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THE NICENE CREED

[TEXT]

THE APOSTLES' CREED

[TEXT]

The Apostles' Creed

Although not written by apostles, the Apostles' Creed reflects the theological formulations of the first century church. The creed's structure may be based on Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In a time when most Christians were illiterate, oral repetition of the Apostles' Creed, along with the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, helped preserve and transmit the faith of the western churches. The Apostles' Creed played no role in Eastern Orthodoxy.

In the early church, Christians confessed that "Jesus is Lord" but did not always understand the biblical context of lordship. The views of Marcion, a Christian living in Rome in the second century, further threatened the church's understanding of Jesus as Lord. Marcion read the Old Testament as referring to a tyrannical God who had created a flawed world. Marcion believed that Jesus revealed, in contrast, a good God of love and mercy. For Marcion, then, Jesus was not the Messiah proclaimed by the prophets, and the Old Testament was not Scripture. Marcion proposed limiting Christian "Scripture" to Luke's gospel (less the birth narrative and other parts that he felt expressed Jewish thinking) and to those letters of Paul that Marcion regarded as anti-Jewish. Marcion's views developed into a movement that lasted several centuries.

Around A.D. 180, Roman Christians developed an early form of the Apostles' Creed to refute Marcion. They affirmed that the God of creation is the Father of Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, was buried and raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven, where he rules with the Father. They also affirmed belief in the Holy Spirit, the church, and the resurrection of the body.

Candidates for membership in the church, having undergone a lengthy period of moral and doctrinal instruction, were asked at baptism to state what they believed. They responded in the words of this creed.

The Apostles' Creed underwent further development. In response to the question of readmitting those who had denied the faith during the persecutions of the second and third centuries, the church added, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." In the fourth and fifth centuries, North African Christians debated the question of whether the church was an exclusive sect composed of the heroic few or an inclusive church of all who confessed Jesus Christ, leading to the addition of "holy" (belonging to God) and "catholic" (universal). In Gaul, in the fifth century, the phrase "he descended into hell" came into the creed. By the eighth century, the creed had attained its present form.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

- 2.1 I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,
- 2.2 And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
- 2.3 I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the **communion of saints**; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

THE SCOTS CONFESSION
[TEXT]

The Scots Confession

Three documents from the period of the Reformation are included in the *Book of Confessions*, each originating in a different country: Scotland, Germany, and Switzerland. These three centers of the Reformation remain significant in Reformed and Presbyterian thought to this day.

The Scots Confession was written at a turning point in the history of the Scottish nation. When the Queen Regent Mary of Guise died in her sleep in 1560, the Protestant nobility of Scotland was able to secure English recognition of Scottish sovereignty in the Treaty of Edinburgh. To the Scots, this favorable conclusion to the civil war with Mary's French-supported forces represented a providential deliverance.

The Scottish Parliament, having declared Scotland a Protestant nation, asked the clergy to frame a confession of faith. Six ministers, including John Knox, completed their work in four days. In 1560, the document was ratified by Parliament as "doctrine grounded upon the infallible Word of God."

Beginning with a pledge of unconditional commitment to the triune God who creates, sustains, rules, and guides all things, the first eleven chapters of the Scots Confession narrate God's providential acts in the events of biblical history. The kirk (church) of the present and future is continuous with the kirk of God's people going back to Adam. While affirming that the Bible is the norm by which the kirk judges itself, the Scots Confession also sees the Scriptures as a sacred history in which the present day church, through the Holy Spirit, participates until the end of time. God's providential deliverance is a continuing, not merely a past, reality.

The Scots Confession sets forth three marks of the true and faithful church: "the true preaching of the Word of God," "the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus," and "ecclesiastical discipline ... whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished."

"Cleave, serve, worship, trust" are key words in this document. As a call to action in a turbulent time, the Scots Confession reflects a spirit of trust and a commitment to the God whose miraculous deliverance the Scots had experienced firsthand.

THE SCOTS CONFESSION¹

CHAPTER I

God

- 3.01** We confess and acknowledge one God alone, to whom alone we must cleave, whom alone we must serve, whom only we must worship, and in whom alone we put our trust. Who is eternal, infinite, immeasurable, incomprehensible, omnipotent, invisible; one in substance and yet distinct in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. By whom we confess and believe all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, to have been created, to be retained in their being, and to be ruled and guided by his inscrutable providence for such end as his eternal wisdom, goodness, and justice have appointed, and to the manifestation of his own glory.

CHAPTER II

The Creation of Man

- 3.02** We confess and acknowledge that our God has created man, i.e., our first father, Adam, after his own image and likeness, to whom he gave wisdom, lordship, justice, free will, and self-consciousness, so that in the whole nature of man no imperfection could be found. From this dignity and perfection man and woman both fell; the woman being deceived by the serpent and man obeying the voice of the woman, both conspiring against the sovereign majesty of God, who in clear words had previously threatened death if they presumed to eat of the forbidden tree.

CHAPTER III

Original Sin

- 3.03** By this transgression, generally known as original sin, the image of God was utterly defaced in man, and he and his children became by nature hostile to God, slaves to Satan, and servants to sin. And thus everlasting death has had, and shall have, power and dominion over all who have not been, are not, or shall not be reborn from above. This rebirth is wrought by the power of the Holy Ghost creating in the hearts of God's chosen ones an assured faith in the promise of God revealed to

¹ Reprinted from *The Scots Confession*: 1560. Edited with an Introduction by G. D. Henderson. Rendered into modern English by James Bulloch. The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1960, pp. 58–80. Used by permission.

of the general councils, for it is plain that, being human, some of them have manifestly erred, and that in matters of great weight and importance. So far then as the council confirms its decrees by the plain Word of God, so far do we reverence and embrace them. But if men, under the name of a council, pretend to forge for us new articles of faith, or to make decisions contrary to the Word of God, then we must utterly deny them as the doctrine of devils, drawing our souls from the voice of the one God to follow the doctrines and teachings of men. The reason why the general councils met was not to make any permanent law which God had not made before, nor yet to form new articles for our belief, nor to give the Word of God authority; much less to make that to be his Word, or even the true interpretation of it, which was not expressed previously by his holy will in his Word; but the reason for councils, at least of those that deserve that name, was partly to refute heresies, and to give public confession of their faith to the generations following, which they did by the authority of God's written Word, and not by any opinion or prerogative that they could not err by reason of their numbers. This, we judge, was the primary reason for general councils. The second was that good policy and order should be constituted and observed in the Kirk where, as in the house of God, it becomes all things to be done decently and in order. Not that we think any policy or order of ceremonies can be appointed for all ages, times, and places; for as ceremonies which men have devised are but temporal, so they may, and ought to be, changed, when they foster superstition rather than edify the Kirk.

CHAPTER XXI

The Sacraments

3.21 As the fathers under the Law, besides the reality of the sacrifices, had two chief sacraments, that is, **circumcision and the passover**, and those who rejected these were not reckoned among God's people; so do we acknowledge and confess that now in the time of the gospel we have **two chief sacraments**, which alone were **instituted by the Lord Jesus** and commanded to be used by all who will be counted members of his body, that is, **Baptism** and the **Supper or Table of the Lord Jesus**, also called the Communion of His Body and Blood. These sacraments, both of the Old Testament and of the New, were instituted by God not only to make a **visible distinction** between his people and those who were without the Covenant, but also to **exercise the faith of his children** and, by participation of these sacraments, **to seal in their hearts the assurance of his promise**, and of that **most blessed conjunction, union, and society**, which the chosen have with their Head, Christ Jesus. And so we utterly condemn the vanity of those who affirm the sacraments to be nothing else than naked and bare signs. No, we assuredly believe that by **Baptism we are engrafted into Christ Jesus**, to be made partakers of

his righteousness, by which our sins are covered and remitted, and **also that in the Supper rightly used, Christ Jesus is so joined with us that he becomes the very nourishment and food of our souls**. Not that we imagine any transubstantiation of bread into Christ's body, and of wine into his natural blood, as the Romanists have perniciously taught and wrongly believed; but this **union and conjunction** which we have with the body and blood of Christ Jesus in the right use of the sacraments is wrought by **means of the Holy Ghost**, who by true faith **carries us above all things** that are visible, carnal, and earthly, and makes us feed upon the body and blood of Christ Jesus, once broken and shed for us but now in heaven, and appearing for us in the presence of his Father. Notwithstanding the distance between his glorified body in heaven and mortal men on earth, yet we must assuredly believe that the bread which we break is the communion of Christ's body and the cup which we bless the communion of his blood. Thus we confess and believe without doubt that the faithful, in the right use of the Lord's Table, do so eat the body and drink the blood of the Lord Jesus that he **remains in them and they in him**; they are so made **flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone** that as the eternal Godhood has given to the flesh of Christ Jesus, which by nature was corruptible and mortal, **life and immortality, so the eating and drinking of the flesh and blood of Christ Jesus does the like for us**. We grant that this is neither given to us merely at the time nor by the power and virtue of the sacrament alone, but we affirm that the faithful, in the right use of the Lord's Table, have such **union with Christ Jesus** as the natural man cannot apprehend. Further we affirm that although **the faithful**, hindered by negligence and human weakness, do not profit as much as they ought in the actual moment of the Supper, yet afterwards it shall bring forth fruit, being living seed sown in good ground; for the Holy Spirit, who can never be separated from the right institution of the Lord Jesus, **will not deprive the faithful of the fruit of that mystical action**. Yet all this, we say again, comes of that true faith which apprehends **Christ Jesus, who alone makes the sacrament effective in us**. Therefore, if anyone slanders us by saying that we affirm or believe the sacraments to be symbols and nothing more, they are libelous and speak against the plain facts. On the other hand we readily admit that we make a distinction between Christ Jesus in his eternal substance and the elements of the sacramental signs. So we neither worship the elements, in place of that which they signify, nor yet do we despise them or undervalue them, but we use them with great reverence, examining ourselves diligently before we participate, since we are assured by the mouth of the apostle that "whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."

CHAPTER XXII*

The Right Administration of the Sacraments

3.22 Two things are necessary for the right administration of the sacraments. The first is that they should be ministered by lawful ministers, and we declare that these are men appointed to preach the Word, unto whom God has given the power to preach the gospel, and who are lawfully called by some Kirk. The second is that they should be ministered in the elements and manner which God has appointed. Otherwise they cease to be the sacraments of Christ Jesus. This is why we abandon the teaching of the Roman Church and withdraw from its sacraments; firstly, because their ministers are not true ministers of Christ Jesus (indeed they even allow women, whom the Holy Ghost will not permit to preach in the congregation to baptize) and, secondly, because they have so adulterated both the sacraments with their own additions that no part of Christ's original act remains in its original simplicity. The addition of oil, salt, spittle, and such like in baptism, are merely human additions. To adore or venerate the sacrament, to carry it through streets and towns in procession, or to reserve it in a special case, is not the proper use of Christ's sacrament but an abuse of it. Christ Jesus said, "Take ye, eat ye," and "Do this in remembrance of Me." By these words and commands he sanctified bread and wine to be the sacrament of his holy body and blood, so that the one should be eaten and that all should drink of the other, and not that they should be reserved for worship or honored as God, as the Romanists do. Further, in withdrawing one part of the sacrament—the blessed cup—from the people, they have committed sacrilege. **Moreover, if the sacraments are to be rightly used it is essential that the end and purpose of their institution should be understood, not only by the minister but by the recipients. For if the recipient does not understand what is being done, the sacrament is not being rightly used,** as is seen in the case of the Old Testament sacrifices. Similarly, if the teacher teaches false doctrine which is hateful to God, even though the sacraments are his own ordinance, they are not rightly used, since wicked men have used them for another end than what God commanded. We affirm this has been done to the sacraments in the Roman Church, for there the whole action of the Lord Jesus is adulterated in form, purpose, and meaning. What Christ Jesus did, and commanded to be done, is evident from the Gospels and from St. Paul; what the priest does at the altar we do not need to tell. The end and purpose of Christ's institution, for which it should be used, is set forth in the words, "Do this in remembrance of Me," and "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do show"—that is, extol, preach, magnify, and

* See Preface for discussion of our current understanding of such condemnations.

praise—“the Lord’s death, till He come.” But let the words of the mass, and their own doctors and teachings witness, what is the purpose and meaning of the mass; it is that, as mediators between Christ and his Kirk, they should offer to God the Father, a sacrifice in propitiation for the sins of the living and of the dead. This doctrine is blasphemous to Christ Jesus and would deprive his unique sacrifice, once offered on the cross for the cleansing of all who are to be sanctified, of its sufficiency; so we detest and renounce it.

CHAPTER XXIII

To Whom Sacraments Appertain

3.23 We hold that baptism applies as much to the children of the faithful as to those who are of age and discretion, and so we condemn the error of the Anabaptists, who deny that children should be baptized before they have faith and understanding. But we hold that the Supper of the Lord is only for those who are of the household of faith and can try and examine themselves both in their faith and their duty to their neighbors. Those who eat and drink at that holy table without faith, or without peace and goodwill to their brethren, eat unworthily. This is the reason why ministers in our Kirk make public and individual examination of those who are to be admitted to the table of the Lord Jesus.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Civil Magistrate

3.24 We confess and acknowledge that empires, kingdoms, dominions, and cities are appointed and ordained by God; the powers and authorities in them, emperors in empires, kings in their realms, dukes and princes in their dominions, and magistrates in cities, are ordained by God’s holy ordinance for the manifestation of his own glory and for the good and well being of all men. We hold that any men who conspire to rebel or to overturn the civil powers, as duly established, are not merely enemies to humanity but rebels against God’s will. Further, we confess and acknowledge that such persons as are set in authority are to be loved, honored, feared, and held in the highest respect, because they are the lieutenants of God, and in their councils God himself doth sit and judge. They are the judges and princes to whom God has given the sword for the praise and defense of good men and the punishment of all open evil doers. Moreover, we state that the preservation and purification of religion is particularly the duty of kings, princes, rulers, and magistrates. They are not only appointed for civil government but also to maintain true religion and to suppress all idolatry and superstition. This may be seen in David, Jehosaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, and others highly commended for their zeal in that cause.

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

[TEXT]

The Heidelberg Catechism

The Reformation was not a singular movement. Soon after Luther posted his ninety-five theses, reform movements sprang up throughout Europe. As Lutheran thought moved down the Neckar River, Reformed thought traveled up the Rhine from Switzerland. They met at Heidelberg, seat of the oldest university in Germany and capital of the province known as the Palatinate. Tension between Lutherans and Reformed Christians was intense. Because the Reformed did not believe in the real, bodily presence of Christ in the bread and wine, Lutherans believed that they were desecrating the Lord's Supper.

Acting to end the controversy, Frederick the Elector, ruler of the Palatinate, asked two young men of Heidelberg—Zacharias Ursinus, professor of theology, and Kaspar Olevianus, preacher to the city—to prepare a catechism acceptable to both sides. They revised an earlier catechism that Ursinus had written, using its outline and some ninety of its questions and answers. Completed in 1562, the Heidelberg Catechism was published in January of the following year.

The Heidelberg Catechism opens with two questions concerning our comfort in life and death. The knowledge that our only comfort is Jesus Christ frames the remainder of the catechism. Each of its three parts corresponds to a line of Romans 7:24–25 (NRSV), where Paul cries: “Wretched man that I am; Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord;” Thus, questions 3–11 deal with our sin and misery, questions 12–85 with the way in which God in Jesus Christ frees us, and questions 86–129 with the manner in which we express gratitude to God for our deliverance.

Each question of the catechism is personal, addressed to “you.” Each answer draws as much as possible on biblical language. The catechism's tone is irenic, showing nothing of the controversy that called it forth. Its theology is both catholic, universal in appeal, and evangelical, setting forth the gospel of Jesus Christ. Providing a basis for peaceful coexistence between Lutheran and Reformed Christians, the catechism denied that the bread and wine become the very body and blood of Christ but affirmed that “by this visible sign and pledge ... we come to share in his true body and blood through the working of the Holy Spirit ...” (paragraph 4.079).

The influence of the Heidelberg Catechism in the church's preaching and teaching continues to be felt in Germany, Austria, Holland, Hungary, parts of Eastern Europe, Scotland, Canada, and the United States.

The biblical citations in this text are those found in the German 3rd edition of 1563 and the Latin translation of 1563. The citations in the German 3rd edition include book and chapter without verse numbers, inviting the reader to use the Catechism as an aid to the study of larger passages of Scripture. The citations in the Latin edition are often a place to begin reading on a topic, or the conclusion of a relevant passage, rather than simple proof-texts. Placement of the notes varies slightly in the German, the Latin, and here in English according to the nature of the language.

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM¹

LORD'S DAY 1

4.001 1 Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own,¹
but belong—

body and soul,
in life and in death—²
to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.³

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,⁴
and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.⁵

He also watches over me in such a way⁶
that not a hair can fall from my head
without the will of my Father in heaven;⁷
in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.⁸

Because I belong to him,
Christ, by his Holy Spirit,
assures me of eternal life⁹
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready
from now on to live for him.¹⁰

1. 1 Cor. 6:19
2. Rom. 14:8
3. 1 Cor. 3:23
4. 1 Pet. 1:18; 1 John 1:7; 2:2
5. 1 John 3:8
6. John 6:39
7. Matt. 10:30; Luke 21:18
8. Rom. 8:28
9. 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14; Rom. 8:16
10. Rom. 8:14

4.002 2 Q. What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

A. Three things:¹
first, how great my sin and misery are;²
second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery;³
third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.⁴

1. Luke 24:47; 1 Cor. 6:11; Tit. 3:3
2. **John 9:41**; John 15:[6–]7
3. John 17:3
4. Eph. 5:10

¹ Reprinted from *The Heidelberg Catechism, 400th Anniversary Edition, 1563–1963*, Copyright © 1962 United Church Press. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

- A. No.
It is impossible
for those grafted into Christ through true faith
not to produce fruits of gratitude.¹
1. Matt. [7]:18

The Holy Sacraments

LORD'S DAY 25

- 4.065 65 **Q. It is through faith alone
that we share in Christ and all his benefits:
where then does that faith come from?**
- A. The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts¹
by the preaching of the holy gospel,
and confirms it
by the use of the holy sacraments.²
1. Eph. 2:8; John 3:5
2. Matt. 28:19–20; 1 Pet. 1:22–23
- 4.066 66 **Q. What are sacraments?**
- A. Sacraments are **visible, holy signs and seals**.
They were instituted by God so that
by our use of them
he might make us **understand more clearly
the promise of the gospel,**
and **seal that promise**.
- And this is God's gospel promise:
**to grant us forgiveness of sins and eternal life
by grace
because of Christ's one sacrifice
accomplished on the cross.**¹
1. Gen. 17:11; Rom. 4:11; Deut. 30:6; Lev. 6:25; Heb. 9:8–9, [11–]
24; Ezek. 20:12; **1 Sam. 17:36[–37]; Isa. 6:6–7**
- 4.067 67 **Q. Are both the word and the sacraments then
intended to focus our faith
on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross
as the only ground of our salvation?**
- A. Yes!
In the gospel the Holy Spirit teaches us
and by the holy sacraments **confirms**
that our entire salvation
rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.¹
1. Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27

- 4.068 68 Q. How many sacraments did Christ institute in the New Testament?**
A. Two: holy baptism and the holy supper.

Holy Baptism

LORD’S DAY 26

- 4.069 69 Q. How does baptism remind and assure you that Christ’s one sacrifice on the cross benefits you personally?**
A. In this way:
 Christ instituted this outward washing and with it promised that,
 as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body,
 so certainly his blood and his Spirit wash away my soul’s impurity,
 that is, all my sins.¹
1. Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3
- 4.070 70 Q. What does it mean to be washed with Christ’s blood and Spirit?**
A. To be washed with Christ’s blood means that God, by grace, has forgiven our sins because of Christ’s blood poured out for us in his sacrifice on the cross.¹
 To be washed with Christ’s Spirit means that the Holy Spirit has renewed and sanctified us to be members of Christ, so that more and more we become dead to sin and live holy and blameless lives.²
1. Heb. 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:5; **22:14**; Zech. 13:1; Ezek. 36:25
 2. John 1:33; 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:11; 12:13; Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12
- 4.071 71 Q. Where does Christ promise that we are washed with his blood and Spirit as surely as we are washed with the water of baptism?**
A. In the institution of baptism, where he says:
 “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”¹

“The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.”²

This promise is repeated when Scripture calls baptism “the water of rebirth”³ and the washing away of sins.⁴

1. Matt. 28:19
2. Mark 16:16
3. Titus 3:5
4. Acts 22:16

LORD’S DAY 27

4.072 72 Q. Does this outward washing with water itself wash away sins?

A. No,¹ only Jesus Christ’s blood and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins.²

1. Matt. 3:11; 1 Pet. 3:21; Eph. 5:26
2. 1 John 1:7; 1 Cor. 6:11

4.073 73 Q. Why then does the Holy Spirit call baptism the water of rebirth and the washing away of sins?

A. God has good reasons for these words. To begin with, God wants to teach us that the blood and Spirit of Christ take away our sins just as water removes dirt from the body.¹ But more important, God wants to assure us, by this divine pledge and sign, that we are as truly washed of our sins spiritually as our bodies are washed with water physically.²

1. Rev. 1:5; 7:14; 1 Cor. 6:11
2. Mark 16:16; Gal. 3:[2]7

4.074 74 Q. Should infants also be baptized?

A. Yes. Infants as well as adults are included in God’s covenant and people,¹ and they, no less than adults, are promised deliverance from sin through Christ’s blood² and the Holy Spirit who produces faith.³

Therefore, by baptism, the sign of the covenant, they too should be incorporated into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers.⁴

This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision,⁵ which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.⁶

1. Gen. 17:7
2. Matt. 19:14
3. Luke 1:15, [4]4; Ps. 22:[9–]11; Isa. 46:1–5; Acts 2:39
4. Acts 10:47
5. Gen. 17:[9–]14
6. Col. 2:11–13

The Holy Supper of Jesus Christ

LORD’S DAY 28

4.075 75 Q. How does the holy supper remind and assure you that you share in Christ’s one sacrifice on the cross and in all his benefits?

- A.** In this way:
Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat this broken bread and to drink this cup in remembrance of him.
With this command come these promises:

First,
as surely as I see with my eyes
the bread of the Lord broken for me
and the cup shared with me,
so surely
his body was offered and broken for me
and his blood poured out for me
on the cross.

Second,
as surely as
I receive from the hand of the one who serves,
and taste with my mouth
the bread and cup of the Lord,
given me as sure signs of Christ’s body and blood,
so surely
he nourishes and **refreshes my soul** for eternal life
with his crucified body and poured-out blood.

4.076 76 Q. What does it mean to eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink his poured-out blood?

- A.** It means
to accept with a believing heart
the entire suffering and death of Christ
and thereby
to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.¹

But it means more.

Through the Holy Spirit, who lives both in Christ and in us, we are united more and more to Christ's blessed body.²

And so, although he is in heaven³ and we are on earth, we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.⁴

And we forever live on and are governed by one Spirit, as the members of our body are by one soul.⁵

1. John 6:35, 40, 47–48, 50–54
2. John 6:55–56
3. Acts 1:9; 3:21; 1 Cor. 11:26
4. Eph. 3:17; 5:29–32; 1 Cor. 6:15, 17–19; 1 John 3:24; 4:13; John 14:23
5. John 6:56–58; 15:1–6; Eph. 4:15–16

4.077 77 Q. Where does Christ promise to nourish and refresh believers with his body and blood as surely as they eat this broken bread and drink this cup?

A. In the institution of the Lord's Supper:¹

“The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,

‘This is my body that is [broken]* for you.’

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying,

‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood;²

do this, as often as you drink it,

in remembrance of me.’³

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

This promise is repeated by Paul in these words:

“The cup of blessing that we bless,
is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?

The bread that we break,
is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?

Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body,
for we all partake of the one bread.”⁴

1. 1 Cor. 11:23[–26]; Matt. 26:26[–29]; Mark 14:22[–25]; Luke 22:17[–20]
2. **Exod. 24:8; Heb. 9:20**
3. **Exod. 13:9**
4. 1 Cor. 10:16–17

*The word “broken” does not appear in the NRSV text, but it was present in the original German of the Heidelberg Catechism.

LORD'S DAY 29

4.078 78 Q. Do the bread and wine become the real body and blood of Christ?

A. No.

Just as the water of baptism is not changed into Christ's blood and does not itself wash away sins but is simply a divine sign and assurance of these things,¹ so too the holy bread of the Lord's Supper does not become the actual body of Christ,² even though it is called the body of Christ in keeping with the nature and language of sacraments.³

1. Matt. 26:[28–]29; Mark 14:24
2. 1 Cor. 10:16–17; 11:26–28
3. Gen. 17:10, 14–19; Exod. 12:27, 43–48; **13:9; 24:8; 29:36; Acts 7:8; 22:16; Lev. 16:10; 17:11; Isa. 6:6–7; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21; 1 Cor. 10:1–4**

4.079 79 Q. Why then does Christ call the bread his body and the cup his blood, or the new covenant in his blood, and Paul use the words, a participation in Christ's body and blood?

A. Christ has good reason for these words.

He wants to teach us that

just as bread and wine nourish the temporal life, so too his crucified body and poured-out blood are the true food and drink of our souls for eternal life.¹

But more important,

he wants to assure us, by this visible **sign** and **pledge**,

that we, through the Holy Spirit's work, share in his true body and blood

as surely as our mouths

receive these holy signs in his remembrance,²

and that all of his suffering and obedience

are as definitely ours

as if we personally

had suffered and made satisfaction for our sins.

1. John 6:51, 55
2. 1 Cor. 10:16–17

LORD'S DAY 30

4.080 80* Q. How does the Lord's Supper differ from the Roman Catholic Mass?

- A. The Lord's Supper declares to us
that all our sins are completely forgiven
through the **one sacrifice** of Jesus Christ,
which he himself accomplished on the cross once for all.¹

It also declares to us
that the **Holy Spirit grafts us into Christ**,²
who with his true body
is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father³
where he wants us to worship him.⁴

But the Mass teaches
that the living and the dead
do not have their sins forgiven
through the suffering of Christ
unless Christ is still offered for them daily by the priests.

It also teaches
that Christ is bodily present
under the form of bread and wine
where Christ is therefore to be worshiped.

Thus the Mass is basically
nothing but a denial
of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ
and a condemnable idolatry.

1. Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 26–28; 10:10, 12–14; John 19:30; Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:19–20
2. 1 Cor. 6:17; 10:16; **12:13**
3. Heb. 1:3; 8:1
4. John 4:21–23; 20:17; Luke 24:52; Acts 7:55–56; Col. 3:1; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 1:10

*Question and Answer 80 reflects the polemical debates of the Reformation and was added in the second German edition of 1563. The second and fourth sentences of the Answer, as well as the concluding phrase, were added in the third German edition of 1563. After the fourth sentence, the third German and Latin texts have a note to the section on consecration in the Canon of the Mass.

As detailed in the preface to *The Book of Confessions*, these condemnations and characterizations of the Catholic Church are not the position of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and are not applicable to current relationships between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Catholic Church.

4.081 81 Q. Who should come to the Lord's table?

- A. Those who are **displeased with themselves**
because of their sins,
but **who nevertheless trust**
that their sins are pardoned
and that their **remaining weakness is covered**
by the suffering and death of Christ,

and who also **desire more and more
to strengthen their faith
and to lead a better life.**

Hypocrites and those who are unrepentant, however,
eat and drink judgment on themselves.¹

1. 1 Cor. 10:21; 11:28[–29]

**4.082 82 Q. Should those be admitted
to the Lord’s Supper
who show by what they profess and how they live
that they are unbelieving and ungodly?**

- A.** No, that would dishonor God’s covenant
and bring down God’s wrath upon the entire congregation.¹
Therefore, according to the instruction of Christ
and his apostles,
the Christian church is duty-bound to exclude such people,
by the official use of the keys of the kingdom,
until they reform their lives.

1. 1 Cor. 11:20, 34; Isa. 1:11; 66:3; Jer. 7:21[–26]; Ps. 50:16

LORD’S DAY 31

4.083 83 Q. What are the keys of the kingdom?

- A.** The preaching of the holy gospel
and Christian discipline toward repentance.
Both of them
open the kingdom of heaven to believers
and close it to unbelievers.

**4.084 84 Q. How does preaching the holy gospel
open and close the kingdom of heaven?**

- A.** According to the command of Christ:
The kingdom of heaven is opened
by proclaiming and publicly declaring
to all believers, each and every one, that,
as often as they accept the gospel promise in true faith,
God, because of Christ’s merit,
truly forgives all their sins.
The kingdom of heaven is closed, however,
by proclaiming and publicly declaring
to unbelievers and hypocrites that,
as long as they do not repent,
the wrath of God and eternal condemnation
rest on them.¹

God’s judgment, both in this life and in the life to come,
is based on this gospel testimony.

1. John 20:21–23; Matt. 16:19

THE SECOND HELVETIC
CONFESSION

[TEXT]

The Second Helvetic Confession

The word “Helvetic” is Latin for “Swiss.” The setting of the Second Helvetic Confession is Swiss-German Reformed Protestantism.

After the great Reformer Ulrich Zwingli died in battle in 1531, Heinrich Bullinger succeeded him as minister of the church in Zurich. Bullinger was a model Reformed minister. A preacher, he expounded Scripture at least twice a week. A scholar, he wrote Latin commentaries on many books of the Old Testament and on every book of the New Testament except Revelation. An educator, he initiated a system of schools for Zurich and was rector of the Carolinum, a theological academy. A person with ecumenical and political concerns, he was in correspondence with leaders of the Reformation and with rulers throughout Europe. A pastor, he welcomed religious refugees into his own home. When the plague swept through Zurich in 1564, he insisted upon ministering to the afflicted, even though he knew he might become infected and die.

