



The French Confession

A confession of faith
fashioned in common accord
by the churches
dispersed in France (1559)

We believe and confess that there is only one God, who is one indivisible essence: spiritual, eternal, invisible, immutable, infinite, incomprehensible, and ineffable. God, who can do all things, is all-wise, all-good, all-just, and all-merciful.

2. God reveals himself to humankind. First, God reveals himself through his works, in creation and through its preservation and guidance. Second, and more clearly, God reveals himself through his Word, first revealed through the spoken word, and later committed to writing in the books we call Holy Scripture.
3. Holy Scripture is composed of the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments: the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; then Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the first and second books of Samuel, the first and second books of the Kings, the first and second books of the Chronicles (also called Paralipomenon), the first book of Ezra; then Nehemiah, the book of Esther, Job, the Psalms of David, the Proverbs or Maxims of Solomon, the book of Ecclesiastes (called "the Preacher"), the Song of Solomon; then Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi; then the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, according to St. Mark, according to St. Luke, and according to St. John; then the second book of St. Luke, otherwise called the Acts of the Apostles; then the Epistles of St. Paul: one to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, one to the Galatians, one to the Ephesians, one to the Philippians, one to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, one to Titus, one to Philemon; then the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistle of St. James, the first and second Epistles of St. Peter, the first, second and third Epistles of St. John, the Epistle of St. Jude; and then the Apocalypse, or Revelation of St. John.
4. We acknowledge these books as canonical, the most certain rule of our faith. Our recognition comes less from the common agreement and consent of the church than through the witness and inner persuasion of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit leads us to distinguish the books of Scripture from other ecclesiastical books that may be useful, but upon which no article of faith can be based.

5. We believe that the word contained in the books of Scripture has come from God, receiving its authority from God alone and not from humans. As such, this word is the rule of all truth, containing everything necessary for the service of God and for our salvation. Thus, neither humans nor angels are permitted to add to it, subtract from it, or change it in any way. It follows that no authority may be set above Holy Scripture: not antiquity, or tradition, or majority opinion, or human wisdom; not judgments, or pronouncements, or edicts, or decrees, or councils; not visions or signs. On the contrary, everything must be examined, measured, and reformed according to Scripture. It is because they conform to the Word of God that we confess the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.
6. Holy Scripture teaches us that in this one indivisible divine essence whom we confess, there are three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is the first cause, the principle and origin of all things. The Son is God's eternal Word and Wisdom. The Holy Spirit is God's mighty and efficacious power. The Son is eternally begotten from the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from both. The three Persons are not confused, but distinct; they are not divided, but of the same essence, eternity, power, and equality. Thus, we profess what the ancient councils determined, and we despise all sects and heresies that were rejected by holy doctors such as Hilary, Athanasius, Ambrose, and Cyril.
7. We believe that God, in three co-working Persons, created all things by his incomprehensible power, wisdom, and goodness: heaven, earth, and everything in them, as well as invisible spirits, some of whom have stumbled and fallen into perdition, while others have remained obedient. The former, corrupted in evil, are enemies of all goodness and thus enemies of the whole church. The latter, preserved by the grace of God, are servants who glorify God's name and minister to the salvation of the elect.
8. We believe that God has created all things, and that God also governs and guides all things, disposing and ordering everything that happens in the world according to his will. Yet God is not the author of evil, nor can blame for evil be attributed to God. Rather, God's will is the sovereign and infallible measure

of all justice and equity. Even so, God has marvelous means for making use of devils and evil doers, transforming into good the evil they do and for which they remain guilty. Thus, confessing that nothing happens outside the providence of God, we remain humble before the secrets that are hidden from us, not questioning what is beyond our understanding. Instead, we avail ourselves of what is shown to us in Holy Scripture for our peace and security: that God, who is almighty over all things, watches over us with such parental care that not a hair will fall from our head apart from his will. Thus, God restrains the devils and all our enemies so that they can cause us no injury without God's permission.

