

## THE BELGIC CONFESSION

### Article 1: The Only God

We all believe in our hearts  
and confess with our mouths  
that there is a single  
and simple  
spiritual being,  
whom we call God—

eternal,  
incomprehensible,  
invisible,  
unchangeable,  
infinite,  
almighty;

completely wise,  
just,  
and good,  
and the overflowing source  
of all good.

### Article 2: The Means by Which We Know God

We know God by two means:

First, by the creation, preservation, and government  
of the universe,  
since that universe is before our eyes  
like a beautiful book  
in which all creatures,  
great and small,  
are as letters  
to make us ponder  
the invisible things of God:  
God's eternal power and divinity,  
as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20.

All these things are enough to convict humans  
and to leave them without excuse.

Second, God makes himself known to us more clearly  
by his holy and divine Word,  
as much as we need in this life,  
for God's glory  
and for our salvation.

### Article 3: The Written Word of God

We confess that this Word of God  
was not sent nor delivered "by human will,"  
but that "men and women moved by the Holy Spirit,  
spoke from God,"  
as Peter says.<sup>1</sup>

Afterward our God—  
with special care  
for us and our salvation—  
commanded his servants, the prophets and apostles,  
to commit this revealed Word to writing.  
God, with his own finger,  
wrote the two tables of the law.

Therefore we call such writings  
holy and divine Scriptures.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Pet. 1:21

**Article 4: The Canonical Books**

We include in the Holy Scripture the two volumes  
of the Old and New Testaments.  
They are canonical books  
with which there can be no quarrel at all.

In the church of God the list is as follows:

In the Old Testament,

the five books of Moses—

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy;  
the books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth;

the two books of Samuel, and two of Kings;

the two books of Chronicles, called Paralipomenon;

the first book of Ezra; Nehemiah, Esther, Job;

the Psalms of David;

the three books of Solomon—

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song;

the four major prophets—

Isaiah, Jeremiah\*, Ezekiel, Daniel;

and then the other twelve minor prophets—

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah,

Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk,

Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

In the New Testament,

the four gospels—

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John;

the Acts of the Apostles;

the fourteen letters of Paul—

to the Romans;

the two letters to the Corinthians;

to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians;

the two letters to the Thessalonians;

the two letters to Timothy;

to Titus, Philemon, and to the Hebrews;

the seven letters of the other apostles—

one of James;

two of Peter;

three of John;

one of Jude;

and the Revelation of the apostle John.

\* “Jeremiah” here includes the Book of Lamentations as well as the Book of Jeremiah.

**Article 5: The Authority of Scripture**

We receive all these books  
and these only  
as holy and canonical,  
for the regulating, founding, and establishing  
of our faith.

And we believe

without a doubt

all things contained in them—

not so much because the church

receives and approves them as such

but above all because the Holy Spirit

testifies in our hearts

that they are from God,

and also because they

prove themselves

to be from God.

For even the blind themselves are able to see  
that the things predicted in them  
do happen.

**Article 6: The Difference between Canonical and Apocryphal Books**

We distinguish between these holy books  
and the apocryphal ones,  
which are the third and fourth books of Esdras;  
the books of Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Jesus Sirach, Baruch;  
what was added to the Story of Esther;  
the Song of the Three Children in the Furnace;  
the Story of Susannah;  
the Story of Bell and the Dragon;  
the Prayer of Manasseh;  
and the two books of Maccabees.

The church may certainly read these books  
and learn from them  
as far as they agree with the canonical books.  
But they do not have such power and virtue  
that one could confirm  
from their testimony  
any point of faith or of the Christian religion.  
Much less can they detract  
from the authority  
of the other holy books.

**Article 7: The Sufficiency of Scripture**

We believe  
that this Holy Scripture contains  
the will of God completely  
and that everything one must believe  
to be saved  
is sufficiently taught in it.

For since the entire manner of service  
which God requires of us  
is described in it at great length,  
no one—  
even an apostle  
or an angel from heaven,  
as Paul says<sup>2</sup>—  
ought to teach other than  
what the Holy Scriptures have  
already taught us.

For since it is forbidden  
to add to the Word of God,  
or take anything away from it,<sup>3</sup>  
it is plainly demonstrated  
that the teaching is perfect  
and complete in all respects.

Therefore we must not consider human writings—  
no matter how holy their authors may have been—  
equal to the divine writings;  
nor may we put custom,  
nor the majority,  
nor age,  
nor the passage of times or persons,  
nor councils, decrees, or official decisions  
above the truth of God,  
for truth is above everything else.

For all human beings are liars by nature  
and more vain than vanity itself.

Therefore we reject with all our hearts  
everything that does not agree  
with this infallible rule,

as we are taught to do by the apostles  
when they say,  
“Test the spirits  
to see if they are from God,”<sup>4</sup>  
and also,  
“Do not receive into the house  
or welcome anyone  
who comes to you  
and does not bring this teaching.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Gal. 1:8

<sup>3</sup> Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:18-19

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 4:1

<sup>5</sup> 2 John 10

### **Article 8: The Trinity**

In keeping with this truth and Word of God  
we believe in one God,  
who is one single essence,  
in whom there are three persons,  
really, truly, and eternally distinct  
according to their incommunicable properties—  
namely,  
Father,  
Son,  
and Holy Spirit.

The Father  
is the cause,  
origin,  
and source of all things,  
visible as well as invisible.

The Son  
is the Word,  
the Wisdom,  
and the image  
of the Father.

The Holy Spirit  
is the eternal power  
and might,  
proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Nevertheless,  
this distinction does not divide God into three,  
since Scripture teaches us  
that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit  
each has a distinct subsistence  
distinguished by characteristics—  
yet in such a way  
that these three persons are  
only one God.

It is evident then  
that the Father is not the Son  
and that the Son is not the Father,  
and that likewise the Holy Spirit is  
neither the Father nor the Son.

Nevertheless,  
these persons,  
thus distinct,  
are neither divided  
nor fused or mixed together.

For the Father did not take on flesh,  
nor did the Spirit,  
but only the Son.

The Father was never  
without the Son,  
nor without the Holy Spirit,  
since all these are equal from eternity,  
in one and the same essence.

There is neither a first nor a last,  
for all three are one  
in truth and power,  
in goodness and mercy.

**Article 9: The Scriptural Witness on the Trinity**

All these things we know  
from the testimonies of Holy Scripture  
as well as from the effects of the persons,  
especially from those we feel within ourselves.

