with God's Word, praying for them that the Lord may be willing to lead them in all their ways and that we may live a peaceful and quiet life in all piety and decency.

And on this matter we denounce the Anabaptists, the anarchists, and, in general, all those who want to reject the authorities and civil officers and to subvert justice by introducing common ownership of goods and corrupting the moral order that God has established among human beings.

### **Article 37: The Last Judgment**

Finally we believe, according to God's Word, that when the time appointed by the Lord is come (which is unknown to all creatures) 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, to declare himself the judge of the living and the dead. He will burn this old world, in fire and flame, in order to cleanse it.

Then all human creatures will appear in person before the great judge—men, women, and children, all who have lived from the beginning of the world until the end.

They will be summoned there “with the archange's call and with the sound of God's trumpet.”<sup>80</sup>

For all those who died before that time will be raised from the earth, their spirits being joined and united with their own bodies in which they lived. And as for those who are still alive, they will not die like the others but will be changed “in the twinkling of an eye” from perishable to imperishable.<sup>81</sup>

Then “the books” (that is, the consciences) will be opened, and the dead will be judged according to the things they did in the world,<sup>82</sup> whether good or evil. Indeed, all people will give account of all the careless words they have spoken,<sup>83</sup> which the world regards as only playing games. And then the secrets and hypocrisies of humans will be publicly uncovered in the sight of all.

Therefore, with good reason the thought of this judgment is horrible and dreadful to wicked and evil people. But it is very pleasant and a great comfort to the righteous and elect, since their total redemption will then be accomplished. They will then receive the fruits of their labor and of the trouble they have suffered; their innocence will be openly recognized by all; and they will see the terrible vengeance that God will bring on the evil ones who tyrannized, oppressed, and tormented them in this world.

The evil ones will be convicted by the witness of their own consciences, and shall be made

immortal—but only to be tormented in the eternal fire prepared for the devil and the fallen angels.<sup>84</sup>

In contrast, the faithful and elect will be crowned with glory and honor. The Son of God will confess their names<sup>85</sup> before God his Father and the holy and elect angels; all tears will be wiped from their eyes;<sup>86</sup> and their cause—at present condemned as heretical and evil by many judges and civil officers—will be acknowledged as the cause of the Son of God.

And as a gracious reward the Lord will make them possess a glory such as the human heart could never imagine.

So we look forward to that great day with longing in order to enjoy fully the promises of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

---

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> 2 Pet. 1:2

<sup>2</sup> Gal. 1:8

<sup>3</sup> Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:18-19

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 4:1

<sup>5</sup> 2 John 10

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 1:26-27 (NRSV reads “his image” and “he created”)

<sup>7</sup> Gen. 3:22

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 3:17

<sup>9</sup> Matt. 28:19

<sup>10</sup> Luke 1:35

<sup>11</sup> 2 Cor. 13:14

<sup>12</sup> 1 John 5:7 Following the better Greek texts, the NRSV and other modern translations place this verse in a footnote.

<sup>13</sup> Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3

<sup>14</sup> Gen. 1:1

<sup>15</sup> John 1:3

<sup>16</sup> Heb. 1:2

<sup>17</sup> Col. 1:16

<sup>18</sup> Mic. 5:2

<sup>19</sup> Heb. 7:3

<sup>20</sup> Matt. 10:29-30

<sup>21</sup> Ps. 49:20

<sup>22</sup> John 1:5

<sup>23</sup> John 3:27

<sup>24</sup> John 6:44

<sup>25</sup> Rom. 8:7

<sup>26</sup> 1 Cor. 2:14

<sup>27</sup> 2 Cor. 3:5

<sup>28</sup> Phil. 2:13 (NRSV reads “his good pleasure”)

<sup>29</sup> John 15:5

<sup>30</sup> Rom. 7:24

<sup>31</sup> Gal. 4:4

<sup>32</sup> Gen. 3:15

<sup>33</sup> Phil. 2:7

<sup>34</sup> Heb. 2:14

<sup>35</sup> Acts 2:30

<sup>36</sup> Rom. 1:3

<sup>37</sup> Luke 1:42

<sup>38</sup> Gal. 4:4

<sup>39</sup> 2 Tim. 2:8

<sup>40</sup> Rom. 15:12

<sup>41</sup> Heb. 7:14

<sup>42</sup> Heb. 2:17; 4:15

<sup>43</sup> Matt. 1:23

<sup>44</sup> Heb. 7:3

<sup>45</sup> Isa. 53:4-12

<sup>46</sup> Ps. 69:4

<sup>47</sup> 1 Pet. 3:18

<sup>48</sup> Luke 22:44

<sup>49</sup> Matt. 27:46

<sup>50</sup> 1 Cor. 2:2

<sup>51</sup> Phil. 3:8

<sup>52</sup> Matt. 1:21

<sup>53</sup> Rom. 3:28

<sup>54</sup> Ps. 32:1; Rom. 4:6

<sup>55</sup> Rom. 3:24

<sup>56</sup> Ps. 143:2

<sup>57</sup> 2 Cor. 5:17

<sup>58</sup> Rom. 6:4

<sup>59</sup> Gal. 5:6

<sup>60</sup> Phil. 2:13 (NRSV reads “his good pleasure”)

<sup>61</sup> Luke 17:10

<sup>62</sup> 1 John 2:1

<sup>63</sup> Phil. 2:6-8

<sup>64</sup> Heb. 2:17

<sup>65</sup> Rom. 5:10

<sup>66</sup> Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3

<sup>67</sup> Matt. 28:18

<sup>68</sup> Heb. 2:17

<sup>69</sup> Heb. 2:18

<sup>70</sup> Heb. 4:14-16

<sup>71</sup> Heb. 10:19, 22

<sup>72</sup> Heb. 7:24-25

<sup>73</sup> John 14:6

<sup>74</sup> 1 Kings 19:18

<sup>75</sup> 1 Tim. 3

<sup>76</sup> Matt. 28:19

<sup>77</sup> Eph. 4:22-24; Col 3:9

<sup>78</sup> Col. 2:11

<sup>79</sup> 1 Cor. 11:29

<sup>80</sup> 1 Thess. 4:16

<sup>81</sup> 1 Cor. 15:51-53

<sup>82</sup> Rev. 20:12

<sup>83</sup> Matt. 12:36

<sup>84</sup> Matt. 25:14

<sup>85</sup> Matt. 10:32

<sup>86</sup> Rev. 7:17