

# THREE FORMS OF UNITY

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*The Belgic Confession*  
*The Heidelberg Catechism*  
*The Canons of Dort*



**Ichthus Publications**

The text for this reprint edition has been extracted from the 1919 publication of Philip Schaff's *The Creed's of Christendom*, published in New York by Harper & Brothers.

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# An Introduction to the Belgic Confession<sup>1</sup>

## The Reformation in the Netherlands

The Low Countries, conquered from the sea by indomitable energy—the land of Erasmus, of free cities, of inventions, and flourishing commerce—was flooded, through merchants, soldiers, and books, with Protestant ideas from Germany and France, as with waters from the Rhine and the Meuse. Already in 1521 Charles V—who afterwards regretted that he had not burned Luther at Worms—issued from that city an edict for the suppression of heresy in this the most valuable of his inherited dominions. To Belgium belongs the honor of having furnished the first martyrs of evangelical Protestantism in Hendrik Vos and Jan van Essen, two Augustinian monks, who were burned at the stake in Brussels, July 1, 1523, reciting the Apostles' Creed and singing the *Te Deum*, and who were celebrated by Luther in a stirring hymn.<sup>2</sup> This was the fiery signal of a fearful persecution, which reached its height under Philip II of Spain, and the executor of his bloody

<sup>1</sup> All introductions to each of the three forms of unity have been extracted from Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, Vol. I. "The History of the Creeds," Sixth Ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1919). Footnotes cited have similarly been extracted from the 1919 edition.

<sup>2</sup> See a part of it, in English and German, quoted by Gieseler, Vol. IV. p. 311 (Am. ed.).

### *Three Forms of Unity*

designs, the Duke of Alva, but resulted at last in the establishment of national independence and of the Reformed Church in a large part of the Netherlands.

The number of her martyrs exceeds that of any other Protestant Church during the sixteenth century and perhaps that of the whole primitive Church under the Roman Empire.<sup>3</sup> During the ever-memorable conflict under William of Orange, who was assassinated by a fanatical papist in 1584, and his second son Maurice—an able military commander and strict Calvinist (d. 1625)—the Bible, with the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism, was the spiritual guide and comforter of the Protestants and fortified them against the assaults of the enemy. Calvinism, which fears God and nobody else, inspired that heroic courage which triumphed over the political and religious despotism of Spain and raised Holland to an extraordinary degree of commercial and literary eminence.<sup>4</sup>

### **Guido de Brès**

The chief author of the Belgic Confession is Guido (or Guy, Wido) de Brès, a noble evangelist and martyr of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. He was born about 1523 at Mons in

<sup>3</sup> Grotius estimates the number of Protestant martyrs in Holland, under one reign, at one hundred thousand. Gibbon (*History of the Decline, etc.*, at the close of ch. XVI) confidently asserts that “the number of Protestants who were executed by the Spaniards in a single province and a single reign, far exceeded that of the primitive martyrs in the space of three centuries, and of the Roman empire.” And Motley (*History of the Rise of the Dutch Republic*, Vol. II. p. 504) says of the terrible reign of Alva: “The barbarities committed amid the sack and ruin of those blazing and starving cities are almost beyond belief; unborn infants were torn from the living bodies of their mothers; women and children were violated by the thousands, and whole populations burned and hacked to pieces by soldiers in every mode which cruelty in its wanton ingenuity could devise.”

<sup>4</sup> It is strange that Motley, in his great works on the Rise, and the History of the Dutch Republic, ignores the Belgic Confession, and barely mentions the name of Guido de Brès.



## *An Introduction to the Belgic Confession*

Hennegau, educated in the Roman Church, and by diligent reading of the Scriptures, converted to the evangelical faith. Expelled from his country, he sought refuge in London under Edward VI where he joined the Belgic fugitives and prepared himself for the ministry. Afterwards, he studied at Lausanne and became a traveling evangelist in southwestern Belgium and northern France—from Dieppe to Sedan, from Valenciennes to Antwerp. After the conquest of French Flanders, he was, together with the younger missionary from Geneva, Pérégrin de la Grange, taken prisoner, put in chains, and hanged on the last day of May, 1567 for disobedience to the commands of the court at Brussels and especially for the distribution of the holy communion in the Reformed congregations. From prison, the youthful martyr wrote letters of comfort to his brethren, his old mother, his wife, and his children and met his death as if it were a marriage-feast.<sup>5</sup> In his proper home, Protestantism was completely suppressed, but in the neighboring countries of Holland and the Lower Rhine, it spread and flourished.