The testimonies of the Holy Scriptures,  
which teach us to believe in this Holy Trinity,  
are written in many places of the Old Testament,  
which need not be enumerated  
but only chosen with discretion.

In the book of Genesis God says,  
“Let us make humankind in our image,  
according to our likeness.”  
So “God created humankind in his image”—  
indeed, “male and female he created them.”<sup>6</sup>  
“See, the man has become like one of us.”<sup>7</sup>

It appears from this  
that there is a plurality of persons  
within the Deity,  
when God says,  
“Let us make humankind in our image”—  
and afterward God indicates the unity  
in saying,  
“God created.”

It is true that God does not say here  
how many persons there are—  
but what is somewhat obscure to us  
in the Old Testament  
is very clear in the New.

For when our Lord was baptized in the Jordan,  
the voice of the Father was heard saying,  
“This is my Son, the Beloved;”<sup>8</sup>  
the Son was seen in the water;  
and the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove.

So, in the baptism of all believers  
this form was prescribed by Christ:  
Baptize all people “in the name  
of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>9</sup>

In the Gospel according to Luke  
the angel Gabriel says to 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 holy;  
he will be called Son of God.”<sup>10</sup>

And in another place it says:

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit  
be with all of you.”<sup>11</sup>

[“There are three that testify in heaven,  
the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit,  
and these three are one.”]<sup>12</sup>

In all these passages we are fully taught  
that there are three persons  
in the one and only divine essence.  
And although this doctrine surpasses human understanding,  
we nevertheless believe it now,  
through the Word,  
waiting to know and enjoy it fully  
in heaven.

Furthermore,  
we must note the particular works and activities  
of these three persons in relation to us.

The Father is called our Creator,  
by reason of his power.  
The Son is our Savior and Redeemer,  
by his blood.  
The Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier,  
by living in our hearts.

This doctrine of the holy Trinity  
has always been maintained in the true church,  
from the time of the apostles until the present,  
against Jews, Muslims,  
and certain false Christians and heretics,  
such as Marcion, Mani,  
Praxeas, Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Arius,  
and others like them,  
who were rightly condemned by the holy fathers.

And so,  
in this matter we willingly accept  
the three ecumenical creeds—  
the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian—  
as well as what the ancient fathers decided  
in agreement with them.

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 1:26-27

<sup>7</sup> Gen. 3:22

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 3:17

<sup>9</sup> Matt. 28:19

<sup>10</sup> Luke 1:35

<sup>11</sup> 2 Cor. 13:14

<sup>12</sup> 1 John 5:7—following the better Greek texts, the NRSV and other modern translations place this verse in a footnote.

#### **Article 10: The Deity of Christ**

We believe that Jesus Christ,  
according to his divine nature,  
is the only Son of God—  
eternally begotten,  
not made or created,  
for then he would be a creature.

He is one in essence with the Father;  
coeternal;  
the exact image of the person of the Father  
and the “reflection of God’s glory,”<sup>13</sup>  
being like the Father in all things.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God  
not only from the time he assumed our nature  
but from all eternity,  
as the following testimonies teach us  
when they are taken together.

Moses says that God created the world;<sup>14</sup>  
and John says that all things were created through the Word,<sup>15</sup>  
which he calls God.

The apostle says that God created the world through the Son.<sup>16</sup>  
He also says that God created all things through Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup>

And so it must follow  
that the one who is called God, the Word, the Son, and Jesus Christ  
already existed before creating all things.  
Therefore the prophet Micah says  
that Christ's origin is "from ancient days."<sup>18</sup>  
And the apostle says  
that the Son has "neither beginning of days  
nor end of life."<sup>19</sup>

So then,  
he is the true eternal God,  
the Almighty,  
whom we invoke,  
worship,  
and serve.

<sup>13</sup> Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3

<sup>14</sup> Gen. 1:1

<sup>15</sup> John 1:3

<sup>16</sup> Heb. 1:2

<sup>17</sup> Col. 1:16

<sup>18</sup> Mic. 5:2

<sup>19</sup> Heb. 7:3

#### **Article 11: The Deity of the Holy Spirit**

We believe and confess also  
that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally  
from the Father and the Son—  
neither made,  
nor created,  
nor begotten,  
but only proceeding  
from the two of them.

In regard to order,  
the Spirit is the third person of the Trinity—  
of one and the same essence,  
and majesty,  
and glory,  
with the Father and the Son,  
being true and eternal God,  
as the Holy Scriptures teach us.

#### **Article 12: The Creation of All Things**

We believe that the Father,  
when it seemed good to him,  
created heaven and earth and all other creatures  
from nothing,  
by the Word—  
that is to say,  
by the Son.

God has given all creatures  
their being, form, and appearance  
and their various functions  
for serving their Creator.

Even now  
God also sustains and governs them all,  
according to his eternal providence  
and by his infinite power,  
that they may serve humanity,  
in order that humanity may serve God.

God has also created the angels good,  
that they might be messengers of God  
and serve the elect.

Some of them have fallen  
from the excellence in which God created them  
into eternal perdition;  
and the others have persisted and remained  
in their original state,  
by the grace of God.

The devils and evil spirits are so corrupt  
that they are enemies of God  
and of everything good.  
They lie in wait for the church  
and every member of it  
like thieves,  
with all their power,  
to destroy and spoil everything  
by their deceptions.

So then,  
by their own wickedness  
they are condemned to everlasting damnation,  
daily awaiting their torments.

For that reason  
we detest the error of the Sadducees,  
who deny that there are spirits and angels,  
and also the error of the Manicheans,  
who say that the devils originated by themselves,  
being evil by nature,  
without having been corrupted.

### **Article 13: The Doctrine of God's Providence**

We believe that this good God,  
after creating all things,  
did not abandon them to chance or fortune  
but leads and governs them  
according to his holy will,  
in such a way that nothing happens in this world  
without God's orderly arrangement.

Yet God is not the author of,  
and cannot be charged with,  
the sin that occurs.  
For God's power and goodness  
are so great and incomprehensible  
that God arranges and does his works very well and justly  
even when the devils and the wicked act unjustly.

We do not wish to inquire  
with undue curiosity  
into what God does that surpasses human understanding  
and is beyond our ability to comprehend.  
But in all humility and reverence  
we adore the just judgments of God,  
which are hidden from us,  
being content to be Christ's disciples,  
so as to learn only what God shows us in the Word,  
without going beyond those limits.

