



## MERIDIAN CHURCH

### **Elder Confession of Faith**

(Based on the Belgic Confession)

#### **1. 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.

#### **2. 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 things of God, namely, His eternal power and deity. All these things are sufficient to convict men and leave them without excuse. Second, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word as far as is necessary for us in this life, to His glory and our salvation.

#### **3. 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. 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.

#### **4. The Authority of Holy Scripture**

We receive the Bible as holy, inspired, inerrant and infallible 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 contain the evidence thereof in themselves.

#### **5. The Sufficiency of Holy Scripture**

We believe that this Holy Scripture contains the will of God and that all that man must 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.

We may not consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with the divine Scriptures; nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and lighter than a breath. We therefore reject with all our heart whatever does not agree with this infallible rule.

## **6. 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 inter-trinitarian incommunicable properties; namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is the cause, origin, and beginning of all creation, visible and invisible. The Son is the Word, 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 has 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 these three, in one and the same essence, are equal in eternity. There is neither first nor last; for They are all three one, in truth, in power, in goodness, and in mercy.

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

Moreover, we must observe the distinct offices and works of these three Persons towards us. The Father is called our Creator by His power; the Son is our Savior and Redeemer by His blood; the Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier by His dwelling in our hearts. 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.

## **7. Jesus Christ is True and Eternal God**

We believe that Jesus Christ according to His divine nature is the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from eternity, not made, nor created—for then He would be a creature—but of the same essence with the Father, equally-eternal, who reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature, and is equal to Him in all things. He is the Son of God, not only from the time that He assumed our nature but from all eternity, as these testimonies, when 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; likewise the apostle Paul says 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. And so He is true, eternal God, the Almighty, whom we invoke, worship, and serve.

## **8. The Holy Spirit is 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 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 the Holy Scriptures teach us.

## **9. The Creation of all Things**

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

## **10. 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 direction. Yet God does not sin. 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 transgress any further than Scripture allows. But with humility and reverence we adore the just judgments 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, without transgressing these limits.

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

## **11. The Creation and Fall of Man and his Incapability of Doing What is Truly Good**

We believe that God created man of dust from the ground and He made and formed him after His own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy. His moral will could conform to the will of God in every respect. But, when man was in this high position, he did not appreciate it nor did he value his excellency. He transgressed the commandment of life which he had received; by this sin he broke away from God, who was his life; he corrupted all creation. By all this he subjected man liable to spiritual and physical death. Man became wicked and perverse, corrupt in all his ways.

## **12. Original and Indwelling Sin**

We believe that by the disobedience of Adam original sin has spread throughout the whole human race. It is a corruption of the entire nature of man and a hereditary evil found even in infants in their

mother's womb. It is, therefore, so vile and abominable in the sight of God that it is sufficient to condemn the human race. It is not abolished nor eradicated even by regeneration; for sin continually streams forth like water welling up from this woeful source.

### **13. Divine Election**

We believe that, when the entire offspring of Adam plunged into perdition and ruin by the transgression of the first man, God manifested Himself to be as He is: merciful and just. Merciful, in rescuing and saving from this perdition those whom in His eternal and unchangeable counsel He has elected in Jesus Christ our Lord by His pure goodness, without any consideration of their works. Just, in leaving the others in the fall and perdition into which they have plunged themselves.

### **14. The Rescue of Fallen Man**

We believe that, our gracious God, foreknowing that man would plunge himself into physical and spiritual death and make himself completely miserable, in marvelous wisdom and goodness, promised that He would give him His Son, born of woman, to bruise the head of the serpent and to undo the curse.

### **15. The Incarnation of the Son of God**

We confess, therefore, that God has fulfilled the promise He made to the fathers by the mouth of His holy prophets when, at the time appointed by Him, He sent into the world His only-begotten and eternal Son, who took the form of a servant and was born in the likeness of men. He truly assumed a real human nature, body and soul, with all its infirmities, without sin. He was conceived in the womb of a virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is in truth our Immanuel, that is, "God with us."

### **16. The Two Natures in the One Person of Christ**

We believe that by this conception the person of the Son of God is inseparably united and joined with the human nature, so that there are not two sons of God, nor two persons, but two natures united in one single person. Each nature retains its own distinct properties: His divine nature has always remained uncreated, without beginning of days or end of life, filling heaven and earth. His human nature has not lost its properties; it has beginning of days and remains created. It is finite and retains all the properties of a true body. Even though, by His resurrection, He has given immortality to His human nature, He has not changed its reality, since our salvation and resurrection also depend on the reality of His body.

However, these two natures are so closely united in one person that they were not even separated by His death. Therefore, what He, when dying, committed into the hands of His Father was a real human spirit that departed from His body. Meanwhile His divinity always remained united with His human nature, even when He was lying in the grave. And the divine nature always remained in Him.