### **The Belgic Confession**

The Belgic Confession was prepared in 1561 by Guido de Brès, with the aid of Adrien de Saravia (professor of theology in Leyden, afterwards at Cambridge, where he died, 1613), H. Modetus (for some time chaplain of William of Orange), and Godfrey Wingen, in the French language, to prove the Reformed faith from the Word of God.<sup>6</sup> It was revised by Francis Junius of

<sup>5</sup> See, on Guy de Brès, the enlarged edition of Crespin's *Histoire des Martyrs*, Genève, 1617, pp. 731–750, and the Brussels edition of the *Conf. de foi*, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Saravia, in a letter to Uytenbogardus (Apr. 13, 1612), quoted by Niemeyer (Proleg. p. lii.) and Gieseler (*Ch. Hist.* Vol. IV. p. 314, Am. ed.), says: “*Ego me illius confessionis ex primis unum fuisse auctoribus profiteor, sicut et Hermannus Modetus: nescio an plures sint superstites. Illa primo fuit*

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Bourges (1545–1602)—a student of Calvin, pastor of a Walloon congregation at Antwerp, and afterwards professor of theology at Leyden—who abridged the sixteenth article and sent a copy to Geneva and other churches for approval. It was probably printed in 1562, or at all events in 1566, and afterwards translated into Dutch, German, and Latin. It was presented to the bigoted Philip II, 1562, in the vain hope of securing toleration and with an address which breathes the genuine spirit of martyrdom. The petitioners protest against the charge of being rebels and declare that notwithstanding, they number more than a hundred thousand and are exposed to the most cruel oppression; they obey the Government in all lawful things; but that rather than deny Christ before men, they would “offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire, well knowing that those who follow Christ must take his cross and deny themselves.”<sup>7</sup>

The Confession was publicly adopted by a Synod at Antwerp (1566), then at Wesel (1568), more formally by a Synod at Emden (1571)<sup>8</sup> by a national Synod at Dort (1574), another at Middelburg (1581), and again by the great Synod of Dort, April 29, 1619. But inasmuch as the Arminians had demanded partial changes, and the text had become confused, the Synod of Dort submitted the French, Latin, and Dutch texts to a careful revision.

*conscripta Gallico sermone a Christi servo et martyre Guidone de Brès, sed antequam ederetur ministris verbi Dei, quos potuit nancisci, illam communicavit: et emendandum si quid displiceret, addendum, detrahendum proposuit, ut unius opus censi non debeat. Sed nemo eorum, qui manum apposuerunt, umquam cogitavit fidei canonem edere, verum ex canonicis scriptis fidem suam probare.*” Editor’s Note: Nicolaas H. Gootjes concludes these men were only “consultants rather than co-authors,” *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 36.

<sup>7</sup> The address is given in full by Böckel, l.c. pp. 480–484.

<sup>8</sup> The Brussels ed. (p. viii.) says: “Le 8 Octobre, en 1571, il fût statué par le premier synode national des Églises wallonnes et flamandes tenu à Emden, que cette Confession serait signée par tous les membres présents au dit synode et par tous ceux qui seraient admis au saint ministère.”

## *An Introduction to the Belgic Confession*

Since that time the Belgic Confession, together with the Heidelberg Catechism, has been the recognized symbol of the Reformed Churches in Holland and Belgium.<sup>9</sup> It is also the doctrinal standard of the Reformed (Dutch) Church in America, which holds to it even more tenaciously than the mother Church in the Netherlands.<sup>10</sup>

### **Contents**

The Belgic Confession contains thirty-seven Articles and follows the order of the Gallican Confession, but is less polemical and more full and elaborate: especially on the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Church, and the Sacraments.<sup>11</sup> It is, upon the whole, the best symbolical statement of the Calvinistic system of doctrine, with the exception of the Westminster Confession.

<sup>9</sup> The *Société évangélique* or *Église Chrétienne missionnaire belge* requires from its ministers a qualified subscription to the Belgic Confession with “*une réserve préalable en repoussant ce qui dans la Confession belge regarde l'exercice du pouvoir civil en matière de foi.*”

<sup>10</sup> The following formula of subscription is required from ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church in America: “We, the underwritten, Ministers of the Word of God, residing within the bounds of the Classis of N. N., do hereby sincerely, and in good conscience before the Lord, declare by this our subscription, that we heartily believe, and are persuaded, that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the [Belgic] Confession and [Heidelberg] Catechism of the Reformed [Dutch] Church, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made in the National Synod held at Dordrecht, in the year 1619, do fully agree with the Word of God. We promise, therefore, diligently to teach, and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same by our public preaching or writings. We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine, and particularly those which are condemned in the above-mentioned Synod, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict them, and to exert ourselves in keeping the Church pure from such errors. And if hereafter any difficulties or different sentiments respecting the aforesaid doctrine should arise in our minds, we promise that we will neither publicly nor privately propose, teach, or defend the same, either by preaching or by writing, until we have first revealed such sentiment to the Consistory, Classis, or Synod, that the same may be there examined,” etc.

<sup>11</sup> Ebrard (*Handbuch der Kirchen- und Dogmengesch.* Vol. III. p. 319) says that besides the Gallican Confession as the basis, use was made also of the Friesian Confession of Utenhoven, which the English exiles brought with them to Emden, and of the Catechism of Laski.

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### The Text

The text has undergone several modifications as regards the wording and length, but not as regards the doctrine.

The French text must be considered as the original.<sup>12</sup> Of the first edition of 1561 or 1562, no copies are known. The Synod of Antwerp, in September 1580, ordered a precise parchment copy of the revised text (of Junius) to be made for its archives, which copy had to be signed by every new minister. This manuscript has always been regarded in the Belgic churches as the authentic document.<sup>13</sup> The Synod of Dort ordered a new revision with a view to bring the Latin, French, and Dutch texts into harmony on the basis of the manuscript copy of 1580. The Leyden edition of 1669 gives in two parallel columns the original text and the revised text of Dort. A Rotterdam edition of the Psalter, 1787, carefully reprints the original text in the old spelling from the manuscript, with the changes of Dort in notes. The Brussels edition of 1850 presents the ancient text of 1580, as revised at Dort, in modern French.<sup>14</sup>

Next in authority is the Latin text, but of this there are likewise several recensions: a shorter and a larger. The first Latin translation was made from the revised French copy of Francis Janius,

<sup>12</sup> It is entitled, "*Confession de Foy faite d'un commun accord pour les fidèles qui conversent ès Pays-Bas, lesquels désirent vivre selon la pureté de l'Évangile de nostre Seigneur Jésus-Christ.*" This title is followed by two mottoes—the one from Apoc. ii. 10: "*Sois fidèle jusques à la mort et je te donneray la couronne de vie;*" the other from 1 Pet. iii. 15: "*Soyez tousjours appareillez à respondre à chacun qui vous demande raison de l'espérance qui est en vous.*" On the second leaf, there is over the head of the first article the brief title, "*Confession vrayement Chrétienne contenant le sommaire de la doctrine de Dieu et salut éternel de l'âme.*"

<sup>13</sup> The Brussels ed. says (p. 39): "*C'est probablement d'après la copie de Junius que cette Confession a été imprimée dans le livre des Martyrs de Crespin. Le text de Crespin ne diffère pas de celui du manuscrit authentique.*"

<sup>14</sup> This careful edition, issued by the Evangelical Society of Belgium, is reproduced in the third volume of *Creeds of Christendom*, together with the English version now used by the Dutch Reformed Church in America. Both agree, sentence for sentence.

probably by Beza, or under his direction, for the *Harmonia Confessionum*, Geneva, 1581 (distributed under different heads, with the other Confessions).<sup>15</sup> The same passed into the first edition of the *Corpus et Syntagma Confessionum*, Geneva, 1612. Another translation was prepared, 1618, for the use of the Synod of Dort, by Festus Hommius, pastor in Leyden, and one of the scribes of that Synod.<sup>16</sup> This text was revised in the following year by that Synod and thus approved and incorporated with its acts in the 146th session.<sup>17</sup> The revision of Dort was reproduced in the second edition of the *Corpus et Syntagma Conf.*, 1654.<sup>18</sup> The excellent English version in use in the Reformed Dutch Church of America is made from the Latin text of the Synod of Dort.

<sup>15</sup> See *Note critique* at the close of the Brussels edition, p. 39: "Junius envoya une copie de cette révision à Genève. Theodore de Beza la fit imprimer [in French?]. C'est lui, sans doute, qui la traduisit en latin, comme elle se trouve dans 'l'Harmonia Confessionum,' Genève, 1581." That this was the first Latin translation is stated in the *Harmonia*, p. 3: "Belgica, Gallice omnium Belgicarum Ecclesiarum nomine anno 1566 edita, ac demum anno 1579 [1571?] in publica Belgii Synodo repetita et confirmata, Belgiceque versa. Nunc denique a nobis etiam Latine expressa."

<sup>16</sup> "Confessio ecclesiarum reformatarum in Belgio. . . in usum futuræ synodi nationalis latine edidit et collegit Festus Hommius." Ludg. Batav. 1618. Niemeyer (pp. 360 sqq.) gives this translation, which more nearly agrees with the older version, and he adds some readings from the first edition of the *Corpus et Syntagma*.

<sup>17</sup> See the extracts from the Acts of the 144th Session, April 29, 1619, in Niemeyer, p. lv.

<sup>18</sup> Under the title *Ecclesiarum Belgicarum Christiana atque Orthodoxa Confessio, summam doctrinæ de Deo et æterna animarum salute complectens, prout in Synodo Dortrechtana fuit recognita et approbata*. The articles are numbered, but have no titles. The difference between this and the first Latin translation may be judged from the following specimen: *Harmonia Confessionum*, 1581 (p. 36). *Corpus et Syntagma Confessionum*, ed. II., 1654 (p. 129). Art. I. *Corde credimus, et ore confitemur, unicam esse et simplicem essentiam spiritualement, quam Deum vocamus, æternum, incomprehensibilem, inconspicuum, immutabilem, infinitum, qui totus est sapiens, fonsque omnium bonorum uberrimus*. Art. I. *Corde credimus, et ore confitemur OMNES, unicam esse et simplicem essentiam spiritualement, quam Deum vocamus, EUMQUE æternum, incomprehensibilem, invisibilem, infinitum, OMNIPOTENTEM, SUMME SAPIENTEM, JUSTUM ET BONUM, omniumque bonorum fontem uberrimum*.



# The Belgic Confession

## (1561)

### Article 1: Of the Nature of God

**W**e all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth<sup>1</sup> that there is only one God,<sup>2</sup> who is a simple and spiritual Being;<sup>3</sup> He is eternal,<sup>4</sup> incomprehensible,<sup>5</sup> invisible,<sup>6</sup> immutable,<sup>7</sup> infinite,<sup>8</sup> almighty,<sup>9</sup> perfectly wise,<sup>10</sup> just,<sup>11</sup> good,<sup>12</sup> and the overflowing fountain of all good.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rom 10:10 <sup>2</sup> Deut 6:4; 1 Cor 8:4, 6; 1 Tim 2:5 <sup>3</sup> Jn 4:24 <sup>4</sup> Ps 90:2 <sup>5</sup> Rom 11:33 <sup>6</sup> Col 1:15; 1 Tim 6:16 <sup>7</sup> Jas 1:17 <sup>8</sup> 1 Kings 8:27; Jer 23:24 <sup>9</sup> Gen 17:1; Mt 19:26; Rev 1:8 <sup>10</sup> Rom 16:27 <sup>11</sup> Rom 3:25, 26; Rom 9:14; Rev 16:5, 7 <sup>12</sup> Mt 19:17 <sup>13</sup> Jas 1:17

### Article 2: Of the Knowledge of God

**W**e know Him by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most beautiful book,<sup>1</sup> wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many letters leading us to perceive clearly the invisible things of God, namely, His eternal power and deity, as the apostle Paul says (Rom 1:20). All these things are sufficient to convict men and leave them without excuse. Second, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy

and divine Word<sup>2</sup> as far as is necessary for us in this life, to His glory and our salvation.

<sup>1</sup> Ps 19:1–4 <sup>2</sup> Ps 19:7, 8; 1 Cor 1:18–21

### **Article 3: Of Holy Scripture**

**W**e confess that this Word of God did not come by the impulse of man, but that men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God, as the apostle Peter says (2 Pet 1:21). Thereafter, in His special care for us and our salvation, God commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed Word to writing<sup>1</sup> and He Himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law.<sup>2</sup> Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ex 34:27; Ps 102:18; Rev 1:11, 19 <sup>2</sup> Ex 31:18 <sup>3</sup> 2 Tim 3:16

### **Article 4: Of the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testaments**

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

THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: the five books of Moses, namely, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther; Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs; Isaiah, Jeremiah,



Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

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

### **Article 5: Of the Authority of Holy Scripture**

**W**e receive<sup>1</sup> all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith.<sup>2</sup> We believe without any doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God,<sup>3</sup> and also because they contain the evidence thereof in themselves; for, even the blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are being fulfilled.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess 2:13. <sup>2</sup> 2 Tim 3:16, 17. <sup>3</sup> 1 Cor 12:3; 1 Jn 4:6, 1 Jn 5:7. <sup>4</sup> Deut 18:21, 22; 1 Kings 22:28; Jer 28:9; Ezek 33:33

**Article 6: Of the Difference Between the Canonical  
and Apocryphal Books**

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

**Article 7: Of the Perfection of Holy Scripture**

**W**e believe that this Holy Scripture fully contains the will of God and that all that man must believe in order to be saved is sufficiently taught therein.<sup>1</sup> The whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in it at length. It is therefore unlawful for any one, even for an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in Holy Scripture:<sup>2</sup> yes, even if it be an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul says (Gal 1:8). Since it is forbidden to add to or take away anything from the Word of God (Deut 12:32),<sup>3</sup> it is evident that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects.<sup>4</sup>

We may not consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with the divine Scriptures; nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity,

or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all;<sup>5</sup> for all men are of themselves liars, and lighter than a breath (Ps 62:9). We therefore reject with all our heart whatever does not agree with this infallible rule,<sup>6</sup> as the apostles have taught us: Test the spirits to see whether they are of God (1 Jn 4:1). Likewise: If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting (2 Jn 1:10).

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim 3:16, 17; 1 Pet 1:10–12. <sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 15:2; 1 Tim 1:3. <sup>3</sup> Deut 4:2; Prov 30:6; Acts 26:22; 1 Cor 4:6; Rev 22:18, 19. <sup>4</sup> Ps 19:7; Jn 15:15; Acts 18:28; Acts 20:27; Rom 15:4. <sup>5</sup> Mk 7:7–9; Acts 4:19; Col 2:8; 1 Jn 2:19. <sup>6</sup> Deut 4:5,6; Is 8:20; 1 Cor 3:11; Eph 4:4–6; 2 Thess 2:2; 2 Tim 3:14, 15

## **Article 8: Of the Holy Trinity of Persons in One Divine Essence**

**A**ccording to this truth and this Word of God, we believe in one only God,<sup>1</sup> who is one single essence, in which are three persons, really, truly, and eternally distinct according to their incommunicable properties; namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> The Father is the cause, origin, and beginning of all things visible and invisible.<sup>3</sup> The Son is the Word, the wisdom, and the image of the Father.<sup>4</sup> The Holy Spirit is the eternal power and might who proceeds from the Father and the Son.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, God is not by this distinction divided into three, since the Holy Scriptures teach us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each has His personal existence, distinguished by Their properties; but in such a way that these three persons are but one only God.

### *Three Forms of Unity*

It is therefore evident that the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Father, and likewise the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. Nevertheless, these persons thus distinguished are not divided, nor intermixed; for the Father has not assumed our flesh and blood, neither has the Holy Spirit, but the Son only. The Father has never been without His Son,<sup>6</sup> or without His Holy Spirit. For these three, in one and the same essence, are equal in eternity. There is neither first nor last; for They are all three one, in truth, in power, in goodness, and in mercy.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor 8:4–6. <sup>2</sup> Mt 3:16, 17; Mt 28:19. <sup>3</sup> Eph 3:14, 15. <sup>4</sup> Prov 8:22–31; Jn 1:14; Jn 5:17–26; 1 Cor 1:24; Col 1:15–20; Heb 1:3; Rev 19:13. <sup>5</sup> Jn 15:26. <sup>6</sup> Mic 5:2; Jn 1:1, 2.

### **Article 9: Of the Scripture Testimony of the Holy Trinity**

**A**ll this we know both from the testimonies of Holy Scripture<sup>1</sup> and from the respective works of the three Persons, and especially those we perceive in ourselves. The testimonies of Scripture which lead us to believe this Holy Trinity are written in many places of the Old Testament. It is not necessary to mention them all; it is sufficient to select some with discretion.

In the book of Genesis God says: “Let Us make man in our image after our likeness . . . So God created man in His own image . . . ; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:26, 27). Also: “Behold, the man has become like one of Us” (Gen 3:22). From God’s saying, “Let Us make man in Our image,” it appears that there are more divine persons than one; and when He says, “God created,” He indicates that there is one God. It is true, He does not say how many persons there are, but what seems to be some-

what obscure in the Old Testament is very plain in the New Testament. For when our Lord was baptized in the river Jordan, the voice of the Father was heard, who said, “This is My beloved Son” (Mt 3:17); the Son was seen in the water, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form as a dove.<sup>2</sup> For the baptism of all believers, Christ prescribed this formula: “Baptize all nations into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19). In the gospel according to Luke, the angel Gabriel thus addressed Mary, the mother of our Lord: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Likewise: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14). In all these places we are fully taught that there are three persons in one only divine essence.

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

Moreover, we must observe the distinct offices and works of these three Persons towards us. The Father is called our Creator by His power; the Son is our Saviour and Redeemer by His blood; the Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier by His dwelling in our hearts. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity has always been maintained and preserved in the true church since the time of the apostles to this very day, over against Jews, Muslims, and against false Christians and heretics such as Marcion, Mani, Praxeas, Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Arius, and such like, who have been

justly condemned by the orthodox fathers. In this doctrine, therefore, we willingly receive the three creeds, of the Apostles, of Nicaea, and of Athanasius; likewise, that which in accordance with them is agreed upon by the early fathers.

<sup>1</sup> Jn 14:16; Jn 15:26; Acts 2:32, 33; Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Tit 3:4–6; 1 Pet 1:2; 1 Jn 4:13, 14; 1 Jn 5:1–12; Jude 20, 21; Rev 1:4, 5. <sup>2</sup> Mt 3:16.

### **Article 10: Of the Eternal Deity of the Son of God, Our Lord Jesus Christ**

**W**e believe that Jesus Christ according to His divine nature is the only-begotten Son of God,<sup>1</sup> begotten from eternity, not made, nor created—for then He would be a creature—but of the same essence with the Father, equally-eternal, who reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature (Heb 1:3), and is equal to Him in all things.<sup>2</sup> He is the Son of God, not only from the time that He assumed our nature but from all eternity,<sup>3</sup> as these testimonies, when compared with each other, teach us: Moses says that God created the world;<sup>4</sup> the apostle John says that all things were made by the Word which he calls God.<sup>5</sup> The letter to the Hebrews says that God made the world through His Son;<sup>6</sup> likewise the apostle Paul says that God created all things through Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it must necessarily follow that He who is called God, the Word, the Son, and Jesus Christ, did exist at that time when all things were created by Him. Therefore, He could say, “Truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (Jn 8:58), and He prayed, “Glorify Thou Me in Thy own presence with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made” (Jn 17:5). And so, He is true, eternal God, the Almighty, whom we invoke, worship, and serve.

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<sup>1</sup> Mt 17:5; Jn 1:14, 18; Jn 3:16; Jn 14:1–14; Jn 20:17, 31; Rom 1:4; Gal 4:4; Heb 1:2; <sup>2</sup> Jn 5:18, 23; Jn 10:30; Jn 14:9; Jn 20:28; Rom 9:5; Phil 2:6; Col 1:15; Tit 2:13; <sup>3</sup> Jn 8:58; Jn 17:5; Heb 13:8. <sup>4</sup> Gen 1:1. <sup>5</sup> Jn 1:1–3. <sup>6</sup> Heb 1:2. <sup>7</sup> 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16.

### **Article 11: Of the Person and Eternal Deity of the Holy Spirit**

**W**e believe and confess also that the Holy Spirit from eternity proceeds from the Father and the Son. He is neither made, created, nor begotten, but He can only be said to proceed from both.<sup>1</sup> In order He is the third Person of the Holy Trinity, of one and the same essence, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son, true and eternal God, as the Holy Scriptures teach us.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jn 14:15–26; Jn 15:26; Rom 8:9. <sup>2</sup> Gen 1:2; Mt 28:19; Acts 5:3, 4; 1 Cor 2:10; 1 Cor 3:16; 1 Cor 6:11; 1 Jn 5:7.

### **Article 12: Of the Creation of the World and of the Angels**

**W**e believe that the Father through the Word, that is, through His Son, has created out of nothing heaven and earth and all creatures, when it seemed good to Him,<sup>1</sup> and that He has given to every creature its being, shape, and form, and to each its specific task and function to serve its Creator. We believe that He also continues to sustain and govern them according to His eternal providence and by His infinite power in order to serve man, to the end that man may serve his God.

He also created the angels good, to be His messengers and to serve His elect.<sup>2</sup> Some of these have fallen from the exalted position in which God created them into everlasting perdition,<sup>3</sup> but

the others have by the grace of God remained steadfast and continued in their first state. The devils and evil spirits are so depraved that they are enemies of God and of all that is good.<sup>4</sup> With all their might, they lie in wait like murderers to ruin the church and all its members and to destroy everything by their wicked devices.<sup>5</sup> They are therefore by their own wickedness sentenced to eternal damnation and daily expect their horrible torments.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, we detest and reject the error of the Sadducees, who deny that there are any spirits and angels;<sup>7</sup> and also the error of the Manichees, who say that the devils were not created, but have their origin of themselves, and that without having become corrupted, they are wicked by their own nature.

<sup>1</sup> Gen 1:1; Gen 2:3; Is 40:26; Jer 32:17; Col 1:15, 16; 1 Tim 4:3; Heb 11:3; Rev 4:11. <sup>2</sup> Ps 103:20, 21; Mt 4:11; Heb 1:14. <sup>3</sup> Jn 8:44; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6. <sup>4</sup> Gen 3:1–5; 1 Pet 5:8. <sup>5</sup> Eph 6:12; Rev 12:4, 13–17; Rev 20:7–9. <sup>6</sup> Mt 8:29; Mt 25:41; Rev 20:10. <sup>7</sup> Acts 23:8.

### **Article 13: Of the Providence of God**

**W**e believe that this good God, after He had created all things, did not abandon them or give them up to fortune or chance,<sup>1</sup> but that according to His holy will He so rules and governs them that in this world nothing happens without His direction.<sup>2</sup> Yet God is not the Author of the sins which are committed nor can He be charged with them.<sup>3</sup> For His power and goodness are so great and beyond understanding that He ordains and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner, even when devils and wicked men act unjustly.<sup>4</sup> And as to His actions surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire farther than our capacity allows us. But with the greatest humility



and reverence we adore the just judgments of God, which are hidden from us,<sup>5</sup> and we content ourselves that we are pupils of Christ, who have only to learn those things which He teaches us in His Word, without transgressing these limits.<sup>6</sup>

This doctrine gives us unspeakable consolation, for we learn thereby that nothing can happen to us by chance, but only by the direction of our gracious heavenly Father. He watches over us with fatherly care, keeping all creatures so under His power that not one hair of our head—for they are all numbered—nor one sparrow can fall to the ground without the will of our Father (Mt 10:29, 30). In this we trust, because we know that He holds in check the devil and all our enemies so that they cannot hurt us without His permission and will.<sup>7</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Jn 5:17; Heb 1:3. <sup>2</sup> Ps 115:3; Prov 16:1, 9, 33; Prov 21:1; Eph 1:11, 12; Jas 4:13–15. <sup>3</sup> Jas 1:13; 1 Jn 2:16. <sup>4</sup> Job 1:21; Is 10:5; Is 45:7; Amos 3:6; Acts 2:23; Acts 4:27, 28. <sup>5</sup> 1 Kings 22:19–23; Rom 1:28; 2 Thess 2:11. <sup>6</sup> Deut 29:29; 1 Cor 4:6. <sup>7</sup> Gen 45:8; Gen 50:20; 2 Sam 16:10; Rom 8:28, 38, 39.

## **Article 14: Of the Creation, Fall and Corruption of Man**

**W**e believe that God created man of dust from the ground<sup>1</sup> and He made and formed him after His own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy.<sup>2</sup> His will could conform to the will of God in every respect. But, when man was in this high position, he did not appreciate it nor did he value his

excellency. He gave ear to the words of the devil and willfully subjected himself to sin and consequently to death and the curse.<sup>3</sup> For he transgressed the commandment of life which he had received; by his sin he broke away from God, who was his true life; he corrupted his whole nature. By all this he made himself liable to physical and spiritual death.<sup>4</sup>

Since man became wicked and perverse, corrupt in all his ways, he has lost all his excellent gifts which he had once received from God.<sup>5</sup> He has nothing left but some small traces, which are sufficient to make man inexcusable.<sup>6</sup> For whatever light is in us has changed into darkness,<sup>7</sup> as Scripture teaches us, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn 1:5); where the apostle John calls mankind darkness.

Therefore, we reject all teaching contrary to this concerning the free will of man, since man is but a slave to sin (Jn 8:34) and no one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven (Jn 3:27). For who dares to boast that he of himself can do any good, when Christ says: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (Jn 6:44)? Who will glory in his own will when he understands that the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God (Rom 8:7)? Who can speak of his knowledge, since the unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:14)? In short, who dares to claim anything when he realizes that we are not competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but that our competence is from God (2 Cor 3:5)? Therefore, what the apostle says must justly remain sure and firm: "God is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). For there is no understanding nor will conformable to the understanding and

will of God unless Christ has brought it about; as He teaches us: “Apart from Me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5).

<sup>1</sup> Gen 2:7; Gen 3:19; Eccles 12:7. <sup>2</sup> Gen 1:26, 27; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10. <sup>3</sup> Gen 3:16–19; Rom 5:12. <sup>4</sup> Gen 2:17; Eph 2:1; Eph 4:18. <sup>5</sup> Ps 94:11; Rom 3:10; Rom 8:6. <sup>6</sup> Rom 1:20, 21. <sup>7</sup> Eph 5:8.