This doctrine gives us unspeakable comfort  
since it teaches us  
that nothing can happen to us by chance  
but only by the arrangement of our gracious  
heavenly Father,  
who watches over us with fatherly care,  
sustaining all creatures under his lordship,  
so that not one of the hairs on our heads  
(for they are all numbered)  
nor even a little bird  
can fall to the ground  
without the will of our Father.<sup>20</sup>

In this thought we rest,  
knowing that God holds in check  
the devils and all our enemies,  
who cannot hurt us  
without divine permission and will.

For that reason we reject  
the damnable error of the Epicureans,  
who say that God does not get involved in anything  
and leaves everything to chance.

<sup>20</sup> Matt. 10:29-30

#### **Article 14: The Creation and Fall of Humanity**

We believe  
that God created human beings from the dust of the earth  
and made and formed them in his image and likeness—  
good, just, and holy;  
able by their will to conform  
in all things  
to the will of God.

But when they were in honor  
they did not understand it<sup>21</sup>  
and did not recognize their excellence.  
But they subjected themselves willingly to sin  
and consequently to death and the curse,  
lending their ear to the word of the devil.

For they transgressed the commandment of life,  
which they had received,  
and by their sin they separated themselves from God,  
who was their true life,  
having corrupted their entire nature.

So they made themselves guilty  
and subject to physical and spiritual death,  
having become wicked,  
perverse,  
and corrupt in all their ways.  
They lost all their excellent gifts  
which they had received from God,  
and retained none of them  
except for small traces  
which are enough to make them  
inexcusable.

Moreover, all the light in us is turned to darkness,  
as the Scripture teaches us:

“The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness did not overcome it.”<sup>22</sup>  
Here John calls the human race “darkness.”

Therefore we reject everything taught to the contrary concerning human free will, since humans are nothing but the slaves of sin and cannot do a thing unless it is given them from heaven.<sup>23</sup>

For who can boast of being able to do anything good by oneself, since Christ says, “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me”<sup>24</sup>

Who can glory in their own will when they understand that “the mind of the flesh is hostile to God”<sup>25</sup>

Who can speak of their own knowledge in view of the fact that “those who are unspiritual do not understand the gifts of God’s Spirit”<sup>26</sup>

In short, who can produce a single thought, knowing that we are not able to think a thing about ourselves, by ourselves, but that “our competence is from God”<sup>27</sup>

And therefore, what the apostle says ought rightly to stand fixed and firm: “God works within us both to will and to do according to God’s good pleasure.”<sup>28</sup>

For there is no understanding nor will conforming to God’s understanding and will apart from Christ’s involvement, as he teaches us when he says, “Apart from me you can do nothing.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ps. 49:20

<sup>22</sup> John 1:5

<sup>23</sup> John 3:27

<sup>24</sup> John 6:44

<sup>25</sup> Rom. 8:7

<sup>26</sup> 1 Cor. 2:14

<sup>27</sup> 2 Cor. 3:5

<sup>28</sup> Phil. 2:13

<sup>29</sup> John 15:5

#### **Article 15: The Doctrine of Original Sin**

We believe that by the disobedience of Adam original sin has been spread through the whole human race.<sup>30</sup>

It is a corruption of the whole human nature— an inherited depravity which even infects small infants in their mother’s womb, and the root which produces in humanity every sort of sin.

It is therefore so vile and enormous in God’s sight that it is enough to condemn the human race, and it is not abolished or wholly uprooted even by baptism, seeing that sin constantly boils forth as though from a contaminated spring.

Nevertheless,  
it is not imputed to God's children  
for their condemnation  
but is forgiven  
by his grace and mercy—  
not to put them to sleep  
but so that the awareness of this corruption  
might often make believers groan  
as they long to be set free  
from the "body of this death."<sup>31</sup>

Therefore we reject the error of the Pelagians  
who say that this sin is nothing else than a matter of imitation.

<sup>30</sup> Rom. 5:12-13

<sup>31</sup> Rom. 7:24

#### **Article 16: The Doctrine of Election**

We believe that—  
all Adam's descendants having thus fallen  
into perdition and ruin  
by the sin of Adam—  
God showed himself to be as he is:  
merciful and just.

God is merciful  
in withdrawing and saving from this perdition those who,  
in the eternal and unchangeable divine counsel,  
have been elected and chosen in Jesus Christ our Lord  
by his pure goodness,  
without any consideration of their works.

God is just  
in leaving the others in their ruin and fall  
into which they plunged themselves.

#### **Article 17: The Recovery of Fallen Humanity**

We believe that our good God,  
by marvelous divine wisdom and goodness,  
seeing that Adam and Eve had plunged themselves in this manner  
into both physical and spiritual death  
and made themselves completely miserable,  
set out to find them,  
though they,  
trembling all over,  
were fleeing from God.

And God comforted them,  
promising to give them his Son,  
born of a woman,<sup>32</sup>  
to crush the head of the serpent,<sup>33</sup>  
and to make them blessed.

<sup>32</sup> Gal. 4:4

<sup>33</sup> Gen. 3:15

#### **Article 18: The Incarnation**

So then we confess  
that God fulfilled the promise  
made to the early fathers and mothers  
by the mouth of the holy prophets  
when he sent the only and eternal Son of God  
into the world  
at the time appointed.

The Son took the "form of a slave"  
and was made in "human form,"<sup>34</sup>  
truly assuming a real human nature,

with all its weaknesses,  
except for sin;  
being conceived in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary  
by the power of the Holy Spirit,  
without male participation.

And Christ not only assumed human nature  
as far as the body is concerned  
but also a real human soul,  
in order to be a real human being.  
For since the soul had been lost as well as the body  
Christ had to assume them both  
to save them both together.

Therefore we confess,  
(against the heresy of the Anabaptists  
who deny that Christ assumed  
human flesh from his mother)  
that Christ “shared the very flesh and blood of children”;<sup>35</sup>  
being the “fruit of the loins” of David “according to the flesh,”<sup>36</sup>  
“descended from David” according to the flesh;<sup>37</sup>  
the “fruit of the womb” of the virgin Mary;<sup>38</sup>  
born of a woman;<sup>39</sup>  
the seed of David;<sup>40</sup>  
the “root of Jesse”;<sup>41</sup>  
descended from Judah,<sup>42</sup>  
having descended from the Jews according to the flesh;  
descended from Abraham—  
having assumed descent from Abraham and Sarah,  
and was “made like his brothers and sisters,”  
yet without sin.<sup>43</sup>

In this way Christ is truly our Immanuel—  
that is: “God with us.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Phil. 2:7

<sup>35</sup> Heb. 2:14

<sup>36</sup> Acts 2:30

<sup>37</sup> Rom. 1:3

<sup>38</sup> Luke 1:42

<sup>39</sup> Gal. 4:4

<sup>40</sup> 2 Tim. 2:8

<sup>41</sup> Rom. 15:12

<sup>42</sup> Heb. 7:14

<sup>43</sup> Heb. 2:17; 4:15

<sup>44</sup> Matt. 1:23

#### **Article 19: The Two Natures of Christ**

We believe that by being thus conceived  
the person of the Son has been inseparably united  
and joined together  
with human nature,  
in such a way that there are not two Sons of God,  
nor two persons,  
but two natures united in a single person,  
with each nature retaining its own distinct properties.

Thus his divine nature has always remained uncreated,  
without beginning of days or end of life,<sup>45</sup>  
filling heaven and earth.

Christ’s human nature has not lost its properties  
but continues to have those of a creature—  
it has a beginning of days;  
it is of a finite nature  
and retains all that belongs to a real body.  
And even though he,  
by his resurrection,

gave it immortality,  
that nonetheless did not change  
the reality of his human nature;  
for our salvation and resurrection  
depend also on the reality of his body.

But these two natures  
are so united together in one person  
that they are not even separated by his death.

So then,  
what he committed to his Father when he died  
was a real human spirit which left his body.  
But meanwhile his divine nature remained  
united with his human nature  
even when he was lying in the grave;  
and his deity never ceased to be in him,  
just as it was in him when he was a little child,  
though for a while it did not so reveal itself.

These are the reasons why we confess him  
to be true God and truly human—  
true God in order to conquer death  
by his power,  
and truly human that he might die for us  
in the weakness of his flesh.

<sup>45</sup> Heb. 7:3

#### **Article 20: The Justice and Mercy of God in Christ**

We believe that God—  
who is perfectly merciful  
and also very just—  
sent the Son to assume the nature  
in which the disobedience had been committed,  
in order to bear in it the punishment of sin  
by his most bitter passion and death.

So God made known his justice toward his Son,  
who was charged with our sin,  
and he poured out his goodness and mercy on us,  
who are guilty and worthy of damnation,  
giving to us his Son to die,  
by a most perfect love,  
and raising him to life  
for our justification,  
in order that by him  
we might have immortality  
and eternal life.

#### **Article 21: The Atonement**

We believe  
that Jesus Christ is a high priest forever  
according to the order of Melchizedek—  
made such by an oath—  
and that he presented himself  
in our name  
before his Father,  
to appease his Father's wrath  
with full satisfaction  
by offering himself  
on the tree of the cross  
and pouring out his precious blood  
for the cleansing of our sins,  
as the prophets had predicted.

For it is written  
that “the punishment that made us whole”  
was placed on the Son of God  
and that “by his bruises we are healed.”  
He was “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter”;  
he was “numbered with the transgressors”<sup>46</sup>  
and condemned as a criminal by Pontius Pilate,  
though Pilate had declared  
that he was innocent.

So he paid back  
what he had not stolen,<sup>47</sup>  
and he suffered—  
“the righteous for the unrighteous,”<sup>48</sup>  
in both his body and his soul—  
in such a way that  
when he sensed the horrible punishment  
required by our sins  
“his sweat became like great drops of blood  
falling down on the ground.”<sup>49</sup>  
He cried, “My God, my God,  
why have you forsaken me?”<sup>50</sup>

And he endured all this  
for the forgiveness of our sins.

Therefore we rightly say with Paul that  
we know nothing “except Jesus Christ and him crucified”;<sup>51</sup>  
we “regard everything as loss  
because of the surpassing value  
of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>52</sup>  
We find all comforts in his wounds  
and have no need to seek or invent any other means  
to reconcile ourselves with God  
than this one and only sacrifice,  
once made,  
which renders believers perfect  
forever.

This is also why  
the angel of God called him Jesus—  
that is, “Savior”—  
because he would save his people  
from their sins.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Isa. 53:4-12

<sup>47</sup> Ps. 69:4

<sup>48</sup> 1 Pet. 3:18

<sup>49</sup> Luke 22:44

<sup>50</sup> Matt. 27:46

<sup>51</sup> 1 Cor. 2:2

<sup>52</sup> Phil. 3:8

<sup>53</sup> Matt. 1:21

## **Article 22: The Righteousness of Faith**

We believe that  
for us to acquire the true knowledge of this great mystery  
the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts a true faith  
that embraces Jesus Christ,  
with all his merits,  
and makes him its own,  
and no longer looks for anything  
apart from him.

For it must necessarily follow  
that either all that is required for our salvation  
is not in Christ or,  
if all is in him,  
then those who have Christ by faith  
have his salvation entirely.

Therefore,  
to say that Christ is not enough  
but that something else is needed as well  
is a most enormous blasphemy against God—  
for it then would follow  
that Jesus Christ is only half a Savior.  
And therefore we justly say with Paul  
that we are justified “by faith alone”  
or “by faith apart from works.”<sup>54</sup>

However,  
we do not mean,  
properly speaking,  
that it is faith itself that justifies us—  
for faith is only the instrument  
by which we embrace Christ,  
our righteousness.

But Jesus Christ is our righteousness  
in making available to us all his merits  
and all the holy works he has done  
for us and in our place.  
And faith is the instrument  
that keeps us in communion with him  
and with all his benefits.

When those benefits are made ours  
they are more than enough to absolve us  
of our sins.

<sup>54</sup> Rom. 3:28

### **Article 23: The Justification of Sinners**

We believe  
that our blessedness lies in the forgiveness of our sins  
because of Jesus Christ,  
and that in it our righteousness before God is contained,  
as David and Paul teach us  
when they declare those people blessed  
to whom God grants righteousness  
apart from works.<sup>55</sup>

And the same apostle says  
that we are “justified by his grace as a gift,  
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”<sup>56</sup>  
And therefore we cling to this foundation,  
which is firm forever,  
giving all glory to God,  
humbling ourselves,  
and recognizing ourselves as we are;  
not claiming a thing for ourselves or our merits  
and leaning and resting  
on the sole obedience of Christ crucified,  
which is ours when we believe in him.

