

*CREEDS, CONFESSIONS,
CATECHISMS, and COVENANTS*

CREDO

Introductions by **RIVERS HOUSEAL**

Foreword by **COLLIN HOUSEAL**



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PRESS

CREDO: CREEDS, CONFESSIONS, CATECHISMS, AND COVENANTS

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*To the cloud of witnesses behind us,
the brothers and sisters here with us,
and the children of the Covenant
who are yet to come.*

To the glory of the God of Ages!

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Foreword

CHRISTIAN, WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

As I write these words, there is perhaps no simpler yet more consequential question before the Church. Professing Christians are facing a time of trial and persecution not seen in generations—particularly in the United States, considered by many to be a Christian nation, or at least broadly accepting of Christianity. We’re seeing government attempts to regulate worship, lukewarm churchgoers who have abandoned Scripture, and a profane and rebellious society at large.

But these trials are nothing new. Those who say we live in unprecedented times are, frankly, ignorant of history, and Church history in particular.

True enough, today’s secular culture seems bound and determined to turn everything upside down and shake it violently, thumbing its collective nose at God and anything remotely traceable to His established order and ordinances. This is disconcerting enough, but perhaps more so is that many Christians are shocked to see this happening, and they appear at a loss how to respond. “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12, ESV).

So, what are we to do? Where do we draw our lines? How do we answer those who confront us with utter nonsense, insisting on “my truth” and “your truth” while casting scorn at God’s Truth as hopelessly outdated and irrelevant? How are we to live the life God has called us to amidst such spiritual darkness?

If only we could learn from those who have been here before.

Pastors, parents, children—the creeds, confessions, catechisms, and covenants contained in this volume are, in a literal sense, your spiritual inheritance. All mainstream Protestant denominations, if they were so inclined, would have to trace their roots back to these documents. They are our heritage, the legacy of our spiritual forefathers who when similarly challenged said, “This is what we believe, because this is what the Scriptures principally teach.” Contained herein is the wisdom of prior generations who faced down the lies, manipulations, and

doctrines of men and responded with the clear exposition of the Word of God, the immovable declaration of the King of kings since time eternal.

“While, however, ***the Scriptures are from God, the understanding of them belongs to the part of men.*** Men must interpret to the best of their ability each particular part of Scripture separately, and then combine all that the Scriptures teach upon every subject into a consistent whole, and then adjust their teachings upon different subjects in mutual consistency as parts of a harmonious system. Every student of the Bible must do this, and all make it obvious that they do it by the terms they use in their prayers and religious discourse, whether they admit or deny the propriety of human creeds and confessions. If they refuse the assistance afforded by the statements of doctrine slowly elaborated and defined by the Church, they must make out their own creed by their own unaided wisdom. ***The real question is*** not, as often pretended, between the word of God and the creed of man, but ***between the tried and proved faith of the collective body of God’s people, and the private judgment and the unassisted wisdom of the repudiator of creeds.***” (A.A. Hodge, 1823-1886; emphasis added)

I was raised in a mainstream denominational church, with solid preaching and the Word of God clearly explicated, yet I was well into my thirties before I became familiar with any of these creeds and confessions. How did such treasures become dusty and hidden away? Likewise, our children were a few years old before my wife and I discovered the value of catechizing them. I have since seen firsthand how effective these creeds and catechisms are to train and encourage the next covenant generation. You are holding the proof of that claim, as my eldest daughter—still in her teens—has worked tirelessly to research and compile this volume, a project born of her heartfelt desire to see her siblings in Christ benefit from these treasures.

Parents, once your children reach an age to begin understanding what they’re reading—far earlier than most of us think—you will find them attracted to the substance found here. This is no cartoon Christianity, no mere repetition of trite phrases, no oversimplification of important doctrine and theology. This is meat,

not milk—and I’m willing to bet your children are hungry for it. In fact, they will require meat in order to continue their growth as followers of Christ (see Hebrews 5:12-6:2 and 1 Corinthians 3:1-9). If we want men and women of God who are ready to answer for their faith, we cannot raise them on board books, “I Could Sing of Your Love Forever,” and the memorization of John 3:16. At some point they need to embrace the passages that come before and after it, and understand their place within the congregation of Christ throughout time—past, present, and future.