9. We believe that humankind was created pure and whole, conformed to the image of God. By its own fault humankind fell from the grace it had received, and thus is alienated from God who is the fountain of justice and all goodness. Human nature is wholly corrupted. Blind in spirit and depraved in heart, humankind has lost all integrity; not a trace remains. Humanity retains some capacity to distinguish between good and evil, but in seeking God even this light is turned to darkness. Therefore people cannot approach God by their own intelligence and reason. The human will may inspire people to a range of actions, but it remains utterly captive to sin, so that humankind has no freedom except that which God gives.
10. We believe that Adam's posterity is infected with the contagion of original sin. It is an inherited evil and not just a matter of imitation as the detestable Pelagians erroneously claim. It is not necessary to inquire how sin passes from generation to generation; it is enough to acknowledge that what God gave Adam was not for Adam alone, but for all his posterity. Thus, stripped of all good in Adam we stagger in utter misery and are accursed.
11. We believe that this evil is truly sin, that God regards it as such, and that it is sufficient to condemn the whole human race, including infants newborn from their mothers' wombs. Guilt for sin endures after baptism, even though condemnation for sin is abolished for the children of God by God's goodness, freely bestowed. Furthermore, we affirm that perversity continues to produce fruits of malice and rebellion throughout life, so that even the holiest people who resist sin

with all their strength are not immune to the stain of weaknesses and faults.

12. We believe that from the general corruption and condemnation into which all are plunged, God rescues those who are elect in our Lord Jesus Christ according to God's eternal and unchanging counsel. All this is by God's goodness and mercy alone, without regard to anyone's works, that the riches of God's mercy shine forth in them. Others, however, are left in corruption and condemnation in order to demonstrate God's justice in them. In reality, those who are rescued are no better than those who are left in corruption and condemnation. God distinguishes between them according to his eternal counsel, determined in Jesus Christ before the creation of the world. We cannot attain such a benefit by our virtue, for by nature we do not have a single good impulse, affection, or thought, unless God has first acted to incline us to it.
13. We believe that everything required for our salvation has been offered and communicated to us in Jesus Christ. He is given to us for our salvation, becoming for us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption [1 Cor. 1:30], so that if we refuse Christ, we renounce the mercy of the Father in whom we have our only refuge.
14. We believe that Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God and God's eternal Son, clothed himself in our flesh, so that he is both God and human in one person. He is like us in every way, suffering in body and in soul, except that he remained pure from all stain of sin. As to his humanity, he was truly the seed of Abraham and David, although he was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus we abhor the heresies that have troubled the church from antiquity, most notably the diabolical imaginations of Servetus, who attributed to Jesus Christ a phantom divinity and conceived Christ as the ideal and pattern of all things. He mixed and destroyed both divine and human natures by calling Christ the merely figurative Son of God and imagining that Christ's body was composed of three uncreated elements.
15. We believe that the two natures are truly and inseparably conjoined and united in one person, Jesus Christ, with each nature retaining its distinct character. Thus, in this union the divine nature retained its character, remaining uncreated

and infinite, filling all things. So also, the human nature remained finite, having material form and character. Even though Jesus Christ gave immortality to his body in rising from the dead, he did not take away the truth of its human nature. Thus we think of the divinity of Jesus Christ in such a way that we do not strip him of his humanity.

16. We believe that in sending the Son, God's sole intention was to show us love and immeasurable goodness. And we believe that in giving the Son to die and raising him from the dead, God's sole intention was to accomplish all righteousness and secure eternal life for us.
17. We believe that we are reconciled to God through the unique sacrifice offered by the Lord Jesus on the cross. By that sacrifice we are justified before God, for we cannot be acceptable to God or receive adoption unless God pardons our sins and covers them over. So we confess that Jesus Christ is our full and perfect cleansing. In his death we are fully justified, acquitted of the offenses and iniquities of which we are guilty. We can be delivered by this remedy only.
18. We believe that the foundation of our justification is the remission of our sins. (In this, says David, we find our only happiness.) This is why we reject all other means of seeking justification before God. Rather than presuming our own virtue or merit, we rely solely on the obedience of Jesus Christ, which is ascribed to us for the covering over of our sins as well as for granting us favor before God. Furthermore, we know that if we were to refuse this foundation, even partially, we would find no peace, but would always be anxious and troubled. We will never have peace with God unless we resolve to be loved in Jesus Christ, for of ourselves we deserve only to be hated.
19. We believe that by our justification in Christ we have both the freedom and the privilege to call upon God, trusting that God will show himself to be our Father. Since we have no access to the Father except through this Mediator, our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ will be heard as we receive life from the one who is our sovereign.
20. We believe that we are justified by faith alone, for it is written that Christ suffered in order to gain our salvation, so that whoever believes in him will not perish. All the promises of

life, given to us in Jesus Christ, are accommodated to our need. We experience their fulfillment when we accept them, and, since we are assured by the mouth of God, we certainly are not deceived. Therefore, our justification through faith depends wholly upon the free promises through which God declares and affirms that he loves us.