That is enough to cover all our sins  
and to make us confident,  
freeing the conscience from the fear, dread, and terror  
of God’s approach,  
without doing what our first parents, Adam and Eve, did,  
who trembled as they tried to cover themselves  
with fig leaves.

In fact,  
if we had to appear before God relying—  
no matter how little—  
on ourselves or some other creature,  
then, alas, we would be swallowed up.

Therefore everyone must say with David:  
“Lord, do not enter into judgment with your servant,  
for no one living is righteous before you.”<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Ps. 32:1; Rom. 4:6

<sup>56</sup> Rom. 3:24

<sup>57</sup> Ps. 143:2

#### **Article 24: The Sanctification of Sinners**

We believe that this true faith,  
produced in us by the hearing of God’s Word  
and by the work of the Holy Spirit,  
regenerates us and makes us new creatures,<sup>58</sup>  
causing us to live a new life<sup>59</sup>  
and freeing us from the slavery of sin.

Therefore,  
far from making people cold  
toward living in a pious and holy way,  
this justifying faith,  
quite to the contrary,  
so works within them that  
apart from it  
they will never do a thing out of love for God  
but only out of love for themselves  
and fear of being condemned.

So then, it is impossible  
for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being,  
seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith  
but of what Scripture calls  
“faith working through love,”<sup>60</sup>  
which moves people to do by themselves  
the works that God has commanded  
in the Word.

These works,  
proceeding from the good root of faith,  
are good and acceptable to God,  
since they are all sanctified by God’s grace.  
Yet they do not count toward our justification—  
for by faith in Christ we are justified,  
even before we do good works.  
Otherwise they could not be good,  
any more than the fruit of a tree could be good  
if the tree is not good in the first place.

So then, we do good works,  
but not for merit—  
for what would we merit?  
Rather, we are indebted to God for the good works we do,  
and not God to us,  
since God “is at work in us, enabling us both  
to will and to work for his good pleasure”<sup>61</sup>—  
thus keeping in mind what is written:  
“When you have done all that you were ordered to do,  
say, ‘We are worthless slaves;  
we have done only what we ought to have done.’”<sup>62</sup>

Yet we do not wish to deny  
that God rewards good works—  
but it is by grace  
that God crowns these gifts.

Moreover,  
although we do good works  
we do not base our salvation on them;  
for we cannot do any work  
that is not defiled by our flesh  
and also worthy of punishment.  
And even if we could point to one,  
memory of a single sin is enough  
for God to reject that work.

So we would always be in doubt,  
tossed back and forth  
without any certainty,  
and our poor consciences would be tormented constantly  
if they did not rest on the merit  
of the suffering and death of our Savior.

<sup>58</sup> 2 Cor. 5:17

<sup>59</sup> Rom. 6:4

<sup>60</sup> Gal. 5:6

<sup>61</sup> Phil. 2:13

<sup>62</sup> Luke 17:10

#### **Article 25: The Fulfillment of the Law**

We believe  
that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended  
with the coming of Christ,  
and that all foreshadowings have come to an end,  
so that the use of them ought to be abolished  
among Christians.  
Yet the truth and substance of these things  
remain for us in Jesus Christ,  
in whom they have been fulfilled.

Nevertheless,  
we continue to use the witnesses  
drawn from the law and prophets  
to confirm us in the gospel  
and to regulate our lives with full integrity  
for the glory of God,  
according to the will of God.

#### **Article 26: The Intercession of Christ**

We believe that we have no access to God  
except through the one and only Mediator and Intercessor,  
“Jesus Christ the righteous,”<sup>63</sup>  
who  
therefore was made human,  
uniting together the divine and human natures,  
so that we human beings might have access to the divine Majesty.  
Otherwise we would have no access.

But this Mediator,  
whom the Father has appointed between himself and us,  
ought not terrify us by his greatness,  
so that we have to look for another one,  
according to our fancy.  
For neither in heaven nor among the creatures on earth  
is there anyone who loves us  
more than Jesus Christ does.  
Although he was “in the form of God,”  
Christ nevertheless “emptied himself,”  
taking “human form” and “the form of a slave” for us;<sup>64</sup>  
and he made himself “like his brothers and sisters  
in every respect.”<sup>65</sup>

Suppose we had to find another intercessor.  
Who would love us more than he who gave his life for us,  
even though “we were his enemies”?<sup>66</sup>  
And suppose we had to find one who has prestige and power.  
Who has as much of these as he who is seated  
at the right hand of the Father,<sup>67</sup>  
and who has “all authority  
in heaven and on earth”?<sup>68</sup>  
And who will be heard more readily  
than God’s own dearly beloved Son?

So, the practice of honoring the saints as intercessors  
in fact dishonors them  
because of its misplaced faith.  
That was something the saints never did nor asked for,  
but which in keeping with their duty,  
as appears from their writings,  
they consistently refused.

We should not plead here  
that we are unworthy—  
for it is not a question of offering our prayers  
on the basis of our own dignity  
but only on the basis of the excellence and dignity  
of Jesus Christ,  
whose righteousness is ours by faith.

Since the apostle for good reason  
wants us to get rid of this foolish fear—  
or rather, this unbelief—  
he says to us that Jesus Christ  
was made like “his brothers and sisters in every respect,  
that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest”  
to purify the sins of the people.<sup>69</sup>  
For since he suffered,  
being tempted,  
he is also able to help those  
who are tempted.<sup>70</sup>

And further,  
to encourage us more  
to approach him  
he says,  
“Since, then, we have a great high priest  
who has passed through the heavens,  
Jesus, the Son of God,  
let us hold fast to our confession.  
For we do not have a high priest  
who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,  
but we have one who in every respect has been tempted,  
as we are,  
yet without sin.  
Let us therefore approach  
the throne of grace  
with boldness,  
so that we may receive mercy  
and find grace,  
to help in time of need.”<sup>71</sup>

The same apostle says that  
we “have confidence to enter the sanctuary  
by the blood of Jesus.”  
“Let us approach with a true heart  
in full assurance of faith....”<sup>72</sup>

Likewise,  
Christ “holds his priesthood permanently....  
Consequently, he is able for all time to save  
those who approach God through him,  
since he always lives  
to make intercession for them.”<sup>73</sup>

What more do we need?  
For Christ himself declares:  
“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.  
No one comes to the Father  
except through me.”<sup>74</sup>  
Why should we seek  
another intercessor?