In 1561, Bullinger composed the document that later became known as the Second Helvetic Confession. He intended to attach it to his last will and testament to the Zurich church, but events in Germany soon brought it into the public arena.

The publication of the Heidelberg Catechism created trouble for the man who had ordered its preparation. Lutherans considered it too Reformed in spirit, and they demanded that Frederick the Elector, governor of the Palatinate, be brought to trial for heresy. Not a theologian himself, Frederick turned to Bullinger, who offered Frederick this confession as the basis for his defense. When the Imperial Diet, the ruling body of Germany, met for trial in 1566, Frederick was exonerated.

Meanwhile, the churches of Switzerland adopted Bullinger’s confession as their new confession of faith. Soon finding wide acceptance throughout Europe and beyond, it was translated into French, English, Dutch, Polish, Hungarian, Italian, Arabic, and Turkish.

Reflecting the theological maturity of the Reformed churches, the Second Helvetic Confession is moderate in tone and catholic in spirit. From the opening paragraphs it emphasizes the church and its life and affirms the authority of the Scriptures for the church’s government and reformation. By including an article on predestination, the confession asks the church to trust in God’s free and gracious election of its membership in Jesus Christ. At the same time, the confession addresses the practical life of the gathered community, detailing matters of worship, church order and conflict, ministry, the sacraments, and marriage.

THE SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION¹

CHAPTER I

Of the Holy Scripture Being the True Word of God

- 5.001** CANONICAL SCRIPTURE. We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures.
- 5.002** And in this Holy Scripture, the universal Church of Christ has the most complete exposition of all that pertains to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God; and in this respect it is expressly commanded by God that nothing be either added to or taken from the same.
- 5.003** SCRIPTURE TEACHES FULLY ALL GODLINESS. We judge, therefore, that from these Scriptures are to be derived true wisdom and godliness, the reformation and government of churches; as also instruction in all duties of piety; and, to be short, the confirmation of doctrines, and the rejection of all errors, moreover, all exhortations according to that word of the apostle, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof,” etc. (II Tim. 3:16–17). Again, “I am writing these instructions to you,” says the apostle to Timothy, “so that you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God,” etc. (I Tim. 3:14–15). SCRIPTURE IS THE WORD OF GOD. Again, the selfsame apostle to the Thessalonians: “When,” says he, “you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God,” etc. (I Thess. 2:13.) For the Lord himself has said in the Gospel, “It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of my Father speaking through you”; therefore “he who hears you hears me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Matt. 10:20; Luke 10:16; John 13:20).
- 5.004** THE PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD IS THE WORD OF GOD. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good.

¹ Reprinted from *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* by Arthur C. Cochrane. Copyright MCMLXVI W. L. Jenkins. The Westminster Press. Used by permission.

5.167 SYNODS. Nevertheless, there ought to be proper discipline among ministers. In synods the doctrine and life of ministers is to be carefully examined. Offenders who can be cured are to be rebuked by the elders and restored to the right way, and if they are incurable, they are to be deposed, and like wolves driven away from the flock of the Lord by the true shepherds. For, if they be false teachers, they are not to be tolerated at all. Neither do we disapprove of ecumenical councils, if they are convened according to the example of the apostles, for the welfare of the Church and not for its destruction.

5.168 THE WORKER IS WORTHY OF HIS REWARD. All faithful ministers, as good workmen, are also worthy of their reward, and do not sin when they receive a stipend, and all things that be necessary for themselves and their family. For the apostle shows in I Cor., ch. 9, and in I Tim., ch. 5, and elsewhere that these things may rightly be given by the Church and received by ministers. The Anabaptists, who condemn and defame ministers who live from their ministry are also refuted by the apostolic teaching.

CHAPTER XIX

Of the Sacraments of the Church of Christ

5.169 THE SACRAMENTS [ARE] ADDED TO THE WORD AND WHAT THEY ARE. From the beginning, God added to the preaching of his Word in his Church sacraments or sacramental signs. For thus does all Holy Scripture clearly testify. Sacraments are **mystical symbols**, or holy rites, or sacred actions, **instituted by God** himself, consisting of his **Word**, of **signs** and of **things signified**, whereby in the Church he keeps in mind and from time to time **recalls the great benefits** he has shown to men; whereby also he **seals his promises**, and **outwardly represents**, and, as it were, offers unto our sight those things which **inwardly he performs** for us, and **so strengthens and increases our faith** through the working of God's Spirit in our hearts. Lastly, he thereby distinguishes us from all other people and religions, and consecrates and **binds us wholly to himself**, and **signifies what he requires of us**.

5.170 SOME ARE SACRAMENTS OF THE OLD, OTHERS OF THE NEW, TESTAMENTS. Some sacraments are of the old, others of the new, people. The sacraments of the ancient people were **circumcision**, and the **Paschal Lamb**, which was offered up; for that reason it is referred to the sacrifices which were practiced from the beginning of the world.

5.171 THE NUMBER OF SACRAMENTS OF THE NEW PEOPLE. The sacraments of the new people are **Baptism** and the **Lord's Supper**. There are some who count seven sacraments of the new people. Of these we acknowledge that repentance, the ordination of ministers (not indeed the papal but apostolic ordination), and matrimony are profitable ordinances of God, but not

sacraments. Confirmation and extreme unction are human inventions which the Church can dispense with without any loss, and indeed, we do not have them in our churches. For they contain some things of which we can by no means approve. Above all we detest all the trafficking in which the Papists engage in dispensing the sacraments.

5.172 THE AUTHOR OF THE SACRAMENTS. The author of all sacraments is not any man, but God alone. Men cannot institute sacraments. For they pertain to the worship of God, and it is not for man to appoint and prescribe a worship of God, but to accept and preserve the one he has received from God. Besides, the symbols have God's promises annexed to them, which require faith. Now faith rests only upon the Word of God; and the Word of God is like papers or letters, and the sacraments are like seals which only God appends to the letters.

5.173 CHRIST STILL WORKS IN SACRAMENTS. And as God is the author of the sacraments, so he continually works in the Church in which they are rightly carried out; so that the faithful, when they receive them from the ministers, know that God works in his own ordinance, and therefore they receive them as from the hand of God; and the minister's faults (even if they be very great) cannot affect them, since they acknowledge the integrity of the sacraments to depend upon the institution of the Lord.

5.174 THE AUTHOR AND THE MINISTERS OF THE SACRAMENTS TO BE DISTINGUISHED. Hence in the administration of the sacraments they also clearly distinguish between the Lord himself and the ministers of the Lord, confessing that the substance of the sacraments is given them by the Lord, and the outward signs by the ministers of the Lord.

5.175 THE SUBSTANCE OR CHIEF THING IN THE SACRAMENTS. But the principal thing which God promises in all sacraments and to which all the godly in all ages direct their attention (some call it the substance and matter of the sacraments) is Christ the Savior—that only sacrifice, and the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world; that rock, also, from which all our fathers drank, by whom all the elect are circumcised without hands through the Holy Spirit, and are washed from all their sins, and are nourished with the very body and blood of Christ unto eternal life.

5.176 THE SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE IN THE SACRAMENTS OF OLD AND NEW PEOPLES. Now, in respect of that which is the principal thing and the matter itself in the sacraments, the sacraments of both peoples are equal. For Christ, the only Mediator and Savior of the faithful, is the chief thing and very substance of the sacraments in both; for the one God is the author of them both. They were given to both peoples as signs and seals of the grace and promises of God, which should call to mind and renew the memory of God's great benefits, and should distinguish the faithful from all the religions in the world; lastly, which

should be received spiritually by faith, and should **bind the receivers to the Church, and admonish them of their duty**. In these and similar respects, I say, the sacraments of both people are not dissimilar, although in the outward signs they are different. And, indeed, with respect to the signs we make a great difference. For ours are more firm and lasting, inasmuch as they will never be changed to the end of the world. Moreover, ours testify that **both the substance and the promise have been fulfilled or perfected in Christ**; the former signified what was to be fulfilled. Ours are also more simple and less laborious, less sumptuous and involved with ceremonies. Moreover, they belong to a more numerous people, one that is dispersed throughout the whole earth. And since they are more excellent, and by the Holy Spirit kindle greater faith, a greater abundance of the Spirit also ensues.

5.177 OUR SACRAMENTS SUCCEED THE OLD WHICH ARE ABROGATED. But now since Christ the true Messiah is exhibited unto us, and the abundance of grace is poured forth upon the people of The New Testament, the sacraments of the old people are surely abrogated and have ceased; and in their stead the symbols of the New Testament are placed—Baptism in the place of circumcision, the Lord’s Supper in place of the Paschal Lamb and sacrifices.

5.178 IN WHAT THE SACRAMENTS CONSIST. And as formerly the sacraments consisted of the word, the sign, and the thing signified; so even now they are composed, as it were, of the same parts. For the Word of God makes them sacraments, which before they were not. THE CONSECRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS. For they are consecrated by the Word, and shown to be sanctified by him who instituted them. To sanctify or consecrate anything to God is to dedicate it to holy uses; that is, to take it from the common and ordinary use, and to appoint it to a holy use. **For the signs in the sacraments are drawn from common use, things external and visible**. For in baptism the **sign** is the element of water, and that visible washing which is done by the minister; but the thing signified is regeneration and the cleansing from sins. Likewise, in the Lord’s Supper, the **outward sign** is bread and wine, taken from things commonly used for meat and drink; but the thing signified is the body of Christ which was given, and his blood which was shed for us, or the communion of the body and blood of the Lord. Wherefore, the water, bread, and wine, according to their nature and apart from the divine institution and sacred use, are only that which they are called and we experience. **But when the Word of God is added to them, together with invocation of the divine name, and the renewing of their first institution and sanctification, then these signs are consecrated, and shown to be sanctified by Christ**. For Christ’s first institution and consecration of the sacraments remains always effectual in the Church of God, so that those who do not celebrate the sacraments in any other way than the Lord himself instituted from the beginning still today enjoy that first

and all-surpassing consecration. **And hence in the celebration of the sacraments the very words of Christ are repeated.**

5.179 **SIGNS TAKE NAME OF THINGS SIGNIFIED.** And as we learn out of the Word of God that these signs were instituted for another purpose than the usual use, therefore we teach that they now, in their holy use, take upon them the names of things signified, and are no longer called mere water, bread or wine, but also regeneration or the washing of water, and the body and blood of the Lord or symbols and sacraments of the Lord's body and blood. Not that the symbols are changed into the things signified, or cease to be what they are in their own nature. For otherwise they would not be sacraments. If they were only the thing signified, they would not be signs.

5.180 **THE SACRAMENTAL UNION.** Therefore the signs acquire the names of things because they are **mystical signs of sacred things**, and because the **signs and the things signified are sacramentally joined together**; joined together, I say, or united by a **mystical signification**, and by the purpose or will of him who instituted the sacraments. **For the water, bread, and wine are not common, but holy signs.** And he that instituted water in baptism did not institute it with the will and intention that the faithful should only be sprinkled by the water of baptism; and he who commanded the bread to be eaten and the wine to be drunk in the supper did not want the faithful to receive only bread and wine without any mystery as they eat bread in their homes; but that they should spiritually partake of the things signified, and by faith be truly cleansed from their sins, and partake of Christ.

5.181 **THE SECTS.** And, therefore, we do not at all approve of those who attribute the sanctification of the sacraments to I know not what properties and formula or to the power of words pronounced by one who is consecrated and who has the intention of consecrating, and to other accidental things which neither Christ or the apostles delivered to us by word or example. Neither do we approve of the doctrine of those who speak of the sacraments just as common signs, not sanctified and effectual. Nor do we approve of those who despise the visible aspect of the sacraments because of the invisible, and so believe the signs to be superfluous because they think they already enjoy the thing themselves, as the Messalians are said to have held.

5.182 **THE THING SIGNIFIED IS NEITHER INCLUDED IN OR BOUND TO THE SACRAMENTS.** We do not approve of the doctrine of those who teach that grace and the things signified are so bound to and included in the signs that whoever participate outwardly in the signs, no matter what sort of persons they be, also inwardly participate in the grace and things signified.

5.183 However, as we do not estimate the value of the **sacraments** by the worthiness or unworthiness of the ministers, so we do not estimate it by the condition of those who receive them. For we know that the value of the sacraments depends upon faith and upon the truthfulness and pure goodness of God. For as the Word of God remains the true Word of God, in which, when it is preached, not only bare words are repeated, but at the same time the things signified or announced in words are offered by God, even if the ungodly and unbelievers hear and understand the words yet do not enjoy the things signified, because they do not receive them by true faith; so the sacraments, which by the Word consist of signs and the things signified, remain true and inviolate sacraments, signifying not only sacred things, but, by God offering, the things signified, even if unbelievers do not receive the things offered. This is not the fault of God who gives and offers them, but the fault of men who receive them without faith and illegitimately; but whose unbelief does not invalidate the faithfulness of God (Rom. 3:3 f.)

5.184 THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH SACRAMENTS WERE INSTITUTED. Since the purpose for which sacraments were instituted was also explained in passing when right at the beginning of our exposition it was shown what sacraments are, there is no need to be tedious by repeating what once has been said. Logically, therefore, we now speak severally of the sacraments of the new people.

CHAPTER XX*

Of Holy Baptism

5.185 THE INSTITUTION OF BAPTISM. Baptism was instituted and consecrated by God. First John baptized, who dipped Christ in the water in Jordan. From him it came to the apostles, who also baptized with water. The Lord expressly commanded them to preach the Gospel and to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). And in The Acts, Peter said to the Jews who inquired what they ought to do: “Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37 f.). Hence by some baptism is called a sign of initiation for God’s people, since by it the elect of God are consecrated to God.

5.186 ONE BAPTISM. There is but one baptism in the Church of God; and it is sufficient to be once baptized or consecrated unto God. For baptism once received continues for all of life, and is a perpetual sealing of our adoption.

* See Preface for discussion of our current understanding of such condemnations.

5.187 **WHAT IT MEANS TO BE BAPTIZED.** Now to be baptized in the name of Christ is to be enrolled, entered, and received into the covenant and family, and so into the inheritance of the sons of God; yes, and in this life to be called after the name of God; that is to say, to be called a son of God; to be cleansed also from the filthiness of sins, and to be granted the manifold grace of God, in order to lead a new and innocent life. Baptism, therefore, calls to mind and renews the great favor God has shown to the race of mortal men. For we are all born in the pollution of sin and are the children of wrath. But God, who is rich in mercy, freely cleanses us from our sins by the blood of his Son, and in him adopts us to be his sons, and by a holy covenant joins us to himself, and enriches us with various gifts, that we might live a new life. All these things are assured by baptism. For inwardly we are regenerated, purified, and renewed by God through the Holy Spirit; and outwardly we receive the assurance of the greatest gifts in the water, by which also those great benefits are represented, and, as it were, set before our eyes to be beheld.