21. We believe that we are illuminated in faith by the unfathomable grace of the Holy Spirit. Because God imparts this gracious and distinctive gift to whomever he chooses, the faithful have no cause to glorify themselves. Instead, the faithful are doubly indebted that they have been chosen rather than others. Moreover, faith is not given to the elect merely to introduce them to the way of righteousness, but to enable them to persevere in faith to the end. God begins the way, and God brings it to completion.
22. We believe that we are reborn to new life by faith, for we are slaves to sin by nature. By faith we receive grace to live holy lives in awe and reverence for God, for we receive what the gospel promises when God gives us his Holy Spirit. So faith does not cool our desire for good and holy living, but rather engenders and excites it in us, leading naturally to good works. It is God who regenerates us in order to accomplish our salvation, reforming us to do good through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore we confess that our good works cannot be displayed as credits for our justification or qualifications for our adoption as God's children. We would always be adrift in doubt and anxiety if our consciences were not anchored in the satisfaction by which Jesus Christ has acquitted us.
23. We believe that the ceremonies of the law ended at the coming of Jesus Christ, but although the rites are no longer in use, the substance and truth of the law endure in the one who has fulfilled the law. Moreover, we need the law and the prophets for the ordering of our lives as well as for our confirmation in the gospel's promises.
24. We believe that Jesus Christ has been given to us as our only advocate, and that he commands us to pray to the Father in his name. Because we must not pray differently from God's teaching through the word, everything that people have imagined about the intercession of the saints is nothing more than

abuse and deception from Satan, designed to lead persons from the form of true worship. We also reject all the various means by which people presume to be redeemed before God, disparaging the sacrificial suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Finally, we consider purgatory to be an illusion found in the same marketplace as monastic vows, pilgrimages, prohibition of marriage and eating of meat, ceremonial days, private confession, indulgences, and everything else that people imagine will merit grace and salvation. We reject these things not only because of their false understanding of merit, but also because these are human inventions that burden consciences.

25. Since we enjoy Jesus Christ only through the gospel, we believe that the order of the church, established by Christ's authority, should be sacred and inviolable. Therefore, the church cannot exist without pastors, who are charged with teaching. When they are properly called and faithfully exercise their office, we should honor them and listen to them respectfully. Even though God does not need the aid of such subordinate means, it pleases God to sustain us in this way. Thus we detest all fanatics who wish to wipe out, as much as they can, the ministry, the preaching of the word of God, and the sacraments.
26. We believe that no one should withdraw from the church, satisfied to be solitary. The whole community must preserve and sustain the unity of the church, submitting to common instruction and to the yoke of Christ. This should happen wherever Christ has established a true church order, even if the civil authority and its laws are hostile. All who do not participate in the church, or who separate themselves from it, deny the order established by God.
27. At the same time we believe that it is appropriate to discern, carefully and prudently, what is the true church, for this designation has been abused too often. Following the word of God then, we say that the faithful community covenants to follow the word of God and the pure religion which derives from it, benefiting from this throughout its life. The faithful community advances constantly, growing and being confirmed in reverent awe of God. As the community strives to remain faithful, all within it are constantly in need of the remission of sins. Although we do not deny that some hypo-

crites and reprobates are found among the faithful, their malice cannot remove the title "Church."