Since it has pleased God  
to give us the Son as our Intercessor,  
let us not leave him for another—  
or rather seek, without ever finding.  
For, when giving Christ to us,  
God knew well that we were sinners.

Therefore,  
in following the command of Christ  
we call on the heavenly Father  
through Christ,  
our only Mediator,  
as we are taught by the Lord’s Prayer,  
being assured that we shall obtain  
all we ask of the Father  
in his name.

<sup>63</sup> 1 John 2:1

<sup>64</sup> Phil. 2:6-8

<sup>65</sup> Heb. 2:17

<sup>66</sup> Rom. 5:10

<sup>67</sup> Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3

<sup>68</sup> Matt. 28:18

<sup>69</sup> Heb. 2:17

<sup>70</sup> Heb. 2:18

<sup>71</sup> Heb. 4:14-16

<sup>72</sup> Heb. 10:19, 22

<sup>73</sup> Heb. 7:24-25

<sup>74</sup> John 14:6

#### **Article 27: The Holy Catholic Church**

We believe and confess  
one single catholic or universal church—  
a holy congregation and gathering  
of true Christian believers,  
awaiting their entire salvation in Jesus Christ  
being washed by his blood,  
and sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

This church has existed from the beginning of the world  
and will last until the end,  
as appears from the fact  
that Christ is eternal King  
who cannot be without subjects.

And this holy church is preserved by God  
against the rage of the whole world,  
even though for a time  
it may appear very small  
to human eyes—  
as though it were snuffed out.

For example,  
during the very dangerous time of Ahab  
the Lord preserved for himself seven thousand  
who did not bend their knees to Baal.<sup>75</sup>

And so this holy church  
is not confined,  
bound,  
or limited to a certain place or certain people.  
But it is spread and dispersed  
throughout the entire world,  
though still joined and united  
in heart and will,  
in one and the same Spirit,  
by the power of faith.

<sup>75</sup> 1 Kings 19:18

#### **Article 28: The Obligations of Church Members**

We believe that  
since this holy assembly and congregation  
is the gathering of those who are saved  
and there is no salvation apart from it,  
people ought not to withdraw from it,  
content to be by themselves,  
regardless of their status or condition.

But all people are obliged  
to join and unite with it,  
keeping the unity of the church  
by submitting to its instruction and discipline,  
by bending their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ,  
and by serving to build up one another,  
according to the gifts God has given them  
as members of each other  
in the same body.

And to preserve this unity more effectively,  
it is the duty of all believers,  
according to God's Word,  
to separate themselves  
from those who do not belong to the church,  
in order to join this assembly  
wherever God has established it,  
even if civil authorities and royal decrees forbid  
and death and physical punishment result.

And so,  
all who withdraw from the church  
or do not join it  
act contrary to God's ordinance.

#### **Article 29: The Marks of the True Church**

We believe that we ought to discern  
diligently and very carefully,  
by the Word of God,  
what is the true church—  
for all sects in the world today  
claim for themselves the name of "the church."

We are not speaking here of the company of hypocrites  
who are mixed among the good in the church  
and who nonetheless are not part of it,  
even though they are physically there.  
But we are speaking of distinguishing  
the body and fellowship of the true church  
from all sects that call themselves "the church."

The true church can be recognized  
if it has the following marks:

The church engages in the pure preaching  
of the gospel;  
it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments  
as Christ instituted them;  
it practices church discipline  
for correcting faults.

In short, it governs itself  
according to the pure Word of God,  
rejecting all things contrary to it  
and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head.  
By these marks one can be assured  
of recognizing the true church—  
and no one ought to be separated from it.

As for those who can belong to the church,  
we can recognize them by the distinguishing marks of Christians:  
namely by faith,  
and by their fleeing from sin and pursuing righteousness,  
once they have received the one and only Savior,  
Jesus Christ.

They love the true God and their neighbors,  
without turning to the right or left,  
and they crucify the flesh and its works.

Though great weakness remains in them,  
they fight against it  
by the Spirit  
all the days of their lives,  
appealing constantly  
to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of the Lord Jesus,  
in whom they have forgiveness of their sins,  
through faith in him.

As for the false church,  
it assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances  
than to the Word of God;  
it does not want to subject itself  
to the yoke of Christ;  
it does not administer the sacraments  
as Christ commanded in his Word;  
it rather adds to them or subtracts from them  
as it pleases;  
it bases itself on humans,  
more than on Jesus Christ;  
it persecutes those  
who live holy lives according to the Word of God  
and who rebuke it for its faults, greed, and idolatry.

These two churches  
are easy to recognize  
and thus to distinguish  
from each other.

### **Article 30: The Government of the Church**

We believe that this true church  
ought to be governed according to the spiritual order  
that our Lord has taught us in his Word.

There should be ministers or pastors  
to preach the Word of God  
and administer the sacraments.

There should also be elders and deacons,  
along with the pastors,  
to make up the council of the church.

By this means  
true religion is preserved;  
true doctrine is able to take its course;  
and evil people are corrected spiritually and held in check,  
so that also the poor  
and all the afflicted  
may be helped and comforted  
according to their need.

By this means  
everything will be done well  
and in good order  
in the church,  
when such persons are elected  
who are faithful  
and are chosen according to the rule  
that Paul gave to Timothy.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>76</sup> 1 Tim. 3

### **Article 31: The Officers of the Church**

We believe that  
ministers of the Word of God, elders, and deacons  
ought to be chosen to their offices  
by a legitimate election of the church,  
with prayer in the name of the Lord,  
and in good order,  
as the Word of God teaches.

So all must be careful  
not to push themselves forward improperly,  
but must wait for God's call,  
so that they may be assured of their calling  
and be certain that they are  
chosen by the Lord.

As for the ministers of the Word,  
they all have the same power and authority,  
no matter where they may be,  
since they are all servants of Jesus Christ,  
the only universal bishop,  
and the only head of the church.

Moreover,  
to keep God's holy order  
from being violated or despised,  
we say that everyone ought,  
as much as possible,  
to hold the ministers of the Word and elders of the church  
in special esteem,  
because of the work they do,  
and be at peace with them,  
without grumbling, quarreling, or fighting.