### **Article 15: Of Original Sin**

**W**e believe that by the disobedience of Adam original sin has spread throughout the whole human race.<sup>1</sup> It is a corruption of the entire nature of man<sup>2</sup> and a hereditary evil which infects even infants in their mother’s womb.<sup>3</sup> As a root it produces in man all sorts of sin. It is, therefore, so vile and abominable in the sight of God that it is sufficient to condemn the human race.<sup>4</sup> It is not abolished nor eradicated even by baptism, for sin continually streams forth like water welling up from this woeful source.<sup>5</sup> Yet, in spite of all this, original sin is not imputed to the children of God to their condemnation, but by His grace and mercy is forgiven them.<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that the believers may sleep peacefully in their sin, but that the awareness of this corruption may make them often groan as they eagerly wait to be delivered from this body of death.

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

<sup>1</sup> Rom 5:12–14, 19. <sup>2</sup> Rom 3:10. <sup>3</sup> Job 14:4; Ps 51:5; Jn 3:6. <sup>4</sup> Eph 2:3. <sup>5</sup> Rom 7:18, 19. <sup>6</sup> Eph 2:4, 5.

### **Article 16: Of Divine Predestination**

**W**e believe that when the entire offspring of Adam plunged into perdition and ruin by the transgression of the first

man,<sup>1</sup> God manifested Himself to be as He is: merciful and just. Merciful, in rescuing and saving from this perdition those whom in His eternal and unchangeable counsel<sup>2</sup> He has elected<sup>3</sup> in Jesus Christ our Lord<sup>4</sup> by His pure goodness, without any consideration of their works.<sup>5</sup> Just, in leaving the others in the fall and perdition into which they have plunged themselves.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rom 3:12. <sup>2</sup> Jn 6:37, 44; Jn 10:29; Jn 17:2, 9, 12; Jn 18:9. <sup>3</sup> 1 Sam 12:22; Ps 65:4; Acts 13:48; Rom 9:16; Rom 11:5; Tit 1:1. <sup>4</sup> Jn 15:16, 19; Rom 8:29; Eph 1:4, 5. <sup>5</sup> Mal 1:2, 3; Rom 9:11–13; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:4, 5. <sup>6</sup> Rom 9:19–22; 1 Pet 2:8.

## **Article 17: Of the Restoration of Natural Man Through the Son of God**

**W**e believe that, when He saw that man had thus plunged himself into physical and spiritual death and made himself completely miserable, our gracious God in His marvelous wisdom and goodness set out to seek man when he trembling fled from Him.<sup>1</sup> He comforted him with the promise that He would give him His Son, born of woman (Gal 4:4), to bruise the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15) and to make man blessed.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gen 3:9. <sup>2</sup> Gen 22:18; Is 7:14; Jn 1:14; Jn 5:46; Jn 7:42; Acts 13:32, 33; Rom 1:2, 3; Gal 3:16;

## **Article 18: Of the Incarnation of the Son of God**

**W**e confess, therefore, that God has fulfilled the promise He made to the fathers by the mouth of His holy prophets<sup>1</sup> when, at the time appointed by Him,<sup>2</sup> He sent into the world His own only-begotten and eternal Son, who took the form of a servant and was born in the likeness of men (Phil 2:7). He truly

assumed a real human nature with all its infirmities,<sup>3</sup> without sin,<sup>4</sup> for He was conceived in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit and not by the act of a man.<sup>5</sup> He not only assumed human nature as to the body, but also a true human soul, in order that He might be a real man. For since the soul was lost as well as the body, it was necessary that He should assume both to save both.

Contrary to the heresy of the Anabaptists, who deny that Christ assumed human flesh of His mother, we therefore confess that Christ partook of the flesh and blood of the children (Heb 2:14). He is a fruit of the loins of David (Acts 2:30); born of the seed of David according to the flesh (Rom 1:3); a fruit of the womb of the virgin Mary (Luke 1:42); born of woman (Gal 4:4); a branch of David (Jer 33:15); a shoot from the stump of Jesse (Is 11:1); sprung from the tribe of Judah (Heb 7:14); descended from the Jews according to the flesh (Rom 9:5); of the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16), since the Son was concerned with the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in every respect, yet without sin (Heb 2:16, 17; Heb 4:15).

In this way He is in truth our Immanuel, that is, God with us (Mt 1:23).

<sup>1</sup> Gen 26:4; <sup>2</sup> Sam 7:12–16; Ps 132:11; Lk 1:55; Acts 13:23. <sup>3</sup> Gal 4:4. <sup>4</sup> 1 Tim 2:5; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 2:14. <sup>5</sup> 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 7:26; 1 Pet 2:22. <sup>6</sup> Mt 1:18; Lk 1:35.