5.188 **WE ARE BAPTIZED WITH WATER.** And therefore we are baptized, that is, washed or sprinkled with visible water. For the water washes dirt away, and cools and refreshes hot and tired bodies. And the grace of God performs these things for souls, and does so invisibly or spiritually.

5.189 **THE OBLIGATION OF BAPTISM.** Moreover, God also separates us from all strange religions and peoples by the symbol of baptism, and consecrates us to himself as his property. We, therefore, confess our faith when we are baptized, and obligate ourselves to God for obedience, mortification of the flesh, and newness of life. Hence, we are enlisted in the holy military service of Christ that all our life long we should fight against the world, Satan, and our own flesh. Moreover, we are baptized into one body of the Church, that with all members of the Church we might beautifully concur in the one religion and in mutual services.

5.190 **THE FORM OF BAPTISM.** We believe that the most perfect form of baptism is that by which Christ was baptized, and by which the apostles baptized. Those things, therefore, which by man's device were added afterwards and used in the Church we do not consider necessary to the perfection of baptism. Of this kind is exorcism, the use of burning lights, oil, salt, spittle, and such other things as that baptism is to be celebrated twice every year with a multitude of ceremonies. For we believe that one baptism of the Church has been sanctified in God's first institution, and that it is consecrated by the Word and is also effectual today in virtue of God's first blessing.

5.191 **THE MINISTER OF BAPTISM.** We teach that baptism should not be administered in the Church by women or midwives. For Paul deprived women of ecclesiastical duties, and baptism has to do with these.

- 5.192** ANABAPTISTS. We condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that newborn infants of the faithful are to be baptized. For according to evangelical teaching, of such is the Kingdom of God, and they are in the covenant of God. Why, then, should the sign of God’s covenant not be given to them? Why should those who belong to God and are in his Church not be initiated by holy baptism? We condemn also the Anabaptists in the rest of their peculiar doctrines which they hold contrary to the Word of God. We therefore are not Anabaptists and have nothing in common with them.

CHAPTER XXI

Of the Holy Supper of the Lord

- 5.193** THE SUPPER OF THE LORD. The Supper of the Lord (which is called the Lord’s Table, and the Eucharist, that is, a Thanksgiving), is, therefore, usually called a supper, because it was instituted by Christ at his last supper, and still represents it, and because in it the faithful are spiritually fed and given drink.

- 5.194** THE AUTHOR AND CONSECRATOR OF THE SUPPER. For the author of the Supper of the Lord is not an angel or any man, but the Son of God himself, our Lord Jesus Christ, who first consecrated it to his Church. **And the same consecration or blessing still remains along all those who celebrate no other but that very Supper which the Lord instituted**, and at which they repeat the words of the Lord’s Supper, and in all things look to the one Christ by a true faith, from whose hands they receive, as it were, what **they receive through the ministry** of the ministers of the Church.

- 5.195** A MEMORIAL OF GOD’S BENEFITS. By this sacred rite the Lord wishes to keep in **fresh remembrance** that **greatest benefit** which he showed to mortal men, namely, that by having given his body and shed his blood he has **pardoned all our sins**, and **redeemed us** from eternal death and the power of the devil, and **now feeds us** with his flesh, and give us his blood to drink, which, being received spiritually by true faith, **nourish us** to eternal life. **And this so great a benefit is renewed as often as the Lord’s Supper is celebrated.** For the Lord said: “Do this in remembrance of me.” This holy Supper also **seals to us** that the very body of Christ was truly given for us, and his blood shed for the remission of our sins, **lest our faith should in any way waver.**

- 5.196** THE SIGN AND THING SIGNIFIED. And this is visibly represented by this sacrament outwardly through the ministers, and, as it were, presented to our eyes to be seen, which is invisibly wrought by the Holy Spirit inwardly in the soul. Bread is outwardly offered by the minister, and the words of the Lord are heard: “Take, eat; this is my body”; and, “Take and divide among you. Drink of it, all of you; this is my blood.”

Therefore the faithful receive what is given by the ministers of the Lord, and they eat the bread of the Lord and drink of the Lord's cup. **At the same time by the work of Christ through the Holy Spirit they also inwardly receive the flesh and blood of the Lord, and are thereby nourished unto life eternal. For the flesh and blood of Christ is the true food and drink unto life eternal; and Christ himself, since he was given for us and is our Savior, is the principal thing in the Supper, and we do not permit anything else to be substituted in his place.**

5.197 But in order to understand better and more clearly how the flesh and blood of Christ are the food and drink of the faithful, and are received by the faithful unto eternal life, we would add these few things. There is more than one kind of eating. There is corporeal eating whereby food is taken into the mouth, is chewed with the teeth, and swallowed into the stomach. In times past the Capernaïtes thought that the flesh of the Lord should be eaten in this way, but they are refuted by him in John, ch. 6. For as the flesh of Christ cannot be eaten corporeally without infamy and savagery, so it is not food for the stomach. All men are forced to admit this. We therefore disapprove of that canon in the Pope's decrees, *Ego Berengarius (De Consecrat., Dist. 2)*. For neither did godly antiquity believe, nor do we believe, that the body of Christ is to be eaten corporeally and essentially with a bodily mouth.

5.198 SPIRITUAL EATING OF THE LORD. **There is also a spiritual eating** of Christ's body; not such that we think that thereby the food itself is to be changed into spirit, but whereby the body and blood of the Lord, while remaining in their own essence and property, are **spiritually communicated to us**, certainly not in a corporeal **but in a spiritual way**, by the Holy Spirit, who applies and bestows upon us these things which have been prepared for us by the sacrifice of the Lord's body and blood for us, namely, the **remission of sins, deliverance, and eternal life**; so that **Christ lives in us and we live in him**, and he causes us to receive him by true faith to this end that **he may become for us** such spiritual food and drink, that is, **our life**.

5.199 CHRIST AS OUR FOOD SUSTAINS US IN LIFE. For even as bodily food and drink not only refresh and strengthen our bodies, but also keeps them alive, so the flesh of Christ delivered for us, and his blood shed for us, not only **refresh and strengthen our souls**, but also **preserve** them alive, not in so far as they are corporeally eaten and drunken, but in so far as they are **communicated unto us spiritually** by the Spirit of God, as the Lord said: "The bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51), and "the flesh" (namely what is eaten bodily) "is of no avail; it is the spirit that gives life" (v. 63). And: "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."

5.200 CHRIST RECEIVED BY FAITH. And as we must by eating receive food into our bodies in order that it may work in us, and prove its effi-

cacy in us—since it profits us nothing when it remains outside us—so it is necessary that we receive Christ by faith, **that he may become ours, and he may live in us and we in him**. For he says: “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35); and also, “He who eats me will live because of me ... he abides in me, I in him” (vs. 57, 56).

5.201 **SPIRITUAL FOOD.** From all this it is clear that by spiritual food we do not mean some imaginary food I know not what, but the very body of the Lord given to us, which nevertheless is received by the faithful not corporeally, but spiritually by faith. In this matter we follow the teaching of the Savior himself, Christ the Lord, according to John, ch. 6.

5.202 **EATING NECESSARY FOR SALVATION.** And this eating of the flesh and drinking of the blood of the Lord is **so necessary** for salvation that without it no man can be saved. But this spiritual eating and drinking also occurs apart from the Supper of the Lord, and as often and wherever a man believes in Christ. To which that sentence of St. Augustine’s perhaps applies: “Why do you provide for your teeth and your stomach? Believe, and you have eaten.”

5.203 **SACRAMENTAL EATING OF THE LORD.** Besides the higher spiritual eating there is also a sacramental eating of the body of the Lord by which not only **spiritually and internally** the believer truly participates in the true body and blood of the Lord, but also, by coming to the Table of the Lord, **outwardly receives the visible sacrament** of the body and blood of the Lord. To be sure, **when the believer believed, he first received the life-giving food, and still enjoys it**. But therefore, when he now receives the sacrament, he does not receive nothing. For he progresses in **continuing to communicate** in the body and blood of the Lord, and **so his faith is kindled and grows more and more**, and is **refreshed** by spiritual food. For while we live, faith is continually increased. And he who outwardly receives the sacrament by true faith, **not only receives the sign, but also, as we said, enjoys the thing itself**. Moreover, he obeys the Lord’s institution and commandment, and with a joyful mind gives thanks for his redemption and that of all mankind, and makes a faithful memorial to the Lord’s death, and gives a witness before the Church, of whose body he is a member. Assurance is also given to those who receive the sacrament that the body of the Lord was given and his blood shed, not only for men in general, but particularly for every faithful communicant, to whom it is food and drink unto eternal life.

5.204 **UNBELIEVERS TAKE THE SACRAMENT TO THEIR JUDGMENT.** But he who comes to this sacred Table of the Lord without faith, communicates only in the sacrament and does not receive the substance of the sacrament whence comes life and salvation; and such men **unworthily**

eat of the Lord's Table. Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, and eats and drinks judgment upon himself (I Cor. 11:26–29). For when they do not approach with true faith, they dishonor the death of Christ, and therefore eat and drink condemnation to themselves.

5.205 THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE SUPPER. We do not, therefore, so join the body of the Lord and his blood with the bread and wine as to say that the bread itself is the body of Christ **except in a sacramental way**; or that the body of Christ is hidden corporeally under the bread, so that it ought to be worshipped under the form of bread; or yet that whoever receives the sign, receives also the thing itself. **The body of Christ is in heaven at the right hand of the Father; and therefore our hearts are to be lifted up on high, and not to be fixed on the bread, neither is the Lord to be worshipped in the bread. Yet the Lord is not absent** from his Church when she celebrates the Supper. The sun, which is absent from us in the heavens, is notwithstanding effectually present among us. **How much more is the Sun of Righteousness**, Christ, although in his body he is absent from us in heaven, **present with us**, nor corporeally, but spiritually, by his vivifying operation, and as he himself explained at his Last Supper that he would be present with us (John, chs. 14; 15; and 16). Whence it follows that we do not have the Supper without Christ, and yet at the same time have an unbloody and mystical Supper, as it was universally called by antiquity.

5.206 OTHER PURPOSES OF THE LORD'S SUPPER. Moreover, we are admonished in the celebration of the Supper of the Lord to be **mindful of whose body we have become members**, and that, therefore, we may be of **one mind with all the brethren**, live a holy life, and not pollute ourselves with wickedness and strange religions; but, persevering in the true faith to the end of our life, strive to excel in holiness of life.

5.207 PREPARATION FOR THE SUPPER. It is therefore fitting that when we would come to the Supper, **we first examine ourselves** according to the commandment of the apostle, especially as to the kind of faith we have, whether we believe that Christ has come to **save sinners** and to **call them to repentance**, and whether each man believes that he is in the number of those who have been delivered by Christ and saved; and whether he is determined to change his wicked life, to lead a holy life, and with the Lord's help to **persevere** in the true religion and in **harmony with the brethren**, and to **give due thanks** to God for his **deliverance**.

5.208 THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SUPPER WITH BOTH BREAD AND WINE. We think that rite, manner, or form of the Supper to be the most simple and excellent which comes **nearest to the first institution** of the Lord and to the apostles' doctrine. It consists in **proclaiming** the Word of God, in godly **prayers**, in the action of the Lord himself, and its repetition, in the eating of the Lord's body and drinking of his blood; in a

fitting remembrance of the Lord's death, and a **faithful thanksgiving**; and in a **holy fellowship** in the **union of the body of the Church**.

5.209 We therefore disapprove of those who have taken from the faithful one species of the sacrament, namely, the Lord's cup. For these seriously offend against the institution of the Lord who says: "Drink ye all of this"; which he did not so expressly say of the bread.

5.210 We are not now discussing what kind of mass once existed among the fathers, whether it is to be tolerated or not. But this we say freely that the mass which is now used throughout the Roman Church has been abolished in our churches for many and very good reasons which, for brevity's sake, we do not now enumerate in detail. We certainly could not approve of making a wholesome action into a vain spectacle and a means of gaining merit, and of celebrating it for a price. Nor could we approve of saying that in it the priest is said to effect the very body of the Lord, and really to offer it for the remission of the sins of the living and the dead, and in addition, for the honor, veneration and remembrance of the saints in heaven, etc.

CHAPTER XXII

Of Religious and Ecclesiastical Meetings

5.211 **WHAT OUGHT TO BE DONE IN MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP.** Although it is permitted all men to read the Holy Scriptures privately at home, and by instruction to edify one another in the true religion, yet in order that the Word of God may be properly preached to the people, and prayers and supplication publicly made, also that the sacraments may be rightly administered, and that collections may be made for the poor and to pay the cost of all the Church's expenses, and in order to maintain social intercourse, it is most necessary that religious or Church gatherings be held. For it is certain that in the apostolic and primitive Church, there were such assemblies frequented by all the godly.

5.212 **MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP NOT TO BE NEGLECTED.** As many as spurn such meetings and stay away from them, despise true religion, and are to be urged by the pastors and godly magistrates to abstain from stubbornly absenting themselves from sacred assemblies.

5.213 **MEETINGS ARE PUBLIC.** But Church meetings are not to be secret and hidden, but public and well attended, unless persecution by the enemies of Christ and the Church does not permit them to be public. For we know how under the tyranny of the Roman emperors the meetings of the primitive Church were held in secret places.

5.214 **DECENT MEETING PLACES.** Moreover, the places where the faithful meet are to be decent, and in all respects fit for God's Church. Therefore, spacious buildings or temples are to be chosen, but they are to be purged of everything that is not fitting for a church. And everything is to be arranged for decorum, necessity, and godly decen-

THE WESTMINSTER
CONFESSION OF FAITH

[TEXT]

The Westminster Standards

In 1643, the English House of Commons adopted an ordinance calling for the “settling of the government and liturgy of the Church of England (in a manner) most agreeable to God’s Holy Word and most apt to procure the peace of the church at home and nearer abroad.” After the ordinance passed the House of Lords, an assembly to accomplish this work convened in Westminster Abbey.

The Parliament nominated one hundred fifty-one persons to the assembly. Thirty were members of Parliament; the others were “learned, godly, and judicious divines.” Five Scottish clergymen were in attendance and had the right of discussion but not vote. Churches in Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland, and the American colonies were invited to send delegates, though none came. The assembly held 1,163 sessions, finally concluding in 1649.

The Westminster Assembly conducted its work in a crisis atmosphere. Internal conflicts had nearly torn apart both England and the English church. Political and religious problems were inseparable. Who should rule the church? Who should rule the state? What power should the king have? What power Parliament, local councils, and assemblies? The Anglican party stood for royal rule in England with the sovereign also head of the church’s government. The Presbyterian party sought to vest authority in elected representatives of the people, both in Parliament and in church presbyteries. An emerging third party, soon led by Oliver Cromwell, wanted local autonomy for churches and limited powers for both king and Parliament.