### **Article 32: The Order and Discipline of the Church**

We also believe that  
although it is useful and good  
for those who govern the churches  
to establish and set up  
a certain order among themselves  
for maintaining the body of the church,  
they ought always to guard against deviating  
from what Christ,  
our only Master,  
has ordained  
for us.

Therefore we reject all human innovations  
and all laws imposed on us,  
in our worship of God,  
which bind and force our consciences  
in any way.

So we accept only what is proper  
to maintain harmony and unity  
and to keep all in obedience  
to God.

To that end excommunication,  
with all it involves,  
according to the Word of God,  
is required.

**Article 33: The Sacraments**

We believe that our good God,  
mindful of our crudeness and weakness,  
has ordained sacraments for us  
to seal his promises in us,  
to pledge good will and grace toward us,  
and also to nourish and sustain our faith.

God has added these to the Word of the gospel  
to represent better to our external senses  
both what God enables us to understand by the Word  
and what he does inwardly in our hearts,  
confirming in us  
the salvation he imparts to us.

For they are visible signs and seals  
of something internal and invisible,  
by means of which God works in us  
through the power of the Holy Spirit.  
So they are not empty and hollow signs  
to fool and deceive us,  
for their truth is Jesus Christ,  
without whom they would be nothing.

Moreover,  
we are satisfied with the number of sacraments  
that Christ our Master has ordained for us.  
There are only two:  
the sacrament of baptism  
and the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ.

**Article 34: The Sacrament of Baptism**

We believe and confess that Jesus Christ,  
in whom the law is fulfilled,  
has by his shed blood  
put an end to every other shedding of blood,  
which anyone might do or wish to do  
in order to atone or satisfy for sins.

Having abolished circumcision,  
which was done with blood,  
Christ established in its place  
the sacrament of baptism.

By it we are received into God's church  
and set apart from all other people and alien religions,  
that we may wholly belong to him  
whose mark and sign we bear.  
Baptism also witnesses to us  
that God, being our gracious Father,  
will be our God forever.

Therefore Christ has commanded  
that all those who belong to him  
be baptized with pure water  
“in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>77</sup>

In this way God signifies to us  
that just as water washes away the dirt of the body  
when it is poured on us  
and also is seen on the bodies of those who are baptized  
when it is sprinkled on them,  
so too the blood of Christ does the same thing internally,  
in the soul,  
by the Holy Spirit.

It washes and cleanses it from its sins  
and transforms us from being the children of wrath  
into the children of God.

This does not happen by the physical water  
but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God,  
who is our Red Sea,  
through which we must pass  
to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh,  
who is the devil,  
and to enter the spiritual land  
of Canaan.

So ministers,  
as far as their work is concerned,  
give us the sacrament and what is visible,  
but our Lord gives what the sacrament signifies—  
namely the invisible gifts and graces;  
washing, purifying, and cleansing our souls  
of all filth and unrighteousness;  
renewing our hearts and filling them  
with all comfort;  
giving us true assurance  
of his fatherly goodness;  
clothing us with the “new self”  
and stripping off the “old self”  
with its practices.<sup>78</sup>

For this reason we believe that  
anyone who aspires to reach eternal life  
ought to be baptized only once  
without ever repeating it—  
for we cannot be born twice.  
Yet this baptism is profitable  
not only when the water is on us  
and when we receive it  
but throughout our  
entire lives.

For that reason we reject the error of the Anabaptists  
who are not content with a single baptism  
once received  
and also condemn the baptism  
of the children of believers.  
We believe our children ought to be baptized  
and sealed with the sign of the covenant,  
as little children were circumcised in Israel  
on the basis of the same promises  
made to our children.

And truly,  
Christ has shed his blood no less  
for washing the little children of believers  
than he did for adults.

Therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament  
of what Christ has done for them,  
just as the Lord commanded in the law that  
by offering a lamb for them  
the sacrament of the suffering and death of Christ  
would be granted them  
shortly after their birth.  
This was the sacrament of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore,  
baptism does for our children  
what circumcision did for the Jewish people.  
That is why Paul calls baptism  
the “circumcision of Christ.”<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Matt. 28:19

<sup>78</sup> Col.3:9

<sup>79</sup> Col. 2:11

### **Article 35: The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper**

We believe and confess  
that our Savior Jesus Christ  
has ordained and instituted the sacrament of the Holy Supper  
to nourish and sustain those  
who are already regenerated and ingrafted  
into his family,  
which is his church.

Now those who are born again have two lives in them.  
The one is physical and temporal—  
they have it from the moment of their first birth,  
and it is common to all.  
The other is spiritual and heavenly,  
and is given them in their second birth—  
it comes through the Word of the gospel  
in the communion of the body of Christ;  
and this life is common to God’s elect only.

Thus, to support the physical and earthly life  
God has prescribed for us  
an appropriate earthly and material bread,  
which is as common to all people  
as life itself.

But to maintain the spiritual and heavenly life  
that belongs to believers,  
God has sent a living bread  
that came down from heaven:  
namely Jesus Christ,  
who nourishes and maintains  
the spiritual life of believers  
when eaten—  
that is, when appropriated  
and received spiritually  
by faith.

To represent to us  
this spiritual and heavenly bread  
Christ has instituted  
an earthly and visible bread as the sacrament of his body  
and wine as the sacrament of his blood.  
He did this to testify to us that  
just as truly as we take and hold the sacrament in our hands

and eat and drink it with our mouths,  
by which our life is then sustained,  
so truly we receive into our souls,  
for our spiritual life,  
the true body and true blood of Christ,  
our only Savior.  
We receive these by faith,  
which is the hand and mouth of our souls.

Now it is certain  
that Jesus Christ did not prescribe  
his sacraments for us in vain,  
since he works in us all he represents  
by these holy signs,  
although the manner in which he does it  
goes beyond our understanding  
and is incomprehensible to us,  
just as the operation of God's Spirit  
is hidden and incomprehensible.

Yet we do not go wrong when we say  
that what is eaten is Christ's own natural body  
and what is drunk is his own blood—  
but the manner in which we eat it  
is not by the mouth, but by the Spirit  
through faith.

In that way Jesus Christ remains always seated  
at the right hand of God the Father  
in heaven—  
but he never refrains on that account  
to communicate himself to us  
through faith.

This banquet is a spiritual table  
at which Christ communicates himself to us  
with all his benefits.  
At that table he makes us enjoy himself  
as much as the merits of his suffering and death,  
as he nourishes, strengthens, and comforts  
our poor, desolate souls  
by the eating of his flesh,  
and relieves and renews them  
by the drinking of his blood.

