

THE NETHERLANDS CONFESSION

An introduction

I. The idea of creeds:

- A. A definition: Creeds are officially adopted declarations or confessions of a church or group of churches which set forth what such a church believes to be the truth of the Word of God.
1. We speak of these as creeds (from the Latin: credo) to express that this is what the church believes (credo means: to believe).
 2. Or these are called confessions, from the Latin (meaning: to express, to say with), because in them the church expresses what it believes to be the truths of Scripture.
 3. They are called standards either (a) in the sense of a flag which leads an army to battle, or (b) a norm or rule which guides in the determination of that which is right or wrong.
 4. They are called symbols, that is, a sign which represents the church and its belief overagainst the world, or overagainst other denominations of churches.

B. How creeds originate:

1. The truth of God's Word is always confessed within the church though it was not immediately clearly understood nor formulated.
2. Under various circumstances, particularly the rise of heresy and coming of persecution, specific Scriptural truths became more definitely formulated in the minds of the church.
3. When the time was ripe, these truths were contracted into brief statements and expressed in creeds.

C. The relation of creeds to Scripture:

1. Historically, creeds are reflections of specific Scriptural truths.
2. Creeds must be based upon Scripture and never placed on a par with it.
3. Creeds must always be judged in the light of the Word of God.
4. Churches are called to revise creeds in a proper way when it can be shown that these are in conflict with Scripture.

D. The value of creeds:

1. Serves to give a united expression of the faith of a church overagainst the world and other churches.
2. Serves to preserve the expression of the truth from generation to generation.
3. Serve as the basis upon which churches of like faith can unite.
4. Serves as a means of instruction to the covenant seed.

E. Our three forms of unity.

1. The Netherlands or Belgic Confession
2. The Heidelberg Catechism (chief author: Zacharias Ursinus; assisted by: Casper Olevianus; composed, and adopted by the Synod of Heidelberg in 1563)
3. The Canons of Dordt (Written by and adopted at the Great Synod of Dordt 1618-1619)

II. The Netherlands Confession:

A. Its composition:

1. It was first written in 1561 under the stress of great persecution. The first known publication date: 1566.
2. Its chief author was Guido De Bres (Guy De Bray); he had assistance and advice from Adrien de Saravia, H. Modetus, and G. Wingen.
3. Originally was composed in French; soon it was translated into Latin, German, Dutch.
4. It was composed as an answer to Roman Catholic civil authorities (who were conducting a terrible persecution under Philip II of Spain, son of Charles V) to prove that the Protestant Christians were truly faithful children of God and loyal subjects of the king.
5. It was approved and adopted by various synods and finally by the Great Synod of Dordt of 1618-1619.
6. It is called either "Netherlands" or the "Belgic" confession. It was written in what was then Southern Netherlands--now the country of Belgium--hence this variation in name.

B. The general division of this Confession:

1. It follows a dogmatical division.
2. In a general way, the confession can be divided as follows:
 - a. Doctrine concerning God (Theology) articles 1-11.
 - b. Doctrine concerning man (Anthropology) articles 12-17.

THE NETHERLANDS CONFESSION
An introduction (continued)

- c. Doctrine concerning Christ (Christology): articles 18-21.
- d. Doctrine concerning salvation (Soteriology): articles 22-26.
- e. Doctrine concerning the church (Ecclesiology): articles 27-36.
- f. Doctrine concerning the last things (Eschatology): article 37.

III. The author of the Netherlands Confession: Guido De Bres

- A. He was born at Mons, the capital of Hainault (a province of Southern Netherlands) in 1522 (or 1523).
- B. He was born and raised a Roman Catholic but was converted to Protestantism before his 25th year.
- C. He was forced to flee to England when persecution broke out in 1548 and was there ²⁶ 4 yrs.
- D. In 1556³ he was compelled to flee once more because of persecution--first to Frankfort and then to Switzerland (where he likely met with John Calvin).
- E. In 1559³ he returned to Southern Netherlands (Belgium) and served various churches (though often in disguise for safety's sake).
- F. In 1561³, when a new investigation of Protestantism began, De Bres wrote this confession to show that Protestants were not dangerous revolutionaries but that they held to God's Word and were subservient to earthly authorities.
- G. When De Bres was recognized as the author of this confession, his life was in constant danger. He was finally captured and hung at Valenciennes on May 31, 1567 (age: 45).