Even before the assembly met, civil war broke out between the contending parties. But the assembly went to work and eventually completed the “Form of Presbyterian Church Government,” a “Directory of Public Worship,” “The Confession of Faith,” “The Larger Catechism,” and “The Shorter Catechism.” Each document was approved by the English Parliament, which asked the assembly to add scriptural proofs.

Cromwell’s ascendancy precipitated the end of the assembly. In 1648, Pride’s Purge forcibly excluded Presbyterian members from Parliament. With the execution of King Charles I in 1649, English Puritanism split into “Presbyterians,” who protested the regicide, and “Independents,” who supported it and aligned themselves with Cromwell.

In 1647, the Scottish General Assembly adopted the Westminster Standards for use in the kirk, replacing the Scots Confession of 1560 and the Heidelberg Catechism. The standards came to New England with the Puritans (Independents) and to the Middle Atlantic states with the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. In 1729, the standards were adopted as the confessional position of the newly organized Presbyterian synod in the colonies and have played a formative role in American Presbyterianism ever since. The Westminster Standards represent the fruits of a Protestant scholasticism that refined and systematized the teachings of the Reformation. The standards

lift up the truth and authority of the Scriptures, as immediately inspired in Hebrew and Greek, kept pure in all ages, and known through the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. Divine sovereignty and double predestination are also emphasized. In appealing to Scripture to formulate a covenant theology, the standards had important implications for political thought and practice, reminding both ruler and people of their duties to God and to each other.

The Westminster Confession of Faith

The Westminster Confession affirms God's work from its beginning in creation to its end in resurrection and last judgment. God is first, last, and preeminent in all things. God's people are to understand and bring their lives into accord with God's wondrous ways and magnificent will.

The confession begins with God's self-revelation in Scripture: God is the "one living and true God, infinite in being and perfection, invisible, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute." Out of nothing, God created all that is, including humans, whom God upholds, directs, and governs. Humans, however, did not remain in blessed harmony with God's will. Sin's intervention, which God permitted but did not cause, resulted in corruption of the human condition and of humans' relationship to God. Yet, God has made a covenant of grace with humans; through Christ, relationship to God is restored. The Christian life—nurtured by prayer, preaching, and the sacraments, and lived in grace and glory—prepares for God's predetermined end of mercy (salvation of the elect) and of justice (damnation of the reprobate).

The Westminster Catechisms

The Larger Catechism, written primarily by Dr. Anthony Tuckney, professor of divinity and vice-chancellor of Cambridge University, was designed for public exposition from the pulpit. The Shorter Catechism, primarily the work of the Reverend John Wallis, an eminent mathematician who later became professor of geometry at Oxford University, was written for the education of children. Both deal with questions of God, Christ, the Christian life, the Ten Commandments, the sacraments, and the Lord's Prayer; unlike most earlier catechisms, neither contains a section on the Apostles' Creed. Especially famous are the first question and answer of the Shorter Catechism. "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH^a

Presbyterian Church
in the United States

The United Presbyterian Church
in the United States of America

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER I

Of the Holy Scripture

6.001 1. Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable;¹ yet are they^b not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation;² therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church;³ and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing;⁴ which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary;⁵ those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.⁶

6.002 2. Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, which are these:

Of the Old Testament

Genesis	II Samuel	Proverbs	Amos
Exodus	I Kings	Ecclesiastes	Obadiah
Leviticus	II Kings	The Song of Songs	Jonah
Numbers	I Chronicles	Isaiah	Micah
Deuteronomy	II Chronicles	Jeremiah	Nahum
Joshua	Ezra	Lamentations	Habakkuk
Judges	Nehemiah	Ezekiel	Zephaniah
Ruth	Esther	Daniel	Haggai
I Samuel	Job	Hosea	Zechariah
	Psalms	Joel	Malachi

^a The text of the Westminster Confession of Faith is that adopted by The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1958. Footnotes have been added to show how the text of 1958 differs from that of the 1647 edition of the Confession published under the title *The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines, Now by Authority of Parliament Sitting at Westminster, Concerning a Confession of Faith: with the Quotations and Text of Scripture Annexed. Presented by Them Lately to Both Houses of Parliament*. No attempt is made to trace the various amendments leading to the text of 1958. The footnotes use the punctuation, spelling, and capitalization of 1647. On the organization of the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1861, it adopted the Standards of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from which its constituents had withdrawn. The only amendment in the Confession since 1861, by this Church, has been in striking out the clause in Chapter XXIV, Section 4, making it unlawful to marry a deceased wife’s sister.

^b UPCUSA ed. reads: “they are.”

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- 6.148** 3. This communion which the saints have with Christ, doth not make them in any wise partakers of the substance of his Godhead, or to be equal with Christ in any respect: either of which to affirm, is impious and blasphemous.⁶ Nor doth their communion one with another as saints, take away or infringe the title or property which each man hath in his goods and possessions.⁷

CHAPTER XXIX

CHAPTER XXVII

Of the Sacraments

- 6.149** 1. Sacraments are holy **signs and seals** of the **covenant of grace**, immediately instituted by God,¹ to represent **Christ and his benefits**, and to **confirm our interest in him**.² as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church, and the rest of the world;³ and solemnly to engage them to the **service of God in Christ**, according to his Word.⁴
- 6.150** 2. There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or **sacramental union**, **between the sign and the thing signified**; whence it comes to pass that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.⁵
- 6.151** 3. **The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments, rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them; neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it, but upon the work of the Spirit**,⁶ and the **word of institution**, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.⁷
- 6.152** 4. There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the gospel, that is to say, baptism and the supper of the Lord:⁸ neither of which may be dispensed by any but by a minister of the Word, lawfully ordained.⁹
- 6.153** 5. The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the New.¹⁰

CHAPTER XXX

CHAPTER XXVIII

Of Baptism

- 6.154** 1. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ,¹ not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church,² but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace,³ of his ingrafting into Christ,⁴ of regeneration,⁵ of remission of sins,⁶ and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life:⁷ which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in his church until the end of the world.⁸

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- 6.155** 2. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,⁹ by a minister of the gospel, lawfully called thereunto.¹⁰
- 6.156** 3. Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary, but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person.¹¹
- 6.157** 4. Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ,¹² but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized.¹³
- 6.158** 5. Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance,¹⁴ yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it,¹⁵ or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.¹⁶
- 6.159** 6. The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered;¹⁷ yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time.¹⁸
- 6.160** 7. The sacrament of Baptism is but once to be administered to any person.¹⁹

CHAPTER XXXI

CHAPTER XXIX

Of the Lord's Supper

- 6.161** 1. Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein he was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of his body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in his Church **unto the end of the world**; for the **perpetual remembrance** of the sacrifice of himself in his death, the **sealing all benefits** thereof unto true believers, their **spiritual nourishment and growth in him**, their **further engagement** in and to all duties which they owe unto him; and to be a **bond and pledge** of their **communion with him, and with each other**, as members of his **mystical body**.¹
- 6.162** 2. In this sacrament Christ is not offered up to his Father, nor any real sacrifice made at all for remission of sins of the quick or dead, but^x

^x Ed. 1647 reads: "... but onely a Commemoration of that one offering up of Himselfe, by Himselfe, upon the Crosse, once for all: and, a spirituall Oblation of all possible praise unto God, for the same: So that, the Popish Sacrifice of the masse (as they call it) is most abominably injurious to Christs one, onely Sacrifice, the alone Propitiation for all the sins of the Elect."

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a **commemoration** of that one^y offering up of himself, by himself, upon the cross, once for all, and a **spiritual oblation of all possible praise** unto God for the same; so that the so-called sacrifice of the mass is most contradictory to Christ's one^z sacrifice, the only propitiation for all the sins of the elect.²

- 6.163** 3. The Lord Jesus hath, in this ordinance, appointed his ministers to declare his word of institution to the people, to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine, and thereby to **set them apart from a common to an holy use**; and to take and break the bread, to take the cup, and (they communicating also themselves) to give both to the communicants.³
3. The Lord hath, in this ordinance, appointed his ministers to declare his word of institution to the people, to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine, and thereby to **set them apart from a common to an holy use**; and to take and break the bread, to take cup, and (they communicating also themselves) to give both to the communicants; but to none who are not then present in the congregation.
- 6.164** 4. **Private masses, or receiving this sacrament by a priest, or any other, alone; as likewise the denial of the cup to the people**; worshipping the elements, the lifting them up, or carrying them about for adoration, and the reserving them for any pretended religious use, are all contrary to the nature of this sacrament, and to the institution of Christ.⁴
- 6.165** 5. The outward elements in this sacrament, duly set apart to the uses ordained by Christ, have such relation to him crucified, as that truly, yet **sacramentally only**, they are sometimes called by the name of the things they represent, to wit, the body and blood of Christ;⁵ albeit, in substance and nature, they still remain truly, and only, bread and wine, as they were before.⁶
- 6.166** 6. That doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of bread and wine, into the substance of Christ's body and blood (commonly called transubstantiation) by consecration of a priest, or by any other way, is repugnant, not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason; overthroweth the nature of the sacrament; and hath been, and is, the cause of manifold superstitions, yea, of gross idolatries.⁷
- 6.167** 7. Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament, **do then also inwardly by faith**, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, **but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ** cru-

^y UPCUSA ed. reads: "once."

^z UPCUSA ed. reads: "own."

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cified, and **all benefits of his death**: the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses.⁸

6.168 8. Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament, yet they receive not the thing signified thereby; but by their unworthy coming thereunto are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, and bring judgement of themselves.⁹

8. Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament, yet they receive not the thing signified thereby; but by their unworthy coming thereunto are guilty of body and blood of the Lord,^a and bring judgement on themselves. Wherefore all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with him, so are they unworthy of the Lord's Table, and cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto.

CHAPTER XXXII

CHAPTER XXX

Of Church Censures

6.169 1. The Lord Jesus, as king and head of his Church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.¹

6.170 2. To these officers the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven are committed, by virtue whereof they have power respectively to retain and remit sins, to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the word and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.²

^a Ed. 1647 reads: "... to their own damnation."

THE
SHORTER CATECHISM
[TEXT]

THE SHORTER CATECHISM

- 7.001** **Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?**
 A. Man's chief end is to glorify God,¹ and to enjoy him forever.²
- 7.002** **Q. 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?**
 A. The Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.¹
- 7.003** **Q. 3. What do the Scriptures principally teach?**
 A. The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.¹
- 7.004** **Q. 4. What is God?**
 A. God is a Spirit,¹ infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being,² wisdom,³ power,⁴ holiness,⁵ justice,⁶ goodness,⁷ and truth.⁸
- 7.005** **Q. 5. Are there more Gods than one?**
 A. There is but one only, the living and true God.¹
- 7.006** **Q. 6. How many Persons are there in the Godhead?**
 A. There are three Persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.¹
- 7.007** **Q. 7. What are the decrees of God?**
 A. The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.¹
- 7.008** **Q. 8. How doth God execute his decrees?**
 A. God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence.¹
- 7.009** **Q. 9. What is the work of creation?**
 A. The work of creation is God's making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.¹
- 7.010** **Q. 10. How did God create man?**
 A. God created man male and female, after his own image,¹ in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness,² with dominion over the creatures.³
- 7.011** **Q. 11. What are God's works of providence?**
 A. God's works of providence are his most holy,¹ wise,² and powerful preserving³ and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.⁴
- 7.012** **Q. 12. What special act of providence did God exercise towards man, in the estate wherein he was created?**
 A. When God created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience;¹ forbidding him to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death.²

- 7.084** **Q. 84. What doth every sin deserve?**
 A. Every sin deserveth God's wrath and curse, both in this life and that which is to come.¹
- 7.085** **Q. 85. What doth God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse, due to us for sin?**
 A. To escape the wrath and curse of God, due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life,¹ with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption.²
- 7.086** **Q. 86. What is faith in Jesus Christ?**
 A. Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace,¹ whereby we receive² and rest upon him alone for salvation,³ as he is offered to us in the gospel.⁴
- 7.087** **Q. 87. What is repentance unto life?**
 A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace,¹ whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin,² and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ,³ doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God,⁴ with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.⁵
- 7.088** **Q. 88. What are the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?**
 A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the **benefits of redemption** are his ordinances, especially the Word, **sacraments**, and prayer,¹ all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.
- 7.089** **Q. 89. How is the Word made effectual to salvation?**
 A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners,¹ and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation.²
- 7.090** **Q. 90. How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?**
 A. That the Word may become effectual to salvation we must attend thereunto with diligence,¹ preparation,² and prayer;³ receive it with faith⁴ and love;⁵ lay it up in our hearts;⁶ and practice it in our lives.⁷
- 7.091** **Q. 91. How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?**
 A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them.¹
- 7.092** **Q. 92. What is a sacrament?**
 A. A sacrament is a holy ordinance **instituted by Christ**, wherein, by **sensible signs**, **Christ and the benefits** of the new covenant are **represented**,¹ **sealed**, and **applied** to believers.²

- 7.093 Q. 93. Which are the sacraments of the New Testament?**
 A. The sacraments of the New Testament are **Baptism**¹ and the **Lord's Supper**.²
- 7.094 Q. 94. What is Baptism?**
 A. Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,¹ doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace,² and our engagement to be the Lord's.³
- 7.095 Q. 95. To whom is Baptism to be administered?**
 A. Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible Church, till they profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him;¹ **but the infants of such as are members of the visible Church are to be baptized.**²
- 7.096 Q. 96. What is the Lord's Supper?**
 A. The Lord's Supper is a sacrament, wherein by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, **his death is showed forth;**¹ and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, **made partakers** of his body and blood, **with all his benefits,** to their **spiritual nourishment** and growth in grace.²
- 7.097 Q. 97. What is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper?**
 A. It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's Supper that they **examine themselves,** of their knowledge to **discern the Lord's body,**¹ **of their faith to feed upon him,**² of their **repentance,**³ **love,**⁴ and **new obedience;**⁵ lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.⁶
- 7.098 Q. 98. What is prayer?**
 A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God,¹ for things agreeable to his will,² in the name of Christ,³ with confession of our sins,⁴ and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.⁵
- 7.099 Q. 99. What rule hath God given for our direction in prayer?**
 A. The whole Word of God is of use to direct us in prayer;¹ but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples, commonly called "the Lord's Prayer."²
- 7.100 Q. 100. What doth the preface of the Lord's Prayer teach us?**
 A. The preface of the Lord's Prayer, which is, "Our Father which art in heaven," teacheth us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us;¹ and that we should pray with and for others.²
- 7.101 Q. 101. What do we pray for in the first petition?**
 A. In the first petition, which is, "Hallowed be thy name," we pray that God would enable us, and others, to glorify him in all that whereby he maketh himself known,¹ and that he would dispose all things to his own glory.²

THE
LARGER CATECHISM
[TEXT]

