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COMMITTEE ON TRANSLATION AND REVISION OF CONFSSIONAL AND
LITURGICAL FORMS

THREE FORMS OF UNITY: THE CONFSSION OF FAITH. (Belgic Confession)

Introductory Remarks

- A. The Committee took as basis for a new translation De Nederlandse Belijdenisgeschriften In Authentieke Teksten. Met Inleiding en Tekstvergelijkingen door J. N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1976).
It gives the authentic French text, established by the Synod of Dordrecht 1619, the Latin text from the Acts of this National Synod, and the authentic Dutch text, also accepted by the Synod itself. We compared the new Dutch texts, nl. the text of the interdenominational Committee-Dankbaar and the text provisionally adopted by the Synod of Groningen-Zuid 1978 of our sister churches in the Netherlands. Both texts are published in the Acts of this Synod, pp 271-307.
- B. Our method, therefore, differed fundamentally from the method accepted by the Belgic Confession Translation Committee of the Christian Reformed Church (see Report 33, 1979 Agenda for Synod, pp 360-430).

This Committee recommended a.o. the following:

That Synod authorize the Belgic Confession Translation Committee to use the 1559/61 de Bres version of the Belgic Confession as the textus receptus for the new English Translation.

Grounds:

1. It is the earliest version available.
2. It was written in times more akin to our own vis-a-vis church-state relationships than were the later revisions.
3. Its theological nuances are, in general, preferable to those in the later revisions.

Over against this recommendation our Committee is of the opinion that the textus receptus is the authorized French and Dutch texts of Dordt 1619.

Grounds:

1. Not the earliest version available is the textus receptus. The situation of the text of a creed or confession (eg. The Apostles' Creed) is different from the text of Holy Scripture. The churches have revised their confessions. As far as the Belgic Confession is concerned, a revision took place already at the Synod of May 1566 in Antwerp. This version found its counterpart in the Dutch text of 1583. The following important revision of the French and Dutch texts happened at the Synod of Dordt 1619. Not the original, personal version of De Bres is the authentic text, but the text established by the churches in the Synod of Dordt.
2. If we return to the personal, original text of De Bres, we lose the important, officially made (eg. the addition of "almighty" in art. 1, the enumeration of the sixty-six Bible Books in art. 4, etc.) The change in art. 22, made

at the Synod of Dordt, in order to underline the substitutionary significance of Christ's active obedience, would be undone.

3. While the main revision already was made by the Synod of 1566, the difference in church-state relationships was not great. The whole interpretation by the Chr. Ref. Committee of the differences between the editions of 1561, 1566 and 1619 is debatable.
4. The Committee of the Chr. Ref. Church states that we should not "try to 'patch up' either the statements of De Bres or the Revision. For by definition a creed, written at a certain time, is an historical document. In our view it should not be rewritten or revised but only translated, at most, by later generations!(p.429)"
This statement shows that the Reformed concept binding to an authentic text of the confession established by a General Synod, is abandoned.
Acceptance of De Bres' original version by the Chr. Ref. Committee is nothing but acceptance of an historical document, without strict ecclesiastical binding in the present. Also for this reason we reject the method of the Chr. Ref. Committee.

C. It may be clear that our Committee did not literally follow the mandate "to submit a text of the Belgic Confession..... in which such changes have been made in the text that a faithful rendering of the original is obtained and in which all quotations from Holy Writ are given in a correct and up-to-date translation". (Acts Coaldale 1977, Art. 60, p.28). For "the original" we read "the authentic texts", nl. the French and Dutch texts of the Synod of Dordrecht 1619.

D. The Committee would like to draw your attention to the following details of our revision:

1. We chose as title: "TRUE CHRISTIAN CONFESSION OF THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES CONTAINING THE SUMMARY OF THE DOCTRINE OF GOD AND OF THE ETERNAL SALVATION OF SOULS". In references it will be mentioned as "Belgic Confession " or "Confession of Faith".
2. Bible passages are presented in the R,S.V., unless some other translation was preferable. Scripture references are added in margin. The Committee has confined itself to the texts mentioned or quoted in the confession itself. If the churches would like to add more Scripture references in margin, the General Synod 1980 should be overtured.
3. As far as changes in the content are concerned, the Committee proposes the following:
 - a. To change the beginning of art. 1 in order to take away the expression "one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God." The majority of the Committee felt that this formulation can give rise to the wrong idea that we call the LORD "God" in our own initiative. One member was of the opinion that the present text expresses well what the believers, taking into account the limitations of human language and mind, can say about God whose nature is inexpressible. The Committee proposes to read: " We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth that there

is only one God, who is a simple and spiritual Being; He is eternal,....."

- b. To add in art. 4 "Lamentations" and not to count the letter to the Hebrews among the Pauline epistles anymore. This is done in accordance with newer Bible translations.
- c. To delete in art. 9 the reference to 1 John 5:7 (A.V.), because of the testimony of the manuscripts (see newer Bible translations).
- d. To replace in art. 10 the Scripture proofs for the eternity of the Son of God, nl. Micah 5:2 and Heb. 7:3, by John 8:58 and John 17:5.

The Committee shares the opinion that the first mentioned texts are no valid Scripture proofs for the truth concerned.

For the Committee,

H. M. Ohmann,

J. Faber, Reporters.

June 1979.

TRUE CHRISTIAN CONFESSION
of the Canadian Reformed Churches
containing the summary of the doctrine
of God and of the eternal salvation
of souls

ARTICLE I

THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD

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

ARTICLE II

HOW GOD MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO US

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

ARTICLE III

THE WORD OF GOD

We confess that this Word of God did not come by the impulse of man, but that men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God,

2 Pet. 1:21 as the apostle Peter says. Thereafter in His special care for us and our salvation, God commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed word to writing and He Himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.

ARTICLE IV

THE CANONICAL BOOKS

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

The books of the Old Testament: the five books of Moses, namely, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther; Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Exekiel, 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 epistles of the apostle Paul, Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, Philemon; the epistle to the Hebrews; the epistles James, I and II Peter, I, II and III John, Jude; and the Revelation to John.

ARTICLE V

THE AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

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

ARTICLE VI

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CANONICAL AND APOCRYPHAL BOOKS

We distinguish these holy books from the apocryphal, namely: I and II Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Additions to Esther, Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, Susannah, Bel and the Dragon, the Prayer of Manasseh, I and II 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 efficacy 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 VII

THE SUFFICIENCY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

We believe that this Holy Scripture fully contains the will of God and that all that man ought to believe in order to be

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

Gal. 1:8

Deut. 4:2;
Deut. 12:32
Rev. 22:19.

We may not consider either 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

Rom. 3:9-18

Ps. 62:9

truth of God since the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and lighter than a breath. We therefore reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule as the apostles have taught us:

I John 4:1

Test the spirits to see whether they are of God. Likewise:

2 John 1:10

If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting.

ARTICLE VIII

GOD IS ONE IN ESSENCE, YET DISTINGUISHED IN THREE PERSONS

According to this truth and this Word of God, we believe in one only God, who is one single essence, in which are three persons, really, truly, and eternally distinct according to their distinctive personal properties; namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is the cause, origin, and beginning of all things visible and invisible.

The Son is the Word, the wisdom, and the image of the Father. The Holy Spirit is the eternal power and might who proceeds from the Father and the Son. Nevertheless, God is not by this distinction divided into three, since the Holy Scriptures teach us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each have His personal existence, distinguished by Their properties; but in such a way that these three persons are but one only God.

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

ARTICLE IX

SCRIPTURE PROOF OF THIS DOCTRINE

All this we know both from the testimonies of Holy Scripture and from the respective actions of the three Persons and especially those towards us.

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

Gen 1:26,27 Genesis God says: Let Us make man in our image after our

Gen. 3:22 likeness.... So God created man in His own image....; male and female He created them. Also: Behold, the man has become like one of Us. From God's saying: Let Us make man in Our image, it appears that there are more divine persons than one; and when He says, God created, He indicates that there is one God. It is true, He does not say how many persons there are, but what seems to be somewhat obscure in the Old Testament is very plain in the New Testament. For when our Lord was baptized in the river Jordan, the voice of the

Luke 3:21,22 Father was heard, who said, This is My beloved Son; the Son was seen in the water, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form as a dove. Also Christ ordained this formula for the baptism of all believers: Baptize all

Matt 28:19 nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel according to Luke the angel Gabriel thus addressed Mary, the mother of our Lord: The

Luke 1:35 Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. Likewise: The grace of

2 Cor.13:14 the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

In all these places we are fully taught that there are three persons in one only divine essence.

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

Moreover, we must observe the distinct offices and

actions 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 indwelling in our hearts. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity has always been maintained in the true Church since the time of the apostles to this very day, over against Jews, Mohammedans, and against false Christians and heretics as Marcion, Mani, Praxeas, Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Arius, and such like, who have been justly condemned by the orthodox fathers.

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

ARTICLE X

JESUS CHRIST TRUE AND ETERNAL GOD

Hebr. 1:3

We believe that Jesus Christ according to His divine nature, is the unique Son of God, begotten from eternity, not made, nor created - for then He would be a creature - of the same essence with the Father, co-eternal, who reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature, equal to Him in all things.

Gen. 1:1

John 1:1-3

Hebr. 1:2

He is the Son of God, not only from the time that He assumed our nature but from all eternity, as these testimonies, compared with each other teach us. Moses says that God created the world; the apostle John says that all things were made by the Word which he calls God. The letter to the Hebrews says that God made the world through His Son;

Col. 1:16

likewise the apostle Paul that God created all things through Jesus Christ. Therefore it must necessarily follow that He who is called God, the Word, the Son, and Jesus Christ, did exist at that time when all things were created by Him.

John 8:58

Therefore He could say, Truly, I say to you, before Abraham

John 17:5

was, I am and He prayed, Glorify Thou Me in Thy own presence with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made.

And so He is true, eternal God, the Almighty, whom we invoke, worship and serve.

ARTICLE XI

THE HOLY SPIRIT TRUE AND ETERNAL GOD

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

ARTICLE XII

THE CREATION OF ALL THINGS, ESPECIALLY THE ANGELS

We believe that the Father through the Word, that is, through His Son, has created out of nothing the heaven, the earth, and all other creatures, when it seemed good to Him, and that He has given every creature its being, shape and form and to each its specific task and function to serve its Creator.

We believe that He also still sustains and governs them according to His eternal providence and by His infinite power. To serve man that man may serve his God.

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

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

ARTICLE XIII

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

We believe that this good God, after He had created all things, did not abandon them or give them up to fortune or chance, but that according to His holy will He so rules and governs them that in this world nothing happens without his decision. Yet God is not the Author of the sins which are committed nor can He be charged with them. For His

power and goodness are so great and beyond understanding that He ordains and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner, even when devils and wicked men act unjustly. And as to His actions surpassing human understanding we will not curiously inquire farther than our capacity allows us. But with the greatest humility and reverence we adore the righteous decisions of God, which are hidden from us and we content ourselves that we are pupils of Christ who have only to learn those things which He teaches us in His Word and who may not transgress these limits.

This doctrine gives us unspeakable comfort, when we learn to understand thereby that nothing can happen to us by chance, but only by the direction of our gracious heavenly Father. He watches over us with fatherly care keeping all creatures so under His power that not one hair of our head - for they are all numbered - nor one sparrow can fall to the ground without the will of our Father. In this we trust, because we know that He holds in check the devil and all our enemies who cannot hurt us without His permission and will.

Matt.10 :
29,30

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