CLASS PREPARATION AND REVIEW:

Study materials: read through our three forms of unity.

1. Point out the differences in approach and contents in each of our three confessions.
2. Name other creeds used in other denominations.
3. Here follows a list of objections to creeds. Consider them and try to give answers.
 - a. Creeds are human productions--and Scripture must be considered sufficient.
 - b. Creeds force and bind the conscience. - Scripture binds, we can drop confession
 - c. Creeds create divisions. *not cause but expression of differences*
 - d. Creeds impede the development of the truth. *only if church has dead confessionalism.*
 - e. Creeds exclude new subjects and hold to out-of-date doctrines.
 - f. Creeds are too long or too broad. *only according to need*
 - g. Creeds encourage hypocrisy. *also re Scripture*
 - h. Creeds prevent progress and development. *prevents repetition of*
4. What is the value of creeds to the church?
5. How do creeds arise?
6. What is the relation of creeds to Scripture?
7. Give the author of the Netherlands Confession, his date of birth and death, and the date of his composition of this Confession.

*a. Symbol of development
b. Sin of individualism
do set aside work
of Spirit, past
c. Church must
Confess - a system
+ compendium of
truth
e. guard against
of the new
B. preserve past truths*

*- verse
- Westminster Confession 60+*

THE NETHERLANDS CONFESSION

Article 1

I. A personal confession.

- A. The Creed presents the Scriptural truths objectively.
- B. Yet, it remains a personal confession.
 - 1. The emphasis is upon what we all believe (that is, the Church).
 - 2. And: it is set forth as a sincere belief:
 - a. Not mere outward confession.
 - b. But it is both from the mouth and heart.
 - 1) The wicked, from the heart, deny God.
 - 2) But the regenerated believes and confesses.
 - a) Confession begins from the regenerated heart.
 - b) One regenerated also must and does confess with the mouth.

II. Our confession concerning the One God:

- A. We acknowledge that God is.
 - 1. Faith does not argue whether or not God exists; but faith believes.
 - 2. Faith holds this truth on the basis of God's own revelation to us.
 - a. It needs no philosophical argument to prove His existence (proofs, other than Scriptural, which have been given are: the Ontological Proof; the Cosmological Proof; the Teleological Proof; the Moral Proof). *I have idea of God that I can not obtain from my surroundings - hence, must be from His (reality) cause + effect*
 - b. But faith holds ^{to the revelation} of God's Word to us in Scripture.
- B. We believe concerning the Being of God:
 - 1. That God is ONE.
 - a. Heathen religions usually teach: polytheism (many gods); pantheism (all is god); atheism (no god).
 - b. We confess:
 - 1) There is one Infinite, Eternal, Almighty God (Deut. 6:4).
 - 2) He is one in Being (that He is Triune does not make Him to be three Gods).
 - 2. God is simple.
 - a. He is not composed of parts; He has no body; God is pure Spirit.
 - b. His perfections or attributes are not "parts" of God, but these are God. I Jn.1:5.
- C. The attributes of God:
 - 1. Incommunicable attributes, that is, those which are not nor can be reflected in the creature. *(see West. Catechism, Ques. 7.*
 - a. Eternal (Ps. 90:2): though completely different than time, it could be described as existence without beginning or end.
 - b. Incomprehensible (Job 11:7): that God is beyond any definition or limits.
 - c. Invisible - 3.b.
 - d. Immutable (I Tim. 1:17): unchangeable. - 3.c.
 - e. Infinite (I Kings 8:27): God is not limited by space or creation.
 - f. Almighty. - 3.g.
 - g. Other attributes: Omnipresence (Acts 17:27,28); Independence (Is. 40:13); Simplicity (Gal. 3:20);
 - 2. The communicable attributes, that is, those which in a limited measure can be reflected in the creature. *(d)*
 - a. Those belonging to the intellect (prophet): Knowledge (Rom. 11:33) wisdom (Acts 15:18).
 - b. Those belonging to His will (priest):
 - 1) Holiness (Rev. 4:8)
 - 2) Righteousness (Ps. 119:132).
 - 3) Goodness:
 - a) Love (John 3:16)
 - b) Grace (Acts 14:17)
 - c) Mercy (Ps. 25:6)
 - d) Longsuffering (II Peter 3:9)
 - c. Those belonging to His power (king): His sovereignty; His almighty power.