THE LARGER CATECHISM

- 7.111 Q. 1. What is the chief and highest end of man?**
 A. Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God,¹ and fully to enjoy him forever.²
- 7.112 Q. 2. How doth it appear that there is a God?**
 A. The very light of nature in man, and the works of God, declare plainly that there is a God;¹ but his Word and Spirit only, do sufficiently and effectually reveal him unto men for their salvation.²
- 7.113 Q. 3. What is the Word of God?**
 A. The holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience.¹
- 7.114 Q. 4. How doth it appear that the Scriptures are the Word of God?**
 A. The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God, by their majesty and purity; by the consent of all the parts, and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God; by their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation.¹ But the Spirit of God, bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very word of God.²
- 7.115 Q. 5. What do the Scriptures principally teach?**
 A. The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.¹
- What Man Ought to Believe Concerning God
- 7.116 Q. 6. What do the Scriptures make known of God?**
 A. The Scriptures make known what God is,¹ the persons in the Godhead,² his decrees,³ and the execution of his decrees.⁴
- 7.117 Q. 7. What is God?**
 A. God is a Spirit,¹ in and of himself infinite in being,² glory, blessedness, and perfection;³ all-sufficient,⁴ eternal,⁵ unchangeable,⁶ incomprehensible,⁷ everywhere present,⁸ almighty;⁹ knowing all things,¹⁰ most wise,¹¹ most holy,¹² most just,¹³ most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.¹⁴
- 7.118 Q. 8. Are there more Gods than one?**
 A. There is but one only, the living and true God.¹
- 7.119 Q. 9. How many persons are there in the Godhead?**
 A. There be three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; although distinguished by their personal properties.¹

7.271 Q. 161. How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?

A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, **not by any power in themselves or any virtue derived from the piety or intention of him by whom they are administered; but only by the working of the Holy Ghost, and the blessing of Christ by whom they are instituted.**¹

7.272 Q. 162. What is a sacrament?

A. A sacrament is an holy ordinance **instituted by Christ** in his Church,¹ to **signify, seal and exhibit**² unto those that are within the **covenant of grace,**³ the **benefits of his mediation;**⁴ to **strengthen and increase their faith and all other graces;**⁵ to **oblige them to obedience;**⁶ to **testify and cherish their love and communion one with another;**⁷ and to distinguish them from those that are without.⁸

7.273 Q. 163. What are the parts of a sacrament?

A. The parts of a sacrament are two: the one, an **outward and sensible sign** used according to Christ's own appointment; the other, an **inward and spiritual grace** thereby signified.¹

7.274 Q. 164. How many sacraments hath Christ instituted under the New Testament?

A. Under the New Testament Christ hath instituted in his Church only two sacraments, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper.¹

7.275 Q. 165. What is Baptism?

A. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,¹ to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into himself,² of remission of sins by his blood,³ and regeneration by his Spirit;⁴ of adoption,⁵ and resurrection unto everlasting life;⁶ and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible Church,⁷ and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's.⁸

7.276 Q. 166. Unto whom is Baptism to be administered?

A. Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible Church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him;¹ but infants descending from parents, either both or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are, in that respect, within the covenant, and are to be baptized.²

7.277 Q. 167. How is our Baptism to be improved by us?

A. The needful but much neglected duty of improving our Baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation,¹ and when we are present at the administration of it to others, by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred

and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein;² by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of Baptism and our engagements;³ by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament;⁴ by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace;⁵ and by endeavoring to live by faith,⁶ to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness,⁷ as those that have therein given up their names to Christ, and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.⁸

7.278 Q. 168. What is the Lord's Supper?

A. The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein by giving and receiving bread and wine according to the appointment of Jesus Christ, **his death is showed forth**,¹ and they that **worthily communicate, feed** upon his body and blood to their **spiritual nourishment** and **growth in grace**,² have their **union and communion** with him **confirmed**; **testify and renew** their **thankfulness** and **engagement** to God,³ and their **mutual love** and **fellowship** each with other, as **members of the same mystical body**.⁴

7.279 Q. 169. How hath Christ appointed bread and wine to be given and received in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper?

A. Christ hath appointed the ministers of his Word in the administration of this sacrament of the Lord's Supper, to set apart the bread and wine **from common use** by the word of institution, thanksgiving, and prayer; to take and break the bread, and to give both the bread and the wine to the communicants; who are by the same appointment to take and eat the bread, and to drink the wine; in **thankful remembrance** that the body of Christ was broken and given, and his blood shed for them.¹

7.280 Q. 170. How do they that worthily communicate in the Lord's Supper feed upon the body and blood of Christ therein?

A. As the body and the blood of Christ are not corporally or carnally present in, with, or under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper;¹ and **yet are spiritually present to the faith of the receiver**, no less truly and really than the elements themselves are to their outward senses;² so they that worthily communicate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, do therein feed upon the body and blood of Christ, not after a corporal or carnal, but in a **spiritual manner**; yet truly and really,³ while by faith they receive and apply unto themselves Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death.⁴

7.281 Q. 171. How are they that receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to prepare themselves before they come unto it?

A. They that receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper are, before they come, to prepare themselves thereunto; by **examining them-**

selves,¹ of their being in Christ,² of their sins and wants;³ of the truth and measure of their knowledge,⁴ faith,⁵ repentance,⁶ love to God and the brethren,⁷ charity to all men,⁸ forgiving those that have done them wrong;⁹ of their desires after Christ,¹⁰ and of their new obedience,¹¹ and by renewing the exercise of these graces,¹² by serious meditation,¹³ and fervent prayer.¹⁴

7.282 Q. 172. May one who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation, come to the Lord's Supper?

A. One who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, may have true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof;¹ and in God's account hath it, if he be duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it,² and unfeignedly desirous to be found in Christ,³ and to depart from iniquity;⁴ in which case (because promises are made, and this sacrament is appointed, for the relief even of weak and doubting Christians)⁵ he is to bewail his unbelief,⁶ and labor to have his doubts resolved;⁷ and so doing, he may and ought to come to the Lord's Supper, that he may be further strengthened.⁸

7.283 Q. 173. May any who profess the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's Supper, be kept from it?

A. Such as are found to be ignorant or scandalous, notwithstanding their profession of the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's Supper, may and ought to be kept from that sacrament by the power which Christ hath left in his Church,¹ until they receive instruction, and manifest their reformation.²

7.284 Q. 174. What is required of them that receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the time of the administration of it?

A. It is required of them that receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper that, during the time of the administration of it, with all holy reverence and attention, they wait upon God in that ordinance; diligently observe the sacramental elements and actions;¹ heedfully discern the Lord's body,² and affectionately meditate upon his death and sufferings,³ and thereby stir up themselves to a vigorous exercise of their graces; in judging themselves,⁴ and sorrowing for sin;⁵ in earnest hungering and thirsting after Christ,⁶ feeding on him by faith,⁷ receiving of his fullness,⁸ trusting in his merits,⁹ rejoicing in his love,¹⁰ giving thanks for his grace;¹¹ in renewing of their covenant with God,¹² and love to all the saints.¹³

7.285 Q. 175. What is the duty of Christians after they have received the sacrament of the Lord's Supper?

A. The duty of Christians after they have received the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, is seriously to consider how they have behaved themselves therein, and with what success;¹ if they find quickening and comfort, to bless God for it,² beg the continuance of it, watch against

relapse,³ fulfill their vows,⁴ and encourage themselves to a frequent attendance on that ordinance:⁵ but if they find no present benefit, more exactly to review their preparation to, and carriage at, the sacrament;⁶ in both which if they can approve themselves to God and their own consciences, they are to wait for the fruit of it in due time;⁷ but if they see that they have failed in either, they are to be humbled,⁸ and to attend upon it afterward with more care and diligence.⁹

7.286 Q. 176. Wherein do the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper agree?

A. The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper agree, in that the author of both is God;¹ the spiritual part of both is Christ and his benefits;² both are seals of the same covenant,³ are to be dispensed by ministers of the gospel and by none other,⁴ and to be continued in the Church of Christ until his second coming.⁵

7.287 Q. 177. Wherein do the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper differ?

A. The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper differ, in that Baptism is to be administered but once, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ,¹ and that even to infants;² whereas the Lord's Supper is to be administered often, in the elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul,³ and to confirm our continuance and growth in him,⁴ and that only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves.⁵

7.288 Q. 178. What is prayer?

A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God,¹ in the name of Christ,² by the help of his Spirit,³ with confession of our sins,⁴ and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.⁵

7.289 Q. 179. Are we to pray unto God only?

A. God only being able to search the heart,¹ hear the requests,² pardon the sins,³ and fulfill the desires of all,⁴ and only to be believed in,⁵ and worshiped with religious worship;⁶ prayer, which is a special part thereof,⁷ is to be made by all to him alone, and to none other.⁸

7.290 Q. 180. What is it to pray in the name of Christ?

A. To pray in the name of Christ is, in obedience to his command, and in confidence on his promises, to ask mercy for his sake;¹ not by bare mentioning of his name;² but by drawing our encouragement to pray, and our boldness, strength, and hope of acceptance in prayer, from Christ and his mediation.³

7.291 Q. 181. Why are we to pray in the name of Christ?

A. The sinfulness of man, and his distance from God by reason thereof, being so great, as that we can have no access into his presence without a mediator, and there being none in heaven or earth appointed

THE CONFESSION OF 1967

[TEXT]

The Confession of 1967

In approving the Confession of 1967, the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America adopted its first new confession of faith in three centuries. The turbulent decade of the 1960s challenged churches everywhere to restate their faith. While the Second Vatican Council was reformulating Roman Catholic thought and practice, Presbyterians were developing the Confession of 1967.

The 168th General Assembly (1956) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) received an overture asking that the Westminster Shorter Catechism be revised. The 170th General Assembly (1958) proposed instead that the church draw up a “brief contemporary statement of faith.” A committee labored at the task seven years.

The 177th General Assembly (1965) (UPCUSA) vigorously discussed the committee’s proposal and sent an amended draft to the church for study. Sessions, congregations, and presbyteries suggested changes and additions. In response, a newly appointed Committee of Fifteen made revisions. The 178th General Assembly (1966) (UPCUSA) debated this draft, accepted it, and forwarded it to the presbyteries for final ratification. After extensive debate, more than 90 percent of the presbyteries voted approval. Final adoption came at the 179th General Assembly (1967) (UPCUSA).

Modestly titled, the Confession of 1967 is built around a single passage of Scripture: “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself . . .” (2 Cor. 5:19, NRSV). The first section, “God’s Work of Reconciliation,” is divided into three parts: the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. The second section, “The Ministry of Reconciliation,” has two parts: the mission of and the equipment of the church. The last section, “The Fulfillment of Reconciliation,” affirms the church’s hope in God’s ultimate triumph.

The Confession of 1967 addresses the church’s role in the modern world. Responsive to developments in biblical scholarship, it asks the church to “approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding” (paragraph 9.29). It calls the church to obedient action, particularly in response to social problems such as racial discrimination, nationalistic arrogance, and family and class conflict. It sees the life, death, resurrection, and promised coming of Jesus Christ as the pattern for the church’s mission today and calls on all Christians to be reconciled to God and to one another.

With the Confession of 1967, the church also adopted a *Book of Confessions* that placed creeds from the early Christian church (the Nicene and the Apostles’ Creeds) and from the Reformation (the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Second Helvetic Confession) alongside the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, adding two documents from the twentieth century (the Theological Declaration of Barmen and the Confession of 1967).

THE CONFESSION OF 1967

PREFACE

- 9.01** The church confesses its faith when it bears a present witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ.
- 9.02** In every age the church has expressed its witness in words and deeds as the need of the time required. The earliest examples of confession are found within the Scriptures. Confessional statements have taken such varied forms as hymns, liturgical formulas, doctrinal definitions, catechisms, theological systems in summary, and declarations of purpose against threatening evil.
- 9.03** Confessions and declarations are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him. No one type of confession is exclusively valid, no one statement is irreformable. Obedience to Jesus Christ alone identifies the one universal church and supplies the continuity of its tradition. This obedience is the ground of the church's duty and freedom to reform itself in life and doctrine as new occasions, in God's providence, may demand.
- 9.04** The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America acknowledges itself aided in understanding the gospel by the testimony of the church from earlier ages and from many lands. More especially it is guided by the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds from the time of the early church; the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession from the era of the Reformation; the Westminster Confession and Shorter Catechism from the seventeenth century; and the Theological Declaration of Barmen from the twentieth century.
- 9.05** The purpose of the Confession of 1967 is to call the church to that unity in confession and mission which is required of disciples today. This Confession is not a "system of doctrine," nor does it include all the traditional topics of theology. For example, the Trinity and the Person of Christ are not redefined but are recognized and reaffirmed as forming the basis and determining the structure of the Christian faith.
- 9.06** God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ and the mission of reconciliation to which he has called his church are the heart of the gospel in any age. Our generation stands in peculiar need of reconciliation in Christ. Accordingly this Confession of 1967 is built upon that theme.

THE CONFESSION

- 9.07** In Jesus Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. Jesus Christ is God with man. He is the eternal Son of the Father, who became man and lived among us to fulfill the work of reconciliation. He is

present in the church by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue and complete his mission. This work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the foundation of all confessional statements about God, man, and the world. Therefore the church calls men to be reconciled to God and to one another.

PART I
GOD'S WORK OF RECONCILIATION

Section A. The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ

1. JESUS CHRIST

9.08 In Jesus of Nazareth true humanity was realized once for all. Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, lived among his own people and shared their needs, temptations, joys, and sorrows. He expressed the love of God in word and deed and became a brother to all kinds of sinful men. But his complete obedience led him into conflict with his people. His life and teaching judged their goodness, religious aspirations, and national hopes. Many rejected him and demanded his death. In giving himself freely for them he took upon himself the judgment under which all men stand convicted. God raised him from the dead, vindicating him as Messiah and Lord. The victim of sin became victor, and won the victory over sin and death for all men.

9.09 God's reconciling act in Jesus Christ is a mystery which the Scriptures describe in various ways. It is called the sacrifice of a lamb, a shepherd's life given for his sheep, atonement by a priest; again it is ransom of a slave, payment of debt, vicarious satisfaction of a legal penalty, and victory over the powers of evil. These are expressions of a truth which remains beyond the reach of all theory in the depths of God's love for man. They reveal the gravity, cost, and sure achievement of God's reconciling work.

9.10 The risen Christ is the Savior for all men. Those joined to him by faith are set right with God and commissioned to serve as his reconciling community. Christ is head of this community, the church, which began with the apostles and continues through all generations.

9.11 The same Jesus Christ is the judge of all men. His judgment discloses the ultimate seriousness of life and gives promise of God's final victory over the power of sin and death. To receive life from the risen Lord is to have life eternal; to refuse life from him is to choose the death which is separation from God. All who put their trust in Christ face divine judgment without fear, for the judge is their redeemer.

2. THE SIN OF MAN

9.12 The reconciling act of God in Jesus Christ exposes the evil in men as sin in the sight of God. In sin, men claim mastery of their own lives, turn against God and their fellow men, and become exploiters and de-

spoilors of the world. They lose their humanity in futile striving and are left in rebellion, despair, and isolation.