For this reason we profess Him to be true God and true man: true God in order to conquer death by His power; and true man that He might die for us according to the infirmity of His flesh.

## **17. The Justice and Mercy of God in Christ**

We believe that God, who is perfectly merciful and just, sent His Son to assume the human nature in which disobedience had been committed, to make satisfaction in that same nature; and to bear the punishment for sin by His most bitter passion and death. God executed His holy justice on His Son when He laid our iniquity on Him, and poured out His goodness and mercy on us, who were guilty and worthy of damnation. Out of a most perfect love He gave His Son to die for us and He raised Him for our justification that through Him we might obtain immortality and life eternal.

## **18. The Propitiation of Christ our High Priest**

We believe that Jesus Christ was confirmed by an oath to be the High Priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. He presented Himself in our place before His Father, appeasing God's wrath by His full satisfaction, offering Himself on the tree of the cross, where He poured out His precious blood to purge away our sins.

We find comfort in His wounds and have no need to seek or invent any other means of reconciliation with God than this only sacrifice, once offered, by which the believers are perfected for all times.

## **19. Our Justification Through Faith in Christ**

We believe that the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts a true faith. This faith embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, makes Him our own, and does not seek anything besides Him. It follows that Christ alone is all we need for salvation. It is, therefore, a terrible blasphemy to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something else is needed besides Him; for the conclusion would then be that Christ is only half a Savior.

Therefore we say with Paul that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith apart from works of law. Meanwhile, strictly speaking, we do not mean that faith as such justifies us, for faith is only the instrument by which we embrace Christ our righteousness; He imputes to us all His merits and as many holy works as He has done for us and in our place.

## **20. Our Sanctification and Good Works**

We believe that true faith does not make man indifferent to living a good and holy life. On the contrary, without faith no one would ever do anything out of love for God, but only out of self-love or fear of being condemned. This faith induces man to apply himself to those works which God has commanded in His Word. These works, proceeding from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, since they are all sanctified by His grace. Nevertheless, they do not count toward our justification. For through faith in Christ we are justified, even before we do any good works. Otherwise they could not be good any more than the fruit of a tree can be good unless the tree itself is good.

Therefore we do good works, but not to merit salvation. For what could we merit? We are indebted to God, rather than He to us, for the good works we do, since it is He who is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Let us keep in mind what is written: "So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was

our duty.’ ” Meanwhile we believe that God rewards good works, but it is by His grace that He crowns those good works.

## **21. Christ, the Fulfillment of the Law**

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ceased with the coming of Christ, and that all shadows have been fulfilled, so that the use of them should be abolished among Christians. Yet their truth and substance remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled. However, we still use the Old Testament, both to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel and to order our life in all honor, according to God’s will and to His glory.

## **22. Christ’s Intercession**

We believe that we have no access to God except through the only Mediator and Advocate (meaning Jesus was sent by God, to stand between God and man and reconcile us) Jesus Christ the righteous. Remaining God, the Son became man, having both a divine and human nature, that men might have access to the divine majesty.

## **23. The Catholic Christian Church**

We believe and profess one catholic, that is one universal church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by His blood, and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

This church has existed from the beginning of the world and will be to the end. This holy church is preserved by God against the fury of the whole world, although for a while it may look very small and as extinct in the eyes of man.

Moreover, this holy church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world. However, it is joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith.

## **24. Everyone’s Duty to Join the Church**

We believe, since this holy assembly and congregation is the assembly of the redeemed and there is no salvation outside of it (for she was entrusted with the gospel), that no one ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself, no matter what his status or standing may be. But all and everyone are obliged to join and unite with a local church, maintaining the unity of the church. They must submit themselves to its instruction and discipline, bend their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and serve the edification of the brothers and sisters, according to the talents which God has given them as members of the same body.

To observe this more effectively, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate from those who do not belong to the church and to join this assembly wherever God has established it. They should do so even though the rulers and edicts of princes were against it, and death or physical punishment might follow.

All therefore who draw away from the church or fail to join it act contrary to the ordinance of God.

## **25. The Marks of the True Church**

We believe that we ought to discern diligently and very carefully from the Word of God what is the true church, for all sects which are in the world today claim for themselves the name of church. We are not speaking here of the hypocrites, who are mixed in a true church along with the good and yet are not part of the church, although they are outwardly in it. We are speaking of the body and the communion of a true church which must be distinguished from all sects that call themselves the church.

The true church is to be recognized by the following marks: It practices the true preaching of the gospel. It maintains the true administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them. It exercises church discipline for correcting and punishing sins. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head. Hereby a true church can certainly be known and no one has the right to separate from it.