Comfort of these (3; e, f)

THE NETHERLANDS CONFESSION

Article 1

Worksheet

1. Supplementary reading: (First read questions below--then these recommended passages.)
 - a. Psalm 90
 - b. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 1, 9, 10
 - c. Canons of Dordt, I-A-11; II-A-1,9; III-IV-A-1
 - d. Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter II 1647
2. Proof-text to be committed to memory: (proof for the eternity of God) Psalm 90:2 "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."
3. Questions for study and consideration: (use the supplementary reading list above--but the questions are not necessarily limited to that material).
 - a. Try to find the meaning of the four "proofs" for the existence of God as given on the preceding page (II.A.2.a.). What reasons could be advanced for the failure of this "proof" to convince the unbeliever?
 - b. What are "anthropomorphisms"? (see a dictionary). Find several instances of these in Scripture.
 - c. If God is immutable, how would one explain Gen. 6:6-7 which speaks of the "repentance" of God?
 - d. What happened to the "communicable" attributes in man after the fall? *Canons III-IV-A-1*
 - e. What comfort does the confession and knowledge of the "incommunicable" attributes of God afford the Christian on this earth? *Canons I-A-11*
 - f. How do the attributes of God assure His punishment upon the wicked? *Canons II-A-1*
 - g. If God is almighty, can He do anything? (for instance: can God sin?)
 - h. List the attributes of God as given in the Westminster Confession. *Luc. 7,*
 - i. How great is the knowledge of God according to the Westminster Confession?

THE NETHERLANDS CONFESSION

Article 2

I. The knowledge of God.

A. This article emphasizes the knowledge of God.

1. Belief implies knowledge.
2. Knowledge is to be distinguished from comprehension.

Definition

- a. Comprehension suggests that the mind of man can fully grasp God within the understanding. But: the finite can never comprehend the Infinite.
- b. Knowledge is the understanding of God insofar as He has revealed Himself.

B. Knowledge is possible only through revelation. *Innate + acquired knowledge*

1. Human reason can never bring one to a true knowledge of God.
 - a. As the stream does not rise higher than its source, so the finite can not rise to the Infinite.
 - b. Denial of this is seen in the errors of human philosophy, especially Rationalism.
2. There must be Divine Revelation:
 - a. God must be pleased to reveal Himself.
 - b. God must reveal Himself in a form which man can grasp.
 - c. He must prepare men even for the reception of this revelation (by forming man in His image).

II. THE REVELATION OF GOD.

A. In creation:

1. It is God's purpose to reveal Himself in creation.
 - a. It is the very reason for creation--that God might reveal Himself.
 - b. Creation indeed serves as a "most elegant book."
 - 1) Creatures are as "letters" or "characters" comprising the whole of this book.
 - 2) This "book" can be read too--but one must carefully distinguish between the "book" and man's conclusions which are drawn from this "book."
2. What creation reveals of God:
 - a. It shows forth His power (Rom. 1:20).
 - b. It shows forth His Godhead or divinity (Rom. 1:20).
 - 1) Particularly is revealed His righteous wrath (Rom. 1:18).
 - 2) But also His glory (Ps. 19), providence (Ps. 145:15-16), etc. (2)
 - c. Creation serves in a picture as a revelation of the heavenly to come:
 - 1) The colors (red, white, black, etc.), numbers (1,3,4,7,10, 12, etc.), and various creatures (sun, sheep, bread, water, etc.) do this.
 - 2) Though we must add that these things can be understood only in light of Scripture
3. Man's understanding of this revelation:
 - a. It is sufficient to leave him without excuse (Rom. 1:20). (1)
 - 1) What natural man beholds in creation does not convince him; but on the contrary, his heart is hardened so that he holds this truth under in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18-22).
 - 2) But this revelation is sufficient to convince man and leaves him without excuse. (9) (10)
 - b. Why man does not understand and believe what creation reveals: (3) (4)
 - 1) Adam could understand in the state of perfection; he could see all the "characters" and their interrelationship in the whole of the "book."
 - 2) But now man can not and will not believe: (5) (6) (11)
 - a) Creation itself is affected by sin and its curse.
 - b) And man in his totally depraved state does not read aright in this "book".
 - 1/ He denies the existence of God.
 - 2/ And he attributes the work of creation to chance (evolution).

B. In Scripture: (8)

1. Scripture reveals "more clearly and fully," i.e., it shows the love of God toward His people in Jesus Christ. It shows the only way of salvation.
2. Its relation to the revelation of God in creation:
 - a. It is not a differing or contradictory revelation, but the same--only it comes clearly in human language and specifically relates of salvation in Christ.
 - b. Scripture is not a "textbook," nevertheless, its revelation must be the guide for our understanding of creation.

(7)

(12)

THE NETHERLANDS CONFESSION
Article 2
Worksheet

A. Supplementary reading: (First read questions below--then these recommended passages.)

1. Psalm 19; Romans 1 and 2
2. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 9, 10.
3. Canons of Dordt, I:A:4; III-IV:A:4,5
4. Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter I, paragraph I.

B. Prooftext to be committed to memory: (proof for revelation in creation--and natural man's accountability before God) Romans 1:20 "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

C. Questions for study and consideration: (use supplementary reading list above--but the questions are not necessarily limited to that material.)

1. What do the "light of nature" and the "works of creation" manifest of God? *Q.2* *W.C.I. P1* ~~II-IV-A-4~~

2. How does the "firmament show his handiwork?" *Ps. 19:1 ff.*

3. Is revelation in nature a matter of "common grace?" *cf III-IV, A. 4*

4. What must we say of the "glimmerings of natural light" remaining in man since the fall?

5. What does man do with the revelation of God in creation? *III-IV A-4*
(common grace)

6. How must we understand Romans 2:4? 2:14?

7. What assurance does the Christian have in the confession that God of nothing made heaven and earth and upholds and governs the same? *L.D. 9, 10*

8. Why was Scripture committed to writing? *W.C. I P1*

9. In what way is the "work of the law" written in the heart of the heathen? *(common grace?)*
Rom. 2:15, 14

10. What does the revelation of God's law do to man? *III-IV-A-5*

11. Upon whom does the wrath of God abide?

12. What does Quakerism teach in opposition to this article of the confession?

THE NETHERLANDS CONFESSION

Article 3

I. The Revelation through God's Word.

A. By tradition.

1. God revealed Himself in many ways.
 - a. Directly; through dreams, visions, trances; by angels; in signs and wonders.
 - b. Through His Son, Jesus Christ.
2. Nor was all of this revelation recorded.
 - a. More was revealed than was recorded (Jn. 20:30,31; 21:25).
 - b. Revelation was passed on through tradition.
 - 1) This was true til the days of Moses; it was possible because of the long life of the saints of that day.
 - 2) Now we need the Word written.

B. In written form: Holy Scripture.

1. This is the Word of God
 - a. Many deny this:
 - 1) Roman Catholics deny the sufficiency and sole authority of Scripture.
 - 2) Modernism denies that the Bible is the Word of God.
 - a) They speak of the Word of God in the Bible.
 - b) This is their idea of the "human factor" of Scripture.
 - 3) This is questioned even in orthodox circles:
 - a) The first chapters of Genesis are denied to be literally true.
 - b) Scientific and historical errors are "discovered" in Scripture.
 - c) Differences are discovered in Scriptural passages; lack of harmony.
 - b. We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God by faith.
 - 1) One can never "prove this to the satisfaction of natural man and human reason.
 - 2) But the Christian believes by faith through the testimony of the Spirit.
2. God is the Author of Scripture.
 - a. He uses men as instruments--but the product is wholly His Word.
 - b. And this we need for knowledge and assurance of our salvation.

II. The inspiration of Scripture.

A. This treats the subject of how God recorded His Word for us.

1. II Tim. 3:16 emphasizes that Scripture is "inspired," literally: "God-breathed."
 - a. The text uses the singular "all Scripture"--allowing for no exception.
 - b. Scripture is all the result of God's "in-breathing", hence, infallible.
2. I Pet. 1:20-21. Prophecy is not of "private interpretation" but holy men were moved by the Spirit.
 - a. The Bible presents the facts and explains them. This explanation is not private interpretation of the writer, but is also itself inspired revelation of God.
 - b. Thus emphasizes that prophecy is not by the will of man but of God.

B. Proper understanding of inspiration:

1. Negatively (views which desire to maintain a "human factor" in Scripture).
 - a. Mechanical inspiration--presenting the human "authors" as dictation machines.
 - b. Dynamic inspiration--The Spirit gave the thoughts, the writers expressed these in their own words and style.
 - c. Dualistic inspiration--That the Spirit simply preserved men from writing the error.
2. Positively:
 - a. Organic inspiration: *Primary Secondary Authors*
 - 1) God determined all of Scripture eternally with Christ as its center.
 - 2) God likewise determined the writers of Scripture eternally.
 - 3) In time God prepared His ordained writers from birth on to prepare them for their task of writing His Word.
 - 4) Thus Scripture is recorded in the distinctive style of the specific writer--yet is wholly God's Word.
 - b. Plenary inspiration: the whole *full* and all of its parts is inspired.
 - c. Verbal inspiration: the words and the style is also part of inspiration.
 - d. Graphic inspiration: God's Word is written for the sake of the Church in the evil day.

Prophecy
Infallibility
Inerrancy
Inspiration

THE NETHERLANDS CONFESSION

Article 3

Worksheet

- A. Supplementary reading: (First read the questions below--then these recommended passages.)
1. Genesis 3; II Peter 1
 2. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day VI; question 19
 3. Canons of Dordt, V:B:5
 4. Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter I
- B. Proof-text to be committed to memory (Proof for inspiration):
II Peter 1:21 "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."
- C. Questions for study and consideration: (use supplementary reading list above--but the questions are not necessarily limited to that material.)
1. Was the gospel published already in Paradise? Explain.
 2. How is the gospel represented in the sacrifices and ceremonies of the law?
 3. Give reasons why Scripture was committed to writing? *W.C. ques 6*
 4. Why does Peter believe he is called to record Scripture? *II Pet 1, to know (promises) (4) to remember + not follow folks*
 5. Why is it so important to insist upon the infallibility of Scripture?
 6. According to the Westminster Confession, from what is derived the Authority of Scripture? *23*
 7. In what way is prophecy a "more sure word?" *II Pet. 1:19*
 8. Criticize the statement: The Word of God is contained in the Bible.
 9. Are the words of Genesis 3:4b and 5 also the inspired Word of God?
 10. Does the Christian need some special revelation apart from Scripture to give him the assurance of perseverance in this life? Explain.
 11. What is the infallible rule for Scriptural interpretation?

THE NETHERLANDS CONFESSION

Article 7

Worksheet

A. Supplementary reading:

1. Check the passages of Scripture listed in the outline.
2. Westminster Larger Catechism, questions 3,4.

B. Proof-text (sufficiency of the Word of God): Deut. 12:32 "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it."

C. Questions for study and consideration:

1. What, if anything, is the relationship between "sufficiency" and "perspicuity" of Scripture?
2. The article states that Holy Scriptures the will of God concerning what man ought to believe UNTO SALVATION.
 - a. Does this imply that other things mentioned in Scripture, unrelated to salvation, is not "sufficient" for us?
 - b. Is it not true that Scripture is then only binding for us as far as the doctrine of salvation is concerned?
 - c. Does it not follow that Scripture is not authoritative in matters historical or scientific?
3. How are we to answer the Roman Catholics concerning their "proofs" for tradition?
4. How do we explain our church activities which are based on tradition (Christmas)?
5. How is the sufficiency of Scripture being denied today?
6. See if you can find out anything on the "Book of Mormon".
7. Find the passage mentioned in the article which quotes what "the apostle Paul saith."
Gal. 1:8
8. Can you find other passages of Scripture which speak of, and warn against, adding or taking away from a certain book? Does this apply only to that one book--or all of Scripture? *Rev. 22:18-19*
9. Where is the last sentence of the article quoted from? *I Jn. 4:1*
II Jn. 10