28. In this conviction we declare that where the word of God is not received and its authority is not acknowledged, and where there is no use of the sacraments, we can conclude that there is no church, properly speaking. Thus we condemn the assemblies of the papacy where the pure truth of God is banished, where the sacraments are corrupted, bastardized, falsified, or annihilated altogether, and where idolatries and superstitions hold sway. We hold that all who engage in these acts by taking communion there separate and cut themselves off from the body of Jesus Christ. Yet because some small trace of the church continues in the papacy, and because the substance of baptism remains there (for the efficacy of baptism does not depend on the one who administers the sacrament), we confess that those who have been baptized have no need of a second baptism. However, because of corruptions, people cannot present children in those assemblies without polluting themselves.
29. As for the true church, we believe that it ought to be governed in accordance with the order established by our Lord Jesus Christ, having pastors, elders, and deacons. In this way, pure doctrine can be maintained, vices can be corrected and suppressed, the poor and afflicted can be helped in their need, assemblies can be gathered in the name of God, and both great and small can be edified.
30. We believe that all true pastors, wherever they may be, have equal power and authority in the exercise of their office under one head, the only sovereign and universal bishop, Jesus Christ. For the same reason, no church should presume to claim authority or sovereignty over another.
31. We believe that no persons should presume to govern the church on their own authority, for church officers should be chosen by election whenever possible and as God permits. We add one exception: from time to time, even in our own time, the state of the church has been so broken that God has raised leaders in an extraordinary fashion in order to rebuild a ruined and desolate church. Nevertheless, we believe that this rule should bind us: all pastors, elders, and deacons should be called to their offices.

32. We believe that it is good and useful for all who are elected church officers to determine together the form of governance for the whole body, although they must not depart from anything ordained by our Lord Jesus Christ. This does not rule out distinctive local regulations required by particular circumstances.
33. However, we rule out all human innovations and all laws that bind consciences under the pretext of service to God. We welcome only what nourishes concord, holding everyone in obedience, from the greatest to the least. Thus we must heed what our Lord has declared concerning excommunication and its consequences, approving it and affirming its necessity.
34. We believe that the sacraments are joined to the Word so that it may be more fully confirmed. The sacraments are pledges to us and seals of God's grace, giving needed aid and comfort to our faith because of our weakness and immaturity. We believe that the sacraments are outward signs through which God works in the truth of his Spirit, and we know that what they signify is not in vain. At the same time we hold that their substance and power are in Jesus Christ alone; apart from him, they are nothing more than shadow and smoke.
35. We acknowledge only two sacraments, common to the whole church. The first, Baptism, is given to us as the pledge of our adoption. In Baptism we are grafted into the body of Christ, washed and cleansed by his blood, and renewed in holiness of life by his Spirit. Although we are baptized only once, the benefit it signifies lasts through life and death, so that we have an enduring testimony that Jesus Christ will be our justification and sanctification forever. Baptism is a sacrament of faith and repentance, yet because God receives little children into his church together with their parents, we declare under the authority of Jesus Christ that little children born of the faithful ought to be baptized.
36. We confess that the holy Supper of the Lord is a testimony of our unity with Jesus Christ. He died only once and was raised for our sake, yet we are truly fed and are nourished by his flesh and blood. Thus we are made one with him and his life is communicated to us. Although he is in heaven until he comes to judge the world, we believe that he gives us life and

nourishes us with the substance of his body and his blood. This takes place in the unfathomable and incomprehensible power of his Spirit. We maintain that this is done spiritually, which does not mean that we substitute imagination or fantasy for reality and truth, but that the greatness of this mystery exceeds the capacities of our minds and the order of nature. In short, because it is heavenly, it can only be apprehended by faith.

37. We believe that God truly and effectively gives us what is represented in the Lord's Supper and in Baptism, and that the signs are united with the true possession and benefit of all they present. Thus, all who bring the receptacle of pure faith to the sacred table of Christ truly receive what the signs signify. The body and blood of Jesus Christ are food and drink for the soul just as bread and wine are nourishment for the body.
38. We maintain that even though water is an ordinary substance, it testifies truly to the inner cleansing of our souls by the blood of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. We maintain that the bread and the wine given to us in the Lord's Supper serve truly as spiritual nourishment for us, for they show visibly that the flesh of Jesus Christ is our food and his blood our drink. Thus we spurn the fanatics and sacramentarians who will not receive these signs and seals even though Jesus Christ said, "This is my body and this cup is my blood."
39. We believe that God wills the world to be governed by laws and policies that provide restraints on disordered worldly appetites. Therefore, God has established kingdoms and republics and all other sorts of principalities, hereditary or otherwise, as well as everything pertