

ON THE WAY

The Doctrine of the Person and the Work of Christ

The Belgic Confession of Faith

CHRISTOLOGY

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...

Hebrews 1:3

“...tell of His salvation from day to day.”

Psalm 96:2

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INTRODUCTION

Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls."

Jeremiah 6:16

There is a very close connection between the doctrine of man and the doctrine of Christ. The former deals with man, created in the image of God and endowed with true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, but through willful transgression of the law of God despoiled of his true humanity and transformed into a sinner. It points to man as a highly privileged creature of God, still bearing some of the traces of his original glory, but yet as a creature that has lost its birthright, its true freedom, and its original righteousness and holiness. This means that it directs attention, not merely, nor even primarily, to the creatureliness, but to the sinfulness of man. It emphasizes the ethical distance between God and man, the distance resulting from the fall of man, which neither man nor angels can bridge; and is as such virtually a cry for divine help. Christology is in part the answer to that cry. It acquaints us with the objective work of God in Christ to bridge the chasm, and to remove the distance. It shows us God coming to man, to remove the barriers between God and man by meeting the conditions of the law in Christ, and to restore man to His blessed communion. Anthropology already directs attention to the gracious provisions of God for a covenant of friendship with man, which provides for a life of blessed communion with God; but it is a covenant which is effective only in and through Christ. And therefore the doctrine of Christ, as the Mediator of the covenant, must necessarily follow. Christ, typified and predicted in the Old Testament as the Redeemer of man, came in the fullness of time, to tabernacle among men and to effect an eternal reconciliation.

ⁱ Material in this section is from Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., Copyright © 1939 by L. Berkhof. All rights reserved.

THE ECUMENICAL CREEDS

ⁱⁱ**T**he word *creed* comes from the Latin, *credo*, meaning “I believe.” A creed is an authoritative statement of basic articles of faith which the Christian church affirms. In Article 9 of the Belgic Confession, three short documents dating from the early history of the Christian church are named as creeds: the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. The adoption of the Belgic Confession by the sixteenth and seventeenth-century synods of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands implied approval of these creeds. They are called “ecumenical,” meaning general or universal, because they are accepted by most Christian churches.

THE BELGIC CONFESSION OF FAITH

ⁱⁱⁱ**T**he oldest of the doctrinal standards of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands is the Confession of Faith, most commonly known as the Belgic Confession, following the seventeenth-century Latin designation *Confessio Belgica*. “Belgica” referred to the Lowlands or the whole of the Netherlands, both north and south, which today is divided into the Netherlands and Belgium. Variant names for the Belgic Confession include the Walloon Confession and the Netherlands Confession.

The Confession’s chief author was Guido de Bres (1522-1567), a godly itinerant pastor of Reformed persuasion. During the sixteenth century the Reformed churches in the Netherlands were exposed to severe persecution through Philip II of Spain, an ally of the Roman Catholic Church. As an apology for the persecuted band of Reformed believers in the Lowlands who formed the so called churches under the cross, de Bres prepared this confession in French in 1561. De Bres was most likely assisted by his fellow pastors who, together with himself, desired to prove to their persecutors that the adherents of the Reformed faith were not rebels as charged, but law-

^{ii/iii} Material in this section is from *The Three Forms of Unity* (Birmingham, AL.: Solid Ground Christian Books). Copyright © 2010 Introduction by Joel Beeke. All rights reserved.

abiding citizens who professed only biblical doctrines. The Confession was written as an independent composition, though it was modeled after the Gallic Confession, a 1559 French Reformed confession, which in turn was dependent upon Calvin's design. Basically, the Confession follows what has become known as the traditional doctrinal order of the six loci of Reformed systematic theology – the doctrines concerning God (theology proper, articles 1-11), man (anthropology, articles 12-15), Christ (Christology, articles 16-21), salvation (soteriology, articles 22-26), the church (ecclesiology, articles 27-35), and the last things (eschatology, article 37). Article 36 addresses the theocratic nature of civil government. Despite following an objective doctrinal order, the Confession breathes a warmly experiential and personal spirit, facilitated by its repeated use of the pronoun “we”.

The following year, 1562, a copy was sent to King Philip II together with an address in which the petitioners declared that they were ready to obey the government in all lawful things, but that 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” rather than deny the truth expressed in this Confession. Neither the Confession nor the petition, however, bore the desired fruit of toleration for Protestants with the Spanish authorities. Five years later de Bres himself became one martyr among thousands who sealed his faith with blood. Nevertheless his work has and will continue to endure through this precious doctrinal standard which still stands as a priceless symbolical statement of Reformed doctrine.

The Belgic Confession was readily received by Reformed churches in the Netherlands after its early translation into Dutch in 1562. In 1566 it was revised by Synod of Antwerp. Subsequently it was regularly adopted by national Dutch Synods held during the last three decades of the sixteenth century. After a further revision of the text, the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) adopted it as one of the doctrinal standards to which all office-bearers in the Reformed churches were required to subscribe.

APOSTLES CREED

- I. I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;
- II. And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord;
- III. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary;
- IV. Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell;
- V. The third day He rose again from the dead;
- VI. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
- VII. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead;
- VIII. I believe in the Holy Ghost;
- IX. I believe an holy catholic church; the communion of saints;
- X. The forgiveness of sins;
- XI. The resurrection of the body;
- XII. And the life everlasting. Amen.

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 for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit 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 in heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the prophets.

And I believe one holy catholic 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.

ATHANASIAN CREED

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith; which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit.

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit.

The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Spirit uncreate.

The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.

The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal.

And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal.

As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensibles, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty.

And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet they are not three Gods, but one God.

So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet they are not three Lords, but one Lord.

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; so are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say, there are three Gods or three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten.

The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten.

The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.

And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another.

But the whole three Persons are coeternal and coequal.

So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.

Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.

God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of substance of His mother, born in the world.

Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.

Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood.

Who although He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ.

One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of that manhood into God.

One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of Person.

For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ; who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead; He ascended into heaven, He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God, Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies; and shall give account of their own works.

And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved.

On the Way

JESUS CHRIST IS TRUE AND ETERNAL GOD

Article 10

Of The Belgic Confession of Faith

We believe that Jesus Christ, according to His divine nature, is the only begotten Son of God,ⁱ begotten from eternity,ⁱⁱ not made nor created (for then He would be a creature), but coessentialⁱⁱⁱ and coeternal^{iv} with the Father, *the express image of His person, and the brightness of His Glory,*^v equal unto Him in all things.^{vi} He is the Son of God, not only from the time that He assumed our nature, but from all eternity,^{vii} as these testimonies, when compared together, teach us. Moses saith that *God created the world;*^{viii} and John saith that *all things were made by that Word, which he calleth God.*^{ix} And the apostle saith that *God made the worlds by His Son;*^x likewise, that *God created all things by Jesus Christ.*^{xi} Therefore it must needs 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.^{xii} Therefore the prophet Micah saith: *His goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*^{xiii} And the apostle: *He hath neither beginning of days nor end of life.*^{xiv} He therefore is the true, eternal, and almighty God, whom we invoke, worship, and serve.

ⁱ John 1:18, 49

ⁱⁱ John 1:14; Colossians 1:15

ⁱⁱⁱ John 10:30; Philippians 2:6

^{iv} John 1:2; 17:5; Revelation 1:8

^v Hebrews 1:3

^{vi} Philippians 2:6

^{vii} John 8:23, 58; 9:35-37; Acts 8:37; Romans 9:5

^{viii} Genesis 1:1

^{ix} John 1:3

^x Hebrews 1:2

^{xi} Colossians 1:16

^{xii} Colossians 1:16

^{xiii} Micah 5:2

^{xiv} Hebrews 7:3

ETERNAL ELECTION

Article 16

Of The Belgic Confession of Faith

We believe that all the posterity of Adam, being thus fallen into perdition and ruin by the sin of our first parents, God then did manifest Himself such as He is; that is to say, *merciful and just*:ⁱ *merciful*, since He delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom He, in His eternal and unchangeable counsel, of mere goodness hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works;ⁱⁱ *just*, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Romans 9:18,22-23; 3:12

ⁱⁱ Romans 9:15-16; 11:32; Ephesians 2:8-10; Psalm 100:3; 1 John 4:10; Deuteronomy 32:8; 1 Samuel 12:22; Psalm 115:5; Malachi 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:9; Romans 8:29; 9:11, 21; 11:5-6; Ephesians 1:4; Titus 3:4-5; Acts 2:47; 13:48; 2 Timothy 2:19-20; 1 Peter 1:2; John 6:27; 15:16; 17:9

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 9:17,18; 2 Timothy 2:20

THE RECOVERY OF FALLEN MAN

Article 17

Of The Belgic Confession of Faith

We believe that our most gracious God, in His admirable wisdom and goodness, seeing that man had thus thrown himself into temporal and spiritual death, and made himself wholly miserable, was pleased to seek and comfort him when he tremblingⁱ fled from His presence, promising him that He would give His Son, who should *be made of a woman, to bruise the head of the serpent*, and would make him happy.ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Genesis 3:8-9, 19; Isaiah 65:1-2

ⁱⁱ Hebrews 2:14; Genesis 22:18; Isaiah 7:14; John 7:42; 2 Timothy 2:8; Hebrews 7:14; Genesis 3:15; Galatians 4:4

OF THE INCARNATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Article 18

Of The Belgic Confession of Faith

We confess, therefore, that God did fulfill the promise which He made to the fathers by the mouth of His holy prophetsⁱ when He sent into the world, at the time appointed by Him, His own only-begotten and eternal Son, *who took upon Him the form of a servant, and became like unto man*,ⁱⁱ really assuming the true human nature, with all its infirmities, sin excepted,ⁱⁱⁱ being conceived in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, by the power of the Holy Ghost, without the means of man;^{iv} and did not only assume human nature as to the body, but also a true human soul,^v that He might be a real man. For since the soul was lost as well as the body, it was necessary that He should take both upon him, to save both. Therefore we confess (in opposition to the heresy of the Anabaptists, who deny that Christ assumed human flesh of His mother) that Christ is become *a partaker of the flesh and blood of the children*;^{vi} that He is *a fruit of the loins of David* after the flesh;^{vii} *made of the seed of David according to the flesh*;^{viii} *a fruit of the womb* of the Virgin Mary;^{ix} *made of a woman*;^x *a branch of David*;^{xi} *a shoot of the root of Jesse*;^{xii} *sprung from the tribe of Judah*;^{xiii} *descended from the Jews according to the flesh*;^{xiv} *of the seed of Abraham, since He took on Him the seed of Abraham*,^{xv} *and became like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted*;^{xvi} *so that in truth He is our Immanuel, that is to say, God with us*.^{xvii}

ⁱ Isaiah 11:1; Luke 1:55; Genesis 26:4; 2 Samuel 7:12; Psalm 132:11; Acts 13:23

ⁱⁱ I Timothy 2:5; 3:16; Philipians 2:7

ⁱⁱⁱ Hebrews 2:14-15; 4:15

^{iv} Luke 1:31, 34-35

^v Matthew 26:38; John 12:27

^{vi} Hebrews 2:14

^{vii} Acts 2:30

^{viii} Psalm 132:11; Romans 1:3

^{ix} Luke 1:42

^x Galatians 4:4

^{xi} Jeremiah 33:15

^{xii} Isaiah 11:1

^{xiii} Hebrews 7:14

^{xiv} Romans 9:5

^{xv} Genesis 22:18; 2 Samuel 7:12; Matthew 1:1; Galatians 3:16

^{xvi} Hebrews 2:15-17

^{xvii} Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23

THE UNION AND DISTINCTION OF THE TWO NATURES IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST

Article 19

Of The Belgic Confession of Faith

We believe that by this conception the person of the Son is inseparably united and connected with the human nature, so that there are not two Sons of God, nor two persons, but two natures united in one single person; yet that each nature retains its own distinct properties. As then the divine nature hath always remained uncreated, without beginning of days or end of life, ⁱ filling heaven and earth, so also hath the human nature not lost its properties, but remained a creature, having beginning of days, being a finite nature, and retaining all the properties of a real body.ⁱⁱ And though He hath by His resurrection given immortality to the same, nevertheless He hath not changed the reality of His human nature, forasmuch as our salvation and resurrection also depend on the reality of His body.

But these two natures are so closely united in one person that they were not separated even by His death. Therefore that which He, when dying, commended into the hands of His Father, was a real human spirit, departing from His body.ⁱⁱⁱ But in the meantime the divine nature always remained united with the human, even when He lay in the grave; and the Godhead did not cease to be in Him, any more than it did when He was an infant, though it did not so clearly manifest itself for a while. Wherefore we confess that He is *very God* and *very man*: very God by His power to conquer death, and very man that He might die for us according to the infirmity of His flesh.

ⁱ Hebrews 7:3

ⁱⁱ I Corinthians 15:13, 21; Philippians 3:21; Matthew 26:11; Acts 1:2, 11; 3:21; Luke 24:39; John 20:25, 27

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 23:46; Matthew 27:50

GOD HATH MANIFESTED HIS JUSTICE AND MERCY IN CHRIST

Article 20

Of The Belgic Confession of Faith

We believe that God, who is perfectly merciful and just, sent His Son to assume that nature in which the disobedience was committed, to make satisfaction in the same and to bear the punishment of sin by His most bitter passion and death.ⁱ God therefore manifested His justice against His Son when He laid our iniquitiesⁱⁱ upon Him and poured forth His mercy and goodness on us, who were guilty and worthy of damnation, out of mere and perfect love, giving His Son unto death for us and raising Him for our justification,ⁱⁱⁱ that through Him we might obtain immortality and life eternal.

ⁱ Hebrews 2:14; Romans 8:3, 32-33

ⁱⁱ Isaiah 53:6; John 1:29; 1 John 4:9

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 4:25

THE SATISFACTION OF CHRIST, OUR ONLY HIGH PRIEST, FOR US

Article 21

Of The Belgic Confession of Faith

We believe that Jesus Christ is ordained with an oath to be an everlasting High Priest after the order of Melchizedek,ⁱ and that He hath presented Himself in our behalf before the Father to appease His wrath by His full satisfaction,ⁱⁱ by offering Himself on the tree of the cross, and pouring out His precious blood to purge away our sins, as the prophets had foretold. For it is written, *He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and numbered with the transgressors,*ⁱⁱⁱ and condemned by Pontius Pilate as a malefactor, though he had first declared Him innocent.^{iv} Therefore, *He restored that which He took not away,*^v and *suffered the just for the unjust,*^{vi} as well in His body as in His soul, feeling the terrible punishment which our sins had merited; insomuch that *His sweat became like unto drops of blood falling on the ground.*^{vii} *He called out, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*^{viii} and hath suffered all this for the remission of our sins.

Wherefore we justly say with the apostle Paul, *that we know nothing by Jesus Christ, and Him crucified*^{ix}, *we count all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord,*^x in whose wounds we find all manner of consolation. Neither is it necessary to seek or invent any other means of being reconciled to God that this only sacrifice, once offered, by which believers are made perfect forever.^{xi} This is also the reason why He was called by the angel of God, *Jesus*, that is to say, *Savior*, because He should save His people from their sins.^{xii}

ⁱ Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:10

ⁱⁱ Colossians 1:14; Romans 5:8-9; Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 2:17; 9:14; Romans 3:24; 8:2; John 15:3; Acts 2:24; 13:28; John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:6

ⁱⁱⁱ Isaiah 53:5, 7, 12

^{iv} Luke 23:22; 24; Acts 13:28; Psalm 22:16; John 18:38; Psalm 69:5; 1 Peter 3:18

^v Psalm 69:5

^{vi} 1 Peter 3:18

^{vii} Luke 22:44

^{viii} Psalm 22:2; Matthew 27:46

^{ix} 1 Corinthians 2:2

^x Philippians 3:8

^{xi} Hebrews 9:25-26; 10:14

^{xii} Matthew 1:21; Acts 4:12