Moreover,  
though the sacraments and what they signify are joined together,  
not all receive both of them.  
The wicked certainly take the sacrament,  
to their condemnation,  
but do not receive the truth of the sacrament,  
just as Judas and Simon the Sorcerer both indeed  
received the sacrament,  
but not Christ,  
who was signified by it.  
He is communicated only to believers.

Finally,  
with humility and reverence  
we receive the holy sacrament  
in the gathering of God's people,  
as we engage together,  
with thanksgiving,  
in a holy remembrance  
of the death of Christ our Savior,  
and as we thus confess  
our faith and Christian religion.

Therefore none should come to this table  
without examining themselves carefully,  
lest by eating this bread  
and drinking this cup  
they “eat and drink judgment against themselves.”<sup>80</sup>

In short,  
by the use of this holy sacrament  
we are moved to a fervent love  
of God and our neighbors.

Therefore we reject  
as desecrations of the sacraments  
all the muddled ideas and condemnable inventions  
that people have added and mixed in with them.  
And we say that we should be content with the procedure  
that Christ and the apostles have taught us  
and speak of these things  
as they have spoken of them.

<sup>80</sup> 1 Cor. 11:29

### **Article 36: The Civil Government**

We believe that  
because of the depravity of the human race,  
our good God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers.  
God wants the world to be governed by laws and policies  
so that human lawlessness may be restrained  
and that everything may be conducted in good order  
among human beings.

For that purpose God has placed the sword  
in the hands of the government,  
to punish evil people  
and protect the good.

*[RCA only\*]*

And the government’s task is not limited  
to caring for and watching over the public domain  
but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry,  
with a view to removing and destroying  
all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist;  
to promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ;  
and to furthering the preaching of the gospel everywhere;  
to the end that God may be honored and served by everyone,  
as he requires in his Word.]

*[CRC only\*\*]*

And being called in this manner  
to contribute to the advancement of a society  
that is pleasing to God,  
the civil rulers have the task,  
subject to God’s law,  
of removing every obstacle  
to the preaching of the gospel  
and to every aspect of divine worship.

They should do this  
while completely refraining from every tendency  
toward exercising absolute authority,  
and while functioning in the sphere entrusted to them,  
with the means belonging to them.

They should do it in order that  
the Word of God may have free course;  
the kingdom of Jesus Christ may make progress;  
and every anti-Christian power may be resisted.]

Moreover everyone,  
regardless of status, condition, or rank,  
must be subject to the government,  
and pay taxes,  
and hold its representatives in honor and respect,  
and obey them in all things that are not in conflict  
with God's Word,  
praying for them  
that the Lord may be willing to lead them  
in all their ways  
and that we may live a peaceful and quiet life  
in all piety and decency.

[RCA only\*\*\*

And on this matter we reject the Anabaptists, anarchists,  
and in general all those who want  
to reject the authorities and civil officers  
and to subvert justice  
by introducing common ownership of goods  
and corrupting the moral order  
that God has established among human beings.]

\* The Reformed Church in America retains the original full text, choosing to recognize that the confession was written within a historical context which may not accurately describe the situation that pertains today.  
\*\*Synod 1958 of the Christian Reformed Church replaced the aforementioned paragraph with the following three paragraphs (in brackets).  
\*\*\*The RCA retains this final paragraph of the original Article 36, choosing to recognize that the confession was written within a historical context which may not accurately describe the situation that pertains today. Synod 1985 of the CRC directed that this paragraph be taken from the body of the text and placed in a footnote.

### **Article 37: The Last Judgment**

Finally we believe,  
according to God's Word,  
that when the time appointed by the Lord is come  
(which is unknown to all creatures)  
and the number of the elect is complete,  
our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven,  
bodily and visibly,  
as he ascended,  
with great glory and majesty,  
to declare himself the judge  
of the living and the dead.  
He will burn this old world,  
in fire and flame,  
in order to cleanse it.

Then all human creatures will appear in person  
before the great judge—  
men, women, and children,  
who have lived from the beginning until the end  
of the world.

They will be summoned there  
“with the archangel's call  
and with the sound of God's trumpet.”<sup>81</sup>

For all those who died before that time  
will be raised from the earth,  
their spirits being joined and united  
with their own bodies  
in which they lived.  
And as for those who are still alive,  
they will not die like the others  
but will be changed “in the twinkling of an eye”  
from perishable to imperishable.<sup>82</sup>

Then the books (that is, the consciences) will be opened,  
and the dead will be judged  
according to the things they did in the world,<sup>83</sup>  
whether good or evil.  
Indeed, all people will give account  
of all the idle words they have spoken,<sup>84</sup>  
which the world regards  
as only playing games.  
And then the secrets and hypocrisies of all people  
will be publicly uncovered  
in the sight of all.

Therefore,  
with good reason  
the thought of this judgment  
is horrible and dreadful  
to wicked and evil people.  
But it is very pleasant  
and a great comfort  
to the righteous and elect,  
since their total redemption  
will then be accomplished.  
They will then receive the fruits of their labor  
and of the trouble they have suffered;  
their innocence will be openly recognized by all;  
and they will see the terrible vengeance  
that God will bring on the evil ones  
who tyrannized, oppressed, and tormented them  
in this world.

The evil ones will be convicted  
by the witness of their own consciences,  
and shall be made immortal—  
but only to be tormented  
in “the eternal fire  
prepared for the devil and his angels.”<sup>85</sup>

In contrast,  
the faithful and elect will be crowned  
with glory and honor.

The Son of God will profess their names<sup>86</sup>  
before God his Father and the holy and elect angels;  
all tears will be wiped from their eyes;<sup>87</sup>  
and their cause—  
at present condemned as heretical and evil  
by many judges and civil officers—  
will be acknowledged as the cause of the Son of God.

And as a gracious reward  
the Lord will make them possess a glory  
such as the human heart  
could never imagine.

So we look forward to that great day with longing  
in order to enjoy fully  
the promises of God in Christ Jesus,  
our Lord.

<sup>81</sup> 1 Thess. 4:16

<sup>82</sup> 1 Cor. 15:51-53

<sup>83</sup> Rev. 20:12

<sup>84</sup> Matt. 12:36

<sup>85</sup> Matt. 25:41

<sup>86</sup> Matt. 10:32

<sup>87</sup> Rev. 7:17