These documents are not inspired, as is Scripture—but they are inspiring. They are not inerrant, but they do hold tremendous instructional value. That said, as treasured as they are and ought to be, we must remember that Christianity does not consist of creeds, confessions, catechisms, or covenants. Christianity is Christ. If none of these existed, Christ and His Church still would. Yet all together, throughout Church history these kinds of documents and the truth they contain have been—and remain—a tremendous tool for uniting true followers of Christ. They also serve the essential function of separating the wheat from the chaff, the sheep from the goats.

If your heartfelt desire is to strengthen your own faith, see your children and grandchildren keep to the ancient and narrow path, and together build the Kingdom to the glory of God, I suggest you start here. Saturated with Scripture, formulated by the greatest biblical and theological minds since the Apostles, you will find no better guides to understanding “what the Scriptures principally teach.”

Collin Houseal
Smithville, Arkansas
July 2021

Timeline

B.C.–1ST CENTURY A.D. **Creeds in Scripture**

CIRCA 30 A.D. Crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ

3RD–4TH CENTURY **Apostles' Creed**

325 **Nicene Creed**

386 Augustine of Hippo converts to Christianity

451 **Chalcedonian Creed**

5TH CENTURY? **Athanasian Creed**

1384 John Wycliffe dies of a stroke in Lutterworth, England

1415 John Huss is burnt at the stake in Konstanz, Germany

1519 Ulrich Zwingli begins preaching Reformation as a priest in Zürich, Switzerland

1520's Henry VIII breaks with the Church of Rome and the Reformation trickles into England

1521 Martin Luther stands before the Diet of Worms

1526 William Tyndale publishes his first complete translation of the New Testament in English

1528 **Ten Theses of Berne**

1529 **Luther's Small Catechism**

1530 **Augsburg Confession**

1536 John Calvin publishes *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and moves to Geneva

1559 **Gallican Confession**; John Knox leaves Geneva to return to Scotland

1560 **Scots Confession, Calvin's Catechism**; The complete *Geneva Bible* is published, the first English Bible to be entirely translated from original Greek and Hebrew texts

1561 **Belgic Confession**

1563 **Heidelberg Catechism**

TIMELINE

- 1572 Thousands of French Huguenots are martyred in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre
- 1603 King James VI of Scotland also becomes James I of England
- 1607 Jamestown is founded in the New World
- 1611 The complete *King James Bible* is published in England
- 1618 The Thirty Years' War begins in Europe between Protestants and Roman Catholics
- 1619 **Canons of Dort**
- 1620 The *Mayflower* lands at Plymouth in the New World
- 1629 **First Salem Covenant**
- 1630 **Watertown Covenant, Covenant of the First Church in Boston**
- 1636 **Enlarged Salem Covenant, Dedham Covenant**
- 1638 **Scottish National Covenant**
- 1642 The English Civil Wars begin
- 1643 **Solemn League and Covenant**
- 1646 **Westminster Confession of Faith**
- 1647 **Westminster Shorter Catechism**
- 1653 Oliver Cromwell becomes Lord Protector of England, Scotland, and Ireland
- 1658 **Savoy Declaration**
- 1660 Charles II is restored to the British throne, persecution ramps up for Covenanters in Scotland and Nonconformists in England
- 1679 The "Killing Times" begin for the Scottish Covenanters
- 1684 **The Children's Bond**
- 1688 The "Glorious Revolution" puts William and Mary on the British throne and ends religious persecution in Britain
- 1689 **Second London Baptist Confession**
Keach's Catechism

Documents in **bold** are included in this volume.

CREEDS

IT TOOK TIME for the Early Church to get its doctrinal bearings. Heresies cropped up constantly, as the Apostles had warned. (Matt. 24:4-5, Eph. 4:14, Gal. 1:8-9, 2 Pet. 2:1, etc.) So the Early Church fathers sat down with Scripture and asked one another, “Christians, what do we believe?” They wrote their answers in creeds: Scripture’s teachings, distilled into short, easy-to-memorize statements. These creeds were meant to serve the Church in several ways.

The word *creed* comes from the Latin word *credo*, meaning “I believe.” Creeds are intended for personal and corporate confessions. When worshipers give voice to a creed, they are vowing before God, “I believe.” Creeds are also a teaching tool for new believers: they give the major tenets of Christianity at a glance, as a jumping-off place for deeper study. Creeds are watchdogs against heresy. When we Christians memorize and regularly avow Scriptural doctrine—before God and each other—we are more apt to notice when wolves in sheep’s clothing start teaching something contrary to God’s Words.

But best of all, creeds unify Christ’s people. Though we may differ on secondary doctrines, if you and I can confess the Apostles’ Creed together, for example, then we are brethren in Christ—not because of the *creed itself*, but because it represents and summarizes indisputable and essential truths of Scripture. ■

Apostles' Creed

In the first few centuries after Christ's coming, the Church needed to be united by clearly stated beliefs, or else schisms and heresies would soon have ripped her apart. To that end, the earliest forms of the Apostles' Creed appeared about the third or fourth century. It was used as a baptismal confession, to make sure new Christians knew the basics of the faith they were embracing. The creed was also called the Apostles' Symbol—a badge of the believer.

Why it was titled the Apostles' Creed is not certain—perhaps the apostles themselves wrote an early version, or (more historically likely) perhaps it was simply considered a summary of the Apostolic teachings in Scripture. The creed was changed slightly in the eighth century to give us the wording we are familiar with today.

I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived
by the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin, Mary; suffered under
Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into
Hades; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into
Heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic¹ Church; the
communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection
of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen. ■

¹ The word *catholic* is an adjective from the Greek word *katholikos*, which means “universal” or “concerning the whole.” It is here referring to the whole Body of Christ, the saints of God worldwide, in the past, present, and future. It does not refer to Roman Catholicism.

Nicene Creed

In the early fourth century, a priest named Arius began to spread a new heresy which taught that Christ was not fully God. To settle the confusion in the Church over this, Emperor Constantine called the First Ecumenical Council to meet in Nicaea in 325. Because the Apostles' Creed does not specifically affirm Christ's "sameness" with God, the First Ecumenical Council (also called the First Council of Nicaea) wrote a new creed to specifically refute Arius' teachings. "... God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God ..." Thus, the Nicene Creed was born.

Then another heretic, Apollinaris, began teaching that Christ was not fully man. So, in 381 Emperor Theodosius called the Second Ecumenical Council to Constantinople and asked them to reaffirm the Nicene Creed. They re-wrote the creed to also emphasize Christ's sinless humanity, producing the Nicene Creed that we know today—or more specifically, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (to distinguish it from the first Nicene Creed).

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men, and for our salvation, came down from Heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin, Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into Heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and

the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord, and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the Prophets. And I believe one holy catholic¹ and apostolic Church; I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen. ■

¹ The word *catholic* is an adjective from the Greek word *katholikos*, which means “universal” or “concerning the whole.” It is here referring to the whole Body of Christ, the saints of God worldwide, in the past, present, and future. It does not refer to Roman Catholicism.

CONFESSIONS

IN CERTAIN AGES, the issues the Church faced required more answering than would fit into a short creed. At those times, the Church fathers banded together to write *confessions*—thorough summaries of what exactly they believed. Like the creeds, these confessions were never intended to take the place of Scripture, but rather to *confess* and define a faithful and accurate understanding of Scripture. The creeds were distillations of the clear, unquestionable doctrines taught in the Bible. Confessions, too, present these foundational doctrines, but unlike creeds they also include what are considered more secondary doctrinal interpretation.

The confessions were meant to do two things: first, to reaffirm the non-negotiable truths of Scripture, the “essentials,” and second, to unite believers who held similar persuasions on secondary doctrines. Though they give much more elaborate answers, the confessions answer the same basic question that the creeds do: “Christians, what do we believe?” ■

Scots Confession

*I*t came halting and bloody, but by 1560 the Reformation had definitely taken hold in Scotland. In August 1560 the Scottish Parliament agreed to reform the state church (or Kirk), breaking from Roman Catholicism in favor of Presbyterianism—but to accomplish this reform, there needed to be a clear definition of what the new Kirk of Scotland actually believed.

The Scottish Parliament commissioned the Six Johns—John Knox, overseeing John Winram, John Spottiswood, John Willock, John Douglas, and John Row—to write a confession for the Kirk. The Six Johns wrote the Scots Confession in four days. Parliament approved and adopted the confession on August 17, 1560. It wouldn't be accepted by the monarchy for seven years, however, until Roman Catholic Mary was overthrown. The Scots Confession was the official confession of the Scottish Kirk until the Westminster Confession replaced it in 1647.

Because Parliament passed it as the Confession of Faith Ratification Act 1560, the Scots Confession is still Scottish law. Yet very few ministers of the Church of Scotland have read it, let alone believe it.

PREFACE

The Estates of Scotland, with the inhabitants of Scotland who profess the holy Evangel of Jesus Christ, to their fellow countrymen and to all other nations who confess the Lord Jesus with them, wish grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the Spirit of righteous judgment, for salvation.

Long have we thirsted, dear brethren, to have made known to the world the doctrine which we profess and for which we have suffered abuse and danger; but such has been the rage of Satan against us, and against the eternal truth of Christ now recently reborn among us, that until this day we have had neither time nor

opportunity to set forth our faith, as gladly we would have done. For how we have been afflicted until now the greater part of Europe, we suppose, knows well.

But since by the infinite goodness of our God (who never suffers His afflicted to be utterly confounded) we have received unexpected rest and liberty, we could not do other than set forth this brief and plain Confession of that doctrine which is set before us, and which we believe and confess; partly to satisfy our brethren whose hearts, we suspect, have been and are grieved by the slanders against us; and partly to silence impudent blasphemers who boldly condemn that which they have not heard and do not understand.

We do not suppose that such malice can be cured merely by our Confession, for we know that the sweet savour of the Gospel is, and shall be, death to the sons of perdition; but we are considering chiefly our own weaker brethren, to whom we would communicate our deepest thoughts, lest they be troubled or carried away by the different rumours which Satan spreads against us to defeat our godly enterprise, protesting that if any man will note in our Confession any chapter or sentence contrary to God's Holy Word, that it would please him of his gentleness and for Christian charity's sake to inform us of it in writing; and we, upon our honour, do promise him that by God's grace we shall give him satisfaction from the mouth of God, that is, from Holy Scripture, or else we shall alter whatever he can prove to be wrong. For we call on God to record that from our hearts we abhor all heretical sects and all teachers of false doctrine, and that with all humility we embrace the purity of Christ's Gospel, which is the one food of our souls and therefore so precious to us that we are determined to suffer the greatest worldly dangers, rather than let our souls be defrauded of it. For we are completely convinced that whoever denies Christ Jesus, or is ashamed of Him in the presence of men, shall be denied before the Father and before His holy angels. Therefore by the aid of the mighty Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ we firmly intend to endure to the end in the confession of our faith, as in the following chapters.

1. GOD

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

Canons of Dort

At the turn of the 17th century, the teachings of Jacob Arminius (which reject predestination) were gaining traction in Dutch churches. Massive disputes were erupting between the Remonstrants (Dutch Arminians, who “remonstrated,” or objected to, historic Calvinism) and the Gomarists (Dutch Calvinists, supporters of Franciscus Gomarus). In 1610, in a document called the Remonstrance, forty-three followers of Jacob Arminius wrote a statement of their Arminian beliefs in five major points: (1) election based on foreseen merit, (2) universal atonement, (3) man’s free will, due to only partial depravity, (4) resistible grace, and (5) the possibility of losing one’s salvation.

In the hopes of settling this dispute in the Netherlands and the Church at large, from November 1618–May 1619 church leaders from across Europe and Britain met in the Synod of Dort. They had to overcome massive political opposition, and even rioting, to get there. French Protestant church leaders were not able to attend at all, having been forbidden by Louis XIII to do so.

The synod went to Scripture to examine Arminian teaching. They found it to be unscriptural, and wrote out their conclusions in the Canons of Dort. The Synod structured their Canons into five points that directly answer the five Arminian points in the Remonstrance of 1610. In recent centuries, Reformed Christians have rearranged and summarized the main points in the Canons of Dort to create the Five Points of Calvinism, or TULIP: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints.

The Canons of Dort, the Belgic Confession, and the Heidelberg Catechism together became the Three Forms of Unity, the defining confessions of the Continental Reformed Church.

FIRST HEAD OF DOCTRINE: OF DIVINE PREDESTINATION

ARTICLE 1. As all men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse, and are deserving of eternal death, God would have done no injustice by leaving them all to perish, and delivering them over to condemnation on account of sin, according to the words of the apostle, “that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). And verse 23: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” And Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death.”

ARTICLE 2. But in this the love of God was manifested, that He sent His only begotten Son into the world, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him” (1 John 4:9). “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

ARTICLE 3. And that men may be brought to believe, God mercifully sends the messengers of these most joyful tidings to whom He will and at what time He pleaseth; by whose ministry men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified. “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?” (Rom. 10:14-15).

ARTICLE 4. The wrath of God abideth upon those who believe not this gospel. But such as receive it, and embrace Jesus the Savior by a true and living faith, are by Him delivered from the wrath of God and from destruction, and have the gift of eternal life conferred upon them.

ARTICLE 5. The cause or guilt of this unbelief, as well as of all other sins, is no wise in God, but in man himself; whereas faith in Jesus Christ and salvation through Him is the free gift of God, as it is written: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him,” etc. (Phil. 1:29).

ARTICLE 6. That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it proceeds from God’s eternal decree, for “known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). “Who worketh all things after the

CATECHISMS

ONCE LIKE-MINDED Christians had determined precisely what they believed, they turned their attention to training the next generation to carry on faithful Christianity. The word *catechism* comes from the Greek *katécheó*, which means “to instruct orally.” In order to carry out the parental mandate to “teach them diligently” (Deuteronomy 6:7), pastors and fathers wrote catechisms designed to systematically disciple their children in biblical doctrine. Once a child has memorized a catechism, he or she has an arsenal of biblically informed answers to give when they battle doubt or are questioned about their faith. A catechized child is a child who is “prepared to make a defense” (1 Peter 3:15).

In some Christians’ minds, the concept of catechizing is connected with Roman Catholicism, but there is nothing papal about training children using questions and answers. Catechisms have been used by generations of Christians in many denominations, but there is a particularly rich history of catechizing children within the Reformed Church.

After creeds and confessions have asked the question, “Christians, what do we believe?” catechisms turn and say, “Children, this is what we believe. Be ready—it’s your turn.” ■

Geneva Catechism

A few years after writing his epic *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and after becoming pastor of the church in Geneva, John Calvin wrote a children's catechism. But he soon realized that his catechism was too difficult for children, so he revised it and republished it as the *Geneva Catechism*. In 1560 Calvin revised his catechism yet again and published it in the form given here. The *Geneva Catechism* was mainly used in Geneva and Scotland. It fell out of popularity after the *Heidelberg* and *Westminster Catechisms* were written, but both drew significantly from Calvin's *Geneva Catechism*.

The catechism reads like a conversation—a probing discussion between a master and a student. Hence, the Geneva Catechism not only offers a thorough course in theology, but also practical training in logic and apologetics.

1. **What is the chief end of human life?**

To know God.

2. **Why do you say that?**

Because He created us and placed us in this world to be glorified in us. And it is indeed right that our life, of which He Himself is the beginning, should be devoted to His glory.

3. **What is the sovereign good of man?**

The same thing.

4. **Why do you hold that to be the sovereign good?**

Because without it our condition is more miserable than that of brute-beasts.

5. **Hence, then, we see that nothing worse can happen to a man than to live without God.**

It is so.

6. **What is the true and right knowledge of God?**

When we know Him in order that we may honour Him.

7. **How do we honour Him aright?**

We put our reliance on Him, by serving Him in obedience to His will, by calling upon Him in all our need, seeking salvation and every good thing in Him, and acknowledging with heart and mouth that all our good proceeds from Him.

8. **To consider these things in order, and explain them more fully—what is the first point?**

To rely upon God.

9. **How can we do that?**

First by knowing Him as almighty and perfectly good.

10. **Is this enough?**

No.

11. **Why?**

Because we are unworthy that He should show His power in helping us, or employ His goodness toward us.

12. **What more, then, is required?**

That we be certain that He loves us, and desires to be our Father, and Saviour.

13. **How do we know that?**

By His Word, in which He declares His mercy to us in Christ, and assures us of His love toward us.

14. **Then the foundation for true reliance upon God is to know Him in Jesus Christ? (John 17:3)**

That is true.

15. **What then briefly is the substance of this knowledge?**

It is contained in the Confession of Faith used by all Christians. It is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, because it is a summary of the true faith which

Heidelberg Catechism

In the mid-16th century, Elector Frederick III was in control of the most powerful Electorate (province) in the German Empire, called the Palatinate. By the grace of God, Frederick was also a faithful Reformed Christian. In 1562 he commissioned Heidelberg University to write a catechism that would systematically train Christian youth and give pastors and teachers a structure from which to teach. Traditionally it is believed that Zacharius Ursinus, a professor at Heidelberg, and Caspar Olevianus, Frederick's court preacher, did most of the writing, but the catechism was rightly credited as being a collective effort of the theology faculty at Heidelberg University.

The framers had the first edition ready by the end of 1562. Its preface was written by Elector Frederick III himself. In early 1563 the Heidelberg Catechism was approved by a Synod in Heidelberg and published in German. From the very beginning the catechism included Scripture references to show that it was founded on Scripture alone. The first edition of the catechism consisted of 128 questions, but at the Elector's request new sentences were added to the second and third editions, and eventually a new eightieth question was added which condemned the Roman Catholic mass. In its first year, the Heidelberg Catechism went through four editions and was translated into Latin. The Latin edition divided the questions among the fifty-two Lord's Days in a year, so that ministers could use the catechism to teach their congregations week by week. Some ministers began using the Heidelberg Catechism as the basis of their Sunday afternoon sermons.

The Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Belgic Confession together became known as the Three Forms of Unity, the defining confessions of the Continental Reformed Church.

LORD'S DAY 1**1. What is your only comfort in life and death?**

That I am not my own, ⁽¹⁾ but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, ⁽²⁾ to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. ⁽³⁾ He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, ⁽⁴⁾ and has set me free from all the power of the devil. ⁽⁵⁾ He also preserves me in such a way ⁽⁶⁾ that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; ⁽⁷⁾ indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. ⁽⁸⁾ Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life ⁽⁹⁾ and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him. ⁽¹⁰⁾

⁽¹⁾ *I Cor. 6:19, 20* ⁽²⁾ *Rom. 14:7-9.* ⁽³⁾ *I Cor. 3:23; Tit. 2:14.*

⁽⁴⁾ *I Pet. 1:18, 19; I John 1:7; 2:2.* ⁽⁵⁾ *John 8:34-36; Heb. 2:14, 15; I John 3:8.* ⁽⁶⁾ *John 6:39, 40; 10:27-30; II Thess. 3:3; I Pet. 1:5.*

⁽⁷⁾ *Matt. 10:29-31; Luke 21:16-18.* ⁽⁸⁾ *Rom. 8:28.* ⁽⁹⁾ *Rom. 8:15, 16; II Cor. 1:21, 22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13, 14.* ⁽¹⁰⁾ *Rom. 8:14.*

2. What do you need to know in order to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

First, how great my sins and misery are; ⁽¹⁾ second, how I am delivered from all my sins and misery; ⁽²⁾ third, how I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance. ⁽³⁾

⁽¹⁾ *Rom. 3:9, 10; I John 1:10.* ⁽²⁾ *John 17:3; Acts 4:12; 10:43.*

⁽³⁾ *Matt. 5:16; Rom. 6:13; Eph. 5:8-10; I Pet. 2:9, 10.*

PART I: HUMAN MISERY**LORD'S DAY 2****3. From where do you know your sins and misery?**

From the law of God. ⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ *Rom. 3:20.*

COVENANTS

AT VARIOUS TIMES in Church history, Christians felt the need to sit down together with open Bibles and determine precisely what they believed. Those times produced the creeds and confessions. But after they left their synods and assemblies, our spiritual forebears had to face the consequences of whatever they had written—and more often than not, that meant persecution.

In the face of their trials, Christians entered into agreements with each other to defend the truths they had already confessed. These agreements were written covenants between similar-minded Christians who collectively confessed that the Bible is the only true rule for life, and who then publicly and formally promised each another that they would be faithful to that confession against whatever enemies there might be at the time. Indeed, as with the confessions, the most common reason Christians covenanted with each other was because their allegiance to Christ *was* threatened. Consequently, the signers of these covenants often suffered or died for their stand—but they suffered together, as brothers and sisters, as they had covenanted to do.

While creeds and confessions bring clarity of doctrine, covenants bring accountability and brotherhood of action. Confessions avow what is true, and covenants shape the Christians' witness to the world. Creeds and confessions ask, "Christians, what do we believe?" Covenants declare, "Christians, we know what we believe. And here is what we're going to do about it—together." ■

Scottish National Covenant

Ever since the Scottish Parliament ratified the Scots Confession in 1560, the Scottish Kirk had been Reformed and Presbyterian. But by the end of the century, the Scots were growing increasingly wary of the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation efforts infesting Scotland. Certain nobles who were close to James VI, king of Scotland, were openly Roman Catholic. James was making changes to the Kirk—such as introducing bishops—that were too suggestive of Roman Catholicism for Reformed Scots to stomach.

As a precaution, in 1580 the Presbyterian leaders wrote the Second Scots Confession (also called the Negative Confession, or the King's Confession) to make it clear that no papist practices would be tolerated in their churches. Though it goes by other names, this confession was essentially the first National Covenant. It was signed by James VI and his court (hence "King's Confession"), and then signed by the vast majority of the Scottish people in 1581. In 1590, it was reaffirmed and generally signed again.

But King James was not faithful to his signature. In 1603, James inherited the English throne also—thus uniting Scotland, which had been Presbyterian for half a century, and England, which had been establishing the Anglican Church with episcopal government since 1534. In 1618, King James caused the five Articles of Perth to be written, which imposed certain episcopal practices on the Presbyterians.

James' son, Charles I, inherited the United Kingdom in 1624 with his French Roman Catholic queen at his side. Taking up his father's mission, he began systematically forcing episcopal church government and practices on the Scottish Kirk. Above all, as Henry VIII had done, Charles I maintained that, as king of the realm, he was also Head of the Church by Divine Right and could dictate what the church would teach and how it would worship.

Scottish Presbyterians staunchly rejected Charles I's imposition of the Book of Common Prayer on the worship and doctrine of the church. They considered aspects of the episcopal liturgy to be far too reminiscent of Roman Catholicism, and declared that Charles was usurping the crown rights of the Redeemer, King Jesus, over his Kirk.

In 1638, the Scottish Presbyterians commissioned Presbyterian pastor Alexander Henderson, and Archibald Johnston, the Lord Wariston to write a covenant that would do two things: First, reaffirm the Reformed theology that the Scots had long accepted, and second, rebuke the notion that the king was Head of the Church, while still affirming that the king indeed had God-given authority over the State.

Henderson and Lord Wariston framed a covenant in three sections: The first section reprinted the Second Scots Confession of 1580-81. The second section, by Lord Wariston, cited and applied past Acts of Parliament that had condemned Roman Catholicism. The third section, by Henderson, protested against the popish practices being smuggled back into the Scottish Kirk.

This new National Covenant was accepted in Greyfriars Kirk in Edinburgh on February 28, 1638. After being prayed over and read aloud, it was laid on a tombstone to be signed. It was said that 60,000 people crowded in to sign it—nobles, clergy, and common people of all ranks. Beside their name, some wrote, “until death.” Some pricked their finger and signed with their blood. Afterward, copies of the National Covenant were carried to villages throughout the Lowlands, gathering more signatures wherever they went.

The confession of faith of the Kirk of Scotland, subscribed at first by the King’s Majesty and his household in the year of God 1580; thereafter by persons of all ranks in the year 1581, by ordinance of the lords of the secret council, and acts of the general assembly; subscribed again by all sorts of persons in the year 1590, by a new ordinance of council, at the desire of the general assembly; with a general band for the maintenance of the true religion, and the King’s person, and now subscribed in the year 1638, by us noblemen, barons, gentlemen, burgesses, ministers, and commons under subscribing; together with our resolution and promises for the causes after specified, to maintain the said true religion, and the King’s Majesty, according to the confession aforesaid, and Acts of Parliament; the tenure whereof here followeth.

The Children's Bond

In 1638, tens of thousands of Scots had signed the Scottish National Covenant to band together in defense of true, biblical, Reformed faith. In 1646, the Scots renewed that bond when they signed the Solemn League and Covenant with the English Puritans. The Scottish Christians who signed these covenants, and proved their allegiance with their lives, became known as Covenanters.

But when King Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660, twenty-eight years of bloody persecution followed for Covenanters across Scotland's Lowlands. First, Covenanting ministers were driven from their own churches and replaced with the king's favorites. But the congregations followed their beloved pastors, and worshiped in the hills at secret meetings called "conventicles." Charles II declared that such conventicles were illegal and punishable, but that did not stop the Covenanters from faithfully meeting anyway. If they were caught, they could be massacred by the king's men, as many of them were. Their ministers were constantly hunted, and usually caught and executed. Covenanters often saw their farms burned, their lands confiscated, and their families abused or murdered. But they were willing to endure all this for the sake of the pure gospel of King Jesus.

Covenanter children who were born into this persecution grew up on rich spiritual food. In 1683, fifteen girls in Pentland, Scotland held a meeting. At least one of them, Beatrix Umpherston, was only ten years old. They were daughters of Covenanters, and from their birth they had worshiped alongside their elders in the valley of the shadow of death. A childhood under persecution had filled these little girls' hearts with the same resoluteness that filled their parents and grandparents. At this meeting in 1683, they wrote a covenant of their very own, *The Children's Bond*.

This is a Covenant made between the Lord and us, with our whole hearts, and to give up ourselves freely to Him without reserve, soul and body, hearts and affections, to be His children and Him to be our God and Father; if it please the Lord to send His gospel to the land again, that we stand to this Covenant which we have written, between the Lord and us, as we shall answer at that great day. That we shall never break this Covenant which we have made with the Lord and us, that we shall stand to this Covenant which we have made; and if not, it shall be a witness against us in the great day when we shall stand before the Lord and His holy angels. O Lord give us real grace in our hearts this day to mind Zion's breaches which are in such low case this day: and make us to mourn with her, for Thou hast said them that mourn with her in the time of trouble shall rejoice when she rejoiceth, when the Lord shall bring back the captivity of Zion, when he shall deliver her out of her enemies' hand, when her King shall come and raise her from the dust, in spite of all her enemies that oppose her, either devils or men. That thus, they have banished their King, Christ out of the land, yet he will arise and avenge His children's blood at her enemies' hands, which cruel murderers have shed.

Them that will not stand to every article of this Covenant which we have made betwixt the Lord and us, that they shall not go to the Kirk to hear any of those soul-murdering curates we will neither speak nor converse with them. Any that break this Covenant, they shall never come into our Society. We shall declare before the Lord that have bound ourselves in Covenant, to be covenanted with Him all the days of our life, to be His children and Him to be our Covenanted Father.

We subscribe with our hands these presents—

Beatrix Umpherston	Helen Clark	Margaret Brown
Helen Moutray	Marion Swan	Janet Brown
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