9.13 Wise and virtuous men through the ages have sought the highest good in devotion to freedom, justice, peace, truth, and beauty. Yet all human virtue, when seen in the light of God's love in Jesus Christ, is found to be infected by self-interest and hostility. All men, good and bad alike, are in the wrong before God and helpless without his forgiveness. Thus all men fall under God's judgment. No one is more subject to that judgment than the man who assumes that he is guiltless before God or morally superior to others.

9.14 God's love never changes. Against all who oppose him, God expresses his love in wrath. In the same love, God took on himself judgment and shameful death in Jesus Christ, to bring men to repentance and new life.

Section B. The Love of God

9.15 God's sovereign love is a mystery beyond the reach of man's mind. Human thought ascribes to God superlatives of power, wisdom, and goodness. But God reveals his love in Jesus Christ by showing power in the form of a servant, wisdom in the folly of the cross, and goodness in receiving sinful men. The power of God's love in Christ to transform the world discloses that the Redeemer is the Lord and Creator who made all things to serve the purpose of his love.

9.16 God has created the world of space and time to be the sphere of his dealings with men. In its beauty and vastness, sublimity and awfulness, order and disorder, the world reflects to the eye of faith the majesty and mystery of its Creator.

9.17 God has created man in a personal relation with himself that man may respond to the love of the Creator. He has created male and female and given them a life which proceeds from birth to death in a succession of generations and in a wide complex of social relations. He has endowed man with capacities to make the world serve his needs and to enjoy its good things. Life is a gift to be received with gratitude and a task to be pursued with courage. Man is free to seek his life within the purpose of God: to develop and protect the resources of nature for the common welfare, to work for justice and peace in society, and in other ways to use his creative powers for the fulfillment of human life.

9.18 God expressed his love for all mankind through Israel, whom he chose to be his covenant people to serve him in love and faithfulness. When Israel was unfaithful, he disciplined the nation with his judgments and maintained his cause through prophets, priests, teachers, and true believers. These witnesses called all Israelites to a destiny in which they would serve God faithfully and become a light to the nations. The same

witnesses proclaimed the coming of a new age, and a true servant of God in whom God's purpose for Israel and for mankind would be realized.

- 9.19** Out of Israel God in due time raised up Jesus. His faith and obedience were the response of the perfect child of God. He was the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel, the beginning of the new creation, and the pioneer of the new humanity. He gave history its meaning and direction and called the church to be his servant for the reconciliation of the world.

Section C. The Communion of the Holy Spirit

- 9.20** God the Holy Spirit fulfills the work of reconciliation in man. The Holy Spirit creates and renews the church as the community in which men are reconciled to God and to one another. He enables them to receive forgiveness as they forgive one another and to enjoy the peace of God as they make peace among themselves. In spite of their sin, he gives them power to become representatives of Jesus Christ and his gospel of reconciliation to all men.

1. THE NEW LIFE

- 9.21** The reconciling work of Jesus was the supreme crisis in the life of mankind. His cross and resurrection become personal crisis and present hope for men when the gospel is proclaimed and believed. In this experience the Spirit brings God's forgiveness to men, moves them to respond in faith, repentance, and obedience, and initiates the new life in Christ.

- 9.22** The new life takes shape in a community in which men know that God loves and accepts them in spite of what they are. They therefore accept themselves and love others, knowing that no man has any ground on which to stand, except God's grace.

- 9.23** The new life does not release a man from conflict with unbelief, pride, lust, fear. He still has to struggle with disheartening difficulties and problems. Nevertheless, as he matures in love and faithfulness in his life with Christ, he lives in freedom and good cheer, bearing witness on good days and evil days, confident that the new life is pleasing to God and helpful to others.

- 9.24** The new life finds its direction in the life of Jesus, his deeds and words, his struggles against temptation, his compassion, his anger, and his willingness to suffer death. The teaching of apostles and prophets guides men in living this life, and the Christian community nurtures and equips them for their ministries.

- 9.25** The members of the church are emissaries of peace and seek the good of man in cooperation with powers and authorities in politics, culture, and economics. But they have to fight against pretensions and

injustices when these same powers endanger human welfare. Their strength is in their confidence that God's purpose rather than man's schemes will finally prevail.

- 9.26** Life in Christ is life eternal. The resurrection of Jesus is God's sign that he will consummate his work of creation and reconciliation beyond death and bring to fulfillment the new life begun in Christ.

2. THE BIBLE

- 9.27** The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel. The church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as prophetic and apostolic testimony in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated.

- 9.28** The New Testament is the recorded testimony of apostles to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and the sending of the Holy Spirit to the Church. The Old Testament bears witness to God's faithfulness in his covenant with Israel and points the way to the fulfillment of his purpose in Christ. The Old Testament is indispensable to understanding the New, and is not itself fully understood without the New.

- 9.29** The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of its witness to God's work of reconciliation in Christ. The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding. As God has spoken his word in diverse cultural situations, the church is confident that he will continue to speak through the Scriptures in a changing world and in every form of human culture.

- 9.30** God's word is spoken to his church today where the Scriptures are faithfully preached and attentively read in dependence on the illumination of the Holy Spirit and with readiness to receive their truth and direction.

PART II THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

Section A. The Mission of the Church

1. DIRECTION

- 9.31** To be reconciled to God is to be sent into the world as his reconciling community. This community, the church universal, is entrusted with

God's message of reconciliation and shares his labor of healing the enmities which separate men from God and from each other. Christ has called the church to this mission and given it the gift of the Holy Spirit. The church maintains continuity with the apostles and with Israel by faithful obedience to his call.

- 9.32** The life, death, resurrection, and promised coming of Jesus Christ has set the pattern for the church's mission. His life as man involves the church in the common life of men. His service to men commits the church to work for every form of human well-being. His suffering makes the church sensitive to all the sufferings of mankind so that it sees the face of Christ in the faces of men in every kind of need. His crucifixion discloses to the church God's judgment on man's inhumanity to man and the awful consequences of its own complicity in injustice. In the power of the risen Christ and the hope of his coming, the church sees the promise of God's renewal of man's life in society and of God's victory over all wrong.
- 9.33** The church follows this pattern in the form of its life and in the method of its action. So to live and serve is to confess Christ as Lord.

2. FORMS AND ORDERS

- 9.34** The institutions of the people of God change and vary as their mission requires in different times and places. The unity of the church is compatible with a wide variety of forms, but it is hidden and distorted when variant forms are allowed to harden into sectarian divisions, exclusive denominations, and rival factions.
- 9.35** Wherever the church exists, its members are both gathered in corporate life and dispersed in society for the sake of mission in the world.
- 9.36** The church gathers to praise God, to hear his word for mankind, to baptize and to **join in the Lord's Supper**, to pray for and present the world to him in worship, to enjoy fellowship, to receive instruction, strength, and comfort, to order and organize its own corporate life, to be tested, renewed, and reformed, and to speak and act in the world's affairs as may be appropriate to the needs of the time.
- 9.37** The church disperses to serve God wherever its members are, at work or play, in private or in the life of society. Their prayer and Bible study are part of the church's worship and theological reflection. Their witness is the church's evangelism. Their daily action in the world is the church in mission to the world. The quality of their relation with other persons is the measure of the church's fidelity.
- 9.38** Each member is the church in the world, endowed by the Spirit with some gift of ministry and is responsible for the integrity of his witness in his own particular situation. He is entitled to the guidance and support of

the Christian community and is subject to its advice and correction. He in turn, in his own competence, helps to guide the church.

9.39 In recognition of special gifts of the Spirit and for the ordering of its life as a community, the church calls, trains, and authorizes certain members for leadership and oversight. The persons qualified for these duties in accordance with the polity of the church are set apart by ordination or other appropriate act and thus made responsible for their special ministries.

9.40 The church thus orders its life as an institution with a constitution, government, officers, finances, and administrative rules. These are instruments of mission, not ends in themselves. Different orders have served the gospel, and none can claim exclusive validity. A presbyterian polity recognizes the responsibility of all members for ministry and maintains the organic relation of all congregations in the church. It seeks to protect the church from exploitation by ecclesiastical or secular power and ambition. Every church order must be open to such reformation as may be required to make it a more effective instrument of the mission of reconciliation.

3. REVELATION AND RELIGION

9.41 The church in its mission encounters the religions of men and in that encounter becomes conscious of its own human character as a religion. God's revelation to Israel, expressed within Semitic culture, gave rise to the religion of the Hebrew people. God's revelation in Jesus Christ called forth the response of Jews and Greeks and came to expression within Judaism and Hellenism as the Christian religion. The Christian religion, as distinct from God's revelation of himself, has been shaped throughout its history by the cultural forms of its environment.

9.42 The Christian finds parallels between other religions and his own and must approach all religions with openness and respect. Repeatedly God has used the insight of non-Christians to challenge the church to renewal. But the reconciling word of the gospel is God's judgment upon all forms of religion, including the Christian. The gift of God in Christ is for all men. The church, therefore, is commissioned to carry the gospel to all men whatever their religion may be and even when they profess none.

4. RECONCILIATION IN SOCIETY

9.43 In each time and place there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity and instructed by all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these concrete situations. The following are particularly urgent at the present time.

- 9.44** a. God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. In his reconciling love, he overcomes the barriers between brothers and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary. The church is called to bring all men to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights. Therefore, the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it. Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize their fellowmen, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they profess.
- 9.45** b. God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ is the ground of the peace, justice, and freedom among nations which all powers of government are called to serve and defend. The church, in its own life, is called to practice the forgiveness of enemies and to commend to the nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace. This search requires that the nations pursue fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict, even at risk to national security, to reduce areas of strife and to broaden international understanding. Reconciliation among nations becomes peculiarly urgent as countries develop nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, diverting their manpower and resources from constructive uses and risking the annihilation of mankind. Although nations may serve God's purposes in history, the church which identifies the sovereignty of any one nation or any one way of life with the cause of God denies the Lordship of Christ and betrays its calling.
- 9.46** c. The reconciliation of man through Jesus Christ makes it plain that enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God's good creation. Because Jesus identified himself with the needy and exploited, the cause of the world's poor is the cause of his disciples. The church cannot condone poverty, whether it is the product of unjust social structures, exploitation of the defenseless, lack of national resources, absence of technological understanding, or rapid expansion of populations. The church calls every man to use his abilities, his possessions, and the fruits of technology as gifts entrusted to him by God for the maintenance of his family and the advancement of the common welfare. It encourages those forces in human society that raise men's hopes for better conditions and provide them with opportunity for a decent living. A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God.
- 9.47** d. The relationship between man and woman exemplifies in a basic way God's ordering of the interpersonal life for which he created

mankind. Anarchy in sexual relationships is a symptom of man's alienation from God, his neighbor, and himself. Man's perennial confusion about the meaning of sex has been aggravated in our day by the availability of new means of birth control and the treatment of infection, by the pressures of urbanization, by the exploitation of sexual symbols in mass communication, and by world overpopulation. The church, as the household of God, is called to lead men out of this alienation into the responsible freedom of the new life in Christ. Reconciled to God, each person has joy in and respect for his own humanity and that of other persons; a man and woman are enabled to marry, to commit themselves to a mutually shared life, and to respond to each other in sensitive and lifelong concern; parents receive the grace to care for children in love and to nurture their individuality. The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection by man when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time.

Section B. The Equipment of the Church

9.48 Jesus Christ has given the church preaching and teaching, praise and prayer, and Baptism and the Lord's Supper as means of fulfilling its service of God among men. These gifts remain, but the church is obliged to change the forms of its service in ways appropriate to different generations and cultures.

1. PREACHING AND TEACHING

9.49 God instructs his church and equips it for mission through preaching and teaching. By these, when they are carried on in fidelity to the Scriptures and dependence upon the Holy Spirit, the people hear the word of God and accept and follow Christ. The message is addressed to men in particular situations. Therefore, effective preaching, teaching, and personal witness require disciplined study of both the Bible and the contemporary world. All acts of public worship should be conducive to men's hearing of the gospel in a particular time and place and responding with fitting obedience.

2. PRAISE AND PRAYER

9.50 The church responds to the message of reconciliation in praise and prayer. In that response, it commits itself afresh to its mission, experiences a deepening of faith and obedience, and bears open testimony to the gospel. Adoration of God is acknowledgment of the Creator by the creation. Confession of sin is admission of all men's guilt before God and of their need for his forgiveness. Thanksgiving is rejoicing in God's goodness to all men and in giving for the needs of others. Petitions and intercessions are addressed to God for the continuation of his goodness, the healing of men's ills, and their de-

liverance from every form of oppression. The arts, especially music and architecture, contribute to the praise and prayer of a Christian congregation when they help men to look beyond themselves to God and to the world which is the object of his love.

3. BAPTISM

- 9.51** By humble submission to John's baptism, Christ joined himself to men in their need and entered upon his ministry of reconciliation in the power of the spirit. Christian baptism marks the receiving of the same Spirit by all his people. Baptism with water represents not only cleansing from sin but a dying with Christ and a joyful rising with him to new life. It commits all Christians to die each day to sin and to live for righteousness. In baptism the church celebrates the renewal of the covenant with which God has bound his people to himself. By baptism, individuals are publicly received into the church to share in its life and ministry, and the church becomes responsible for their training and support in Christian discipleship. When those baptized are infants, the congregation, as well as the parents, has a special obligation to nurture them in the Christian life, leading them to make, by a public profession, a personal response to the love of God shown forth in their baptism.

4. THE LORD'S SUPPER

- 9.52** The Lord's Supper is a celebration of the reconciliation of men with God and with one another, in which they joyfully eat and drink together at the table of their Savior. Jesus Christ gave his church this remembrance of his dying for sinful men so that by participation in it they have communion with him and with all who shall be gathered to him. Partaking in him as they eat the bread and drink the wine in accordance with Christ's appointment, they receive from the risen and living Lord the benefits of his death and resurrection. They rejoice in the foretaste of the kingdom which he will bring to consummation at his promised coming, and go out from the Lord's Table with courage and hope for the service to which he has called them.

PART III

THE FULFILLMENT OF RECONCILIATION

- 9.53** God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ embraces the whole of man's life: social and cultural, economic and political, scientific and technological, individual and corporate. It includes man's natural environment as exploited and despoiled by sin. It is the will of God that his purpose for human life shall be fulfilled under the rule of Christ and all evil be banished from his creation.
- 9.54** Biblical visions and images of the rule of Christ, such as a heavenly city, a father's house, a new heaven and earth, a marriage feast, and an unending day culminate in the image of the kingdom. The kingdom represents the triumph of God over all that resists his will and disrupts

his creation. Already God's reign is present as a ferment in the world, stirring hope in men and preparing the world to receive its ultimate judgment and redemption.

9.55 With an urgency born of this hope, the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the kingdom of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat. In steadfast hope, the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God.