Those who are of the church may be recognized by the marks of Christians. They believe in Jesus Christ the only Savior, flee from sin and pursue righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor without turning to the right or left, and crucify their flesh and its works. Although great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life. They appeal constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of Jesus Christ, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins through faith in Him.

## **26. The Government and Offices of the Church**

We believe that a true church must be governed according to the Spiritual order which our Lord has taught us in His Word. There should be overseers (elder/pastors) to preach and teach the Word of God and to oversee the sacraments. By these means they preserve the true religion; they see to it that the true doctrine takes its course, that evil men are disciplined in a spiritual way and are restrained. By these means everything will be done well and in good order when faithful men are chosen in agreement with the rule that the apostle Paul gave to Timothy

We believe there should be deacons to oversee the physical needs to the church. Through them the poor and all the afflicted are helped and comforted according to their need.

## **27. The Order and Discipline of the Church**

We believe that, although it is useful and good for those who govern the church to establish a certain order to maintain the body of the church, they must at all times watch that they do not deviate from what Christ, our only Master, has commanded. Therefore we reject all human inventions and laws introduced into the worship of God which bind and compel the consciences in any way. We accept only what is proper to preserve and promote harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God. To that end, discipline and excommunication ought to be exercised in agreement with the Word of God.

## **28. The Sacraments**

We believe that our gracious God, mindful of our insensitivity and weakness, has ordained sacraments to seal His promises to us and to be pledges of His good will and grace towards us. He did so to nourish and sustain our faith. He has added these to the Word of the gospel to represent better to our external senses both what He declares to us in His Word and what He does inwardly in our hearts. Thus He confirms to us the salvation which He imparts to us. Sacraments 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. Therefore the signs are not void and meaningless so that they deceive us. For Jesus Christ is their truth; apart from Him they would be nothing. Moreover, we are satisfied with the number of sacraments which Christ our Master has instituted for us, namely, two: the sacrament of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

## **29. The Sacrament of Baptism**

We believe and confess that Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of the law, has by His shed blood fulfilled every other shedding of blood that one could or would make anticipating expiation or satisfaction for sins. He has abolished circumcision, which involved blood, and has correspondingly instituted the sacrament of baptism. By baptism we are received into the church of God and set apart from all other peoples and false religions, to be entirely committed to Him whose mark and emblem we bear. This serves as a testimony to us that He will be our God and gracious Father for ever.

We believe God has commanded the church to baptize disciples, that is, those who profess repentance and faith in Christ by immersion, into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. By this He signifies to us our union is the death and resurrection of Christ our Lord, the washing and cleaning of our souls from sin, our regeneration, and our being a new creation.

Thus the church on their part gives us the sacrament and what is visible, because our Lord has given us what is signified by the sacrament, namely, the invisible gifts and grace. He washes, purges, and cleanses our souls of all filth and unrighteousness, renews our hearts and fills them with all comfort, gives us true assurance of His fatherly goodness, clothes us with the new nature, and takes away the old nature with all its works.

## **30. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper**

We believe and confess that our Savior Jesus Christ has instituted the sacrament of the the Lord's Supper to nourish and sustain those whom He has already regenerated and incorporated into His family, which is His church.

To represent to us the spiritual and heavenly bread, Christ has instituted earthly and visible bread as a sign of His body and wine as a sign of His blood. He testifies to us that as certainly as we take and hold these signs in our hands and eat and drink them with our mouths, by which our physical life is then sustained, so certainly do we receive by faith Christ broken and bloodied for the nourishment of our souls.

Finally, we receive this holy sacrament in the congregation of the people of God with humility and reverence as we together commemorate the death of Christ our Savior with thanksgiving and we confess our faith.

### **31. The Civil Government**

We believe that, our gracious God has ordained human government. He wants the world to be governed by laws and policies, in order that the licentiousness of men be restrained and that everything be conducted among them in good order. For that purpose He has placed the sword in the hand of the government to punish wrongdoers and to protect those who do what is good.

Moreover, everyone ought to be subject to the civil officers, pay taxes, hold them in honor and respect, and obey them in all things which do not disagree with the Word of God. We ought to pray for them, that God may direct them in all their ways and that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way.

### **32. The Last Judgment**

We believe that when the time, ordained by the Lord but unknown to all creatures, has come 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. He will declare Himself Judge of the living and the dead and set this old world afire in order to purge it. Then all people, men, women, and children, who ever lived, from the beginning of the world to the end, will appear in person before this great Judge.

The wicked will be convicted by the testimony of their own consciences and will become immortal, but only to be tormented in the eternal hell prepared for the devil and his angels. On the other hand, the elect will be crowned with glory and honor. The Son of God will acknowledge their names before God His Father. As a gracious reward, the Lord will cause them to possess such a glory as the heart of man could never conceive. Therefore we look forward to that great day with a great longing to enjoy to the full the promises of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. "Come, Lord Jesus!"