9.56 “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

CONFESSION OF BELHAR

[TEXT]

CONFESSION OF BELHAR

How should the church respond when sin disrupts the church's unity, creates division among the children of God, and constructs unjust systems that steal life from God's creation? Members and leaders of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa faced these questions under apartheid, a system of laws that separated people by race from 1948–1994.

Apartheid formed a racially stratified society. Those with the lightest skin tones were offered the greatest protection and opportunity. Non-“white” persons were separated into three categories; each skin tone step away from the “white” category represented a decrease in governmental protections and opportunities. Racial separation was established by law and enforced through violence. Non-white citizens lived with constant and intrusive police presence and interference in the daily functions of life. Those who protested risked punishment, imprisonment, and even death.

The roots of apartheid go back in South African culture and church for several centuries. The Dutch Reformed Church embodied racial separation when it formed three “mission” churches in the late nineteenth century, each categorized by its racial identity. The Dutch Reformed Mission Church was formed for people designated as “coloured” (biracial). The church's complicity with racial separation kept Christians from worshipping and coming to the Lord's Table together. The white Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) created an elaborate biblical interpretation and ideology that supported racial separation and then the formal apartheid policies.

The Dutch Reformed Church's active participation and theological defense of apartheid moved the global church to name apartheid a *status confessionis*—a conviction that the Gospel was at stake and thus the faith needed to be proclaimed. Leaders of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church wrestled with this situation theologically and practically. One outcome of their struggles was the emergence of the Confession of Belhar in the early 1980s.

The Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), the church that succeeded the Dutch Reformed Mission Church after apartheid, has offered the Confession of Belhar to the global Reformed family as a gift, believing that the themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice issue a call from God to the whole church toward holy action, transformation, and life.

The Special Committee on the Confession of Belhar recommended that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) add Belhar as part of its Constitution because it believed the clarity of Belhar's witness to unity, reconciliation, and justice might help the PC(USA) speak and act with similar clarity at a time when it faces division, racism, and injustice.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved the Confession of Belhar as part of the *Book of Confessions* at the 222nd General Assembly (2016).

CONFESSION OF BELHAR

September 1986¹

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| <p>10.1
Revelation 21:6–7</p> | <p>We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.</p> |
| <p>10.2
Matthew 28:19–20</p> | <p>We believe in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.</p> |
| <p>10.3
Ephesians 2:13–20</p> | <p>We believe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that Christ’s work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another; |
| <p>Ephesians 4:11–16,
Psalm 133</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God’s Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain; |
| <p>John 17:20–23</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted; |
| <p>John 13:34</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways; |
| <p>Colossians 3:12–16</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * in that we love one another; |
| <p>Philippians 2:1–5</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; |
| <p>1 Corinthians 1:10–13</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; |

¹ This is a translation of the original Afrikaans text of the confession as it was adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. In 1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). This inclusive language text was prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

10.3–4

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- Ephesians 4:1–6 * that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind;
- 1 Corinthians
10:16–17 * have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope;
- Ephesians 3:18–20 * together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ;
- * together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity;
- Galatians 6:2 * together know and bear one another’s burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ;
- 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 * that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another;
- 1 Corinthians
12:24b–28, Ephesians 3:14–20 * that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity;
- 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, Romans 12:3–8 • that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God;
- Galatians 3:27–29 • that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church;

10.4

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

- which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;
- which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;
- which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;

- which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

10.5

We believe

2 Corinthians
5:17–21

- that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ;

Matthew 5:9, 13–
16; 2 Peter 3:13;
Revelation 21:1–5

- that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells;

Romans 6:12–14,
Colossians 1:11–14

- that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;

James 2:8–9

- that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
- that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

10.6

Therefore, we reject any doctrine which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

10.7**We believe**

- Isaiah 42:1–7
 - that God has revealed God’s self as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
- Luke 6:20–26
 - that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged
- Luke 4:16–19
 - that God calls the church to follow God in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
- Luke 7:22
 - that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
- Psalms 146
 - that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
- James 1:27
 - that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
- Micah 6:8
 - that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right;
- Amos 5:14–15, 23–24
 - that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
- Psalms 82:1–5
 - that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged;
- Leviticus 19:15
 - that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

10.8**Therefore, we reject any ideology**

- which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

10.9

Acts 5:29–32;
1 Peter 3:15–18

We believe that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence.

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

Accompanying Letter to the Confession of Belhar²

This letter was a statement made upon the adoption of the Confession of Belhar by the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

1. We are deeply conscious that moments of such seriousness can arise in the life of the Church that it may feel the need to confess its faith anew in the light of a specific situation. We are aware that such an act of confession is not lightly undertaken, but only if it is considered that the heart of the gospel is so threatened as to be at stake. In our judgment, the present church and political situation in our country and particularly within the Dutch Reformed church family calls for such a decision. Accordingly, we make this confession not as a contribution to a theological debate nor as a new summary of our beliefs, but as a cry from the heart, as something we are obliged to do for the sake of the gospel in view of the times in which we stand. Along with many, we confess our guilt, in that we have not always witnessed clearly enough in our situation and so are jointly responsible for the way in which those things which were experienced as sin and confessed to be sin have grown in time to seem self-evidently right and to be ideologies foreign to the Scriptures. As a result many have been given the impression that the gospel was not really at stake. We make this confession because we are convinced that all sorts of theological arguments have contributed to so disproportionate an emphasis on some aspects of the truth that it has in effect become a lie.
2. We are aware that the only authority for such a confession and the only grounds on which it may be made are the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God. Being fully aware of the risk involved in taking this step, we are nevertheless convinced that we have no alternative. Furthermore, we are aware that no other motives or convictions, however valid they may be, would give us the right to confess in this way. An act of confession may only be made by the Church for the sake of its purity and credibility and that of its message. As solemnly as we are able, we hereby declare before men that our only motive lies in our fear that the truth and power of the gospel itself is threatened in this situation. We do not wish to serve any group interests, advance the cause of any factions, promote any theologies, or achieve any ulterior purposes. Yet, having said this, we know that our deepest intentions may only be judged at their true value by him before whom all is revealed. We do not make this confession from his throne and from on high, but before his throne and before men. We plead, therefore, that this confession would not be misused by anyone with ulterior motives and also that it should not be resisted to serve such motives. Our earnest desire is to lay

² While not of constitutional character, the following letter accompanies the Confession of Belhar to explain the context of the confession.

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no false stumbling blocks in the way, but to point to the true stumbling block, Jesus Christ the rock.

3. This confession is not aimed at specific people or groups of people or a church or churches. We proclaim it against a false doctrine, against an ideological distortion which threatens the gospel itself in our church and our country. Our heartfelt longing is that no one will identify himself with this objectionable doctrine and that all who have been wholly or partially blinded by it will turn themselves away from it. We are deeply aware of the deceiving nature of such a false doctrine and know that many who have been conditioned by it have to a greater or lesser extent learnt to take a half-truth for the whole. For this reason we do not doubt the Christian faith of many such people, their sincerity, honor, integrity, and good intentions and their in many ways estimable practice and conduct. However, it is precisely because we know the power of deception that we know we are not liberated by the seriousness, sincerity, or intensity of our certainties, but only by the truth in the Son. Our church and our land have an intense need of such liberation. Therefore it is that we speak pleadingly rather than accusingly. We plead for reconciliation, that true reconciliation which follows on conversion and change of attitudes and structures. And while we do so we are aware that an act of confession is a two-edged sword, that none of us can throw the first stone, and none is without a beam in his own eye. We know that the attitudes and conduct which work against the gospel are present in all of us and will continue to be so. Therefore this confession must be seen as a call to a continuous process of soul searching together, a joint wrestling with the issues, and a readiness to repent in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in a broken world. It is certainly not intended as an act of self-justification and intolerance, for that would disqualify us in the very act of preaching to others.
4. Our prayer is that this act of confession will not place false stumbling blocks in the way and thereby cause and foster false divisions, but rather that it will be reconciling and uniting. We know that such an act of confession and process of reconciliation will necessarily involve much pain and sadness. It demands the pain of repentance, remorse, and confession; the pain of individual and collective renewal and a changed way of life. It places us on a road whose end we can neither foresee nor manipulate to our own desire. On this road we shall unavoidably suffer intense growing pains while we struggle to conquer alienation, bitterness, irreconciliation, and fear. We shall have to come to know and encounter both ourselves and others in new ways. We are only too well aware that this confession calls for the dismantling of structures of thought, of church, and of society which have developed over many years. However, we confess that for the sake of the gospel, we have no other choice. We pray that our brothers and sisters throughout the Dutch Reformed church family, but also outside it, will want to make this new beginning with us, so that we can be free together and together may walk the road of reconciliation and justice. Accordingly, our prayer is that the pain and sadness we speak of will be pain and sadness that lead to salvation. We believe that this is possible in the power of our Lord and by his Spirit. We believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ offers hope, liberation, salvation, and true peace to our country.

A BRIEF STATEMENT OF FAITH—
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

[TEXT]

A Brief Statement of Faith

In 1983, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was formed by the reunion of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Integral to reunion was the preparation of a brief statement of faith. While recognizing realities of diversity and disagreement in both the church and the world, members of the drafting committee sought to articulate Presbyterians' common identity.

Early in its discussions, the committee decided to write a statement of faith that could be used in worship. The committee drew extensively on the documents in the *Book of Confessions* and on Scripture for its formulations, and arranged them within a trinitarian framework.

The Brief Statement of Faith (statement) is distinctive in several respects. Unlike the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, which move directly from Jesus' birth to his death, the statement emphasizes the significance of Jesus' ministry in Judea and Galilee. The Brief Statement of Faith emphasizes gender-inclusiveness. It underscores the role of both men and women in God's covenant, uses feminine as well as masculine imagery of God, and affirms ordination of both women and men. The statement also expresses concern for the integrity of God's creation.

Affirming at its beginning that "In life and death we belong to God" (11.1, line 1) and, at its end, that "nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord," (11.05, lines 78, 79) the Brief Statement of Faith concludes liturgically with the church's familiar doxology of praise and thanksgiving.

**PREFACE¹ TO
A BRIEF STATEMENT OF FAITH
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**

In 1983 the two largest Presbyterian churches in the United States reunited. *The Plan for Reunion* called for the preparation of a brief statement of the Reformed faith for possible inclusion in the *Book of Confessions*. This statement is therefore not intended to stand alone, apart from the other confessions of our church. It does not pretend to be a complete list of all our beliefs, nor does it explain any of them in detail. It is designed to be confessed by the whole congregation in the setting of public worship, and it may also serve pastors and teachers as an aid to Christian instruction. It celebrates our rediscovery that for all our undoubted diversity, we are bound together by a common faith and a common task.

The faith we confess unites us with the one, universal church. The most important beliefs of Presbyterians are those we share with other Christians, and especially with other evangelical Christians who look to the Protestant Reformation as a renewal of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Diversity remains. But we are thankful that in our time the many churches are learning to accept, and even to affirm, diversity without divisiveness, since the whole counsel of God is more than the wisdom of any individual or any one tradition. The Spirit of Truth gives new light to the churches when they are willing to become pupils together of the Word of God. This statement therefore intends to confess the catholic faith.

We are convinced that to the Reformed churches a distinctive vision of the catholic faith has been entrusted for the good of the whole church. Accordingly, “A Brief Statement of Faith” includes the major themes of the Reformed tradition (such as those mentioned in the *Book of Order*, The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, Chapter 2),² without claiming them as our private possession, just as we ourselves hope to learn and to share the wisdom and insight given to traditions other than our own. And as a confession that seeks to be both catholic and Reformed, the statement (following the apostle’s blessing in 2 Cor. 13:14) is a trinitarian confession in which the grace of Jesus Christ has first place as the foundation of our knowledge of God’s sovereign love and our life together in the Holy Spirit.

No confession of faith looks merely to the past; every confession seeks to cast the light of a priceless heritage on the needs of the present moment, and so to shape the future. Reformed confessions, in particular, when necessary even reform the tradition itself in the light of the Word of God. From the first, the Reformed churches have insisted that the renewal of the church must become visible in the transformation of human lives and societies. Hence “A Brief Statement of Faith” lifts up concerns that call most urgently for the church’s attention in our

¹ The preface and the appendix do not have confessional authority.

² The appendix provides cross-references that will enable the reader to place the affirmations of “A Brief Statement of Faith” in the context of the Reformed tradition.

time. The church is not a refuge from the world; an elect people is chosen for the blessing of the nations. A sound confession, therefore, proves itself as it nurtures commitment to the church's mission, and as the confessing church itself becomes the body by which Christ continues the blessing of his earthly ministry.

THE STATEMENT

11.1

1 In life and in death we belong to God.
 2 Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 3 the love of God,
 4 and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
 5 we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
 6 whom alone we worship and serve.

11.2

7 We trust in Jesus Christ,
 8 fully human, fully God.
 9 Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:
 10 preaching good news to the poor
 11 and release to the captives,
 12 teaching by word and deed
 13 and blessing the children,
 14 healing the sick
 15 and binding up the brokenhearted,
 16 eating with outcasts,
 17 forgiving sinners,
 18 and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.
 19 Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,
 20 Jesus was crucified,
 21 suffering the depths of human pain
 22 and giving his life for the sins of the world.
 23 God raised this Jesus from the dead,
 24 vindicating his sinless life,
 25 breaking the power of sin and evil,
 26 delivering us from death to life eternal.

11.3

27 We trust in God,
 28 whom Jesus called Abba, Father.
 29 In sovereign love God created the world good
 30 and makes everyone equally in God's image,
 31 male and female, of every race and people,
 32 to live as one community.
 33 But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.
 34 Ignoring God's commandments.
 35 we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
 36 accept lies as truth,
 37 exploit neighbor and nature,
 38 and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.
 39 We deserve God's condemnation.
 40 Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.
 41 In everlasting love,

11.3–6**BOOK OF CONFESSIONS**

42 the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people
 43 to bless all families of the earth.
 44 Hearing their cry,
 45 God delivered the children of Israel
 46 from the house of bondage.
 47 Loving us still,
 48 God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
 49 Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
 50 like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
 51 God is faithful still.

11.4

52 We trust in God the Holy Spirit
 53 everywhere the giver and renewer of life.
 54 The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
 55 sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
 56 and binds us together with all believers
 57 in the one body of Christ, the Church.
 58 The same Spirit
 59 who inspired the prophets and apostles
 60 rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
 61 engages us through the Word proclaimed,
 62 claims us in the waters of baptism,
 63 feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
 64 and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.
 65 In a broken and fearful world
 66 the Spirit gives us courage
 67 to pray without ceasing,
 68 to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
 69 to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
 70 to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
 71 and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
 72 In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
 73 we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
 74 and to live holy and joyful lives,
 75 even as we watch for God’s new heaven and new earth,
 76 praying, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

11.5

77 With believers in every time and place,
 78 we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
 79 can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

11.6

80 Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

* Instead of saying this line, congregations may wish to sing a version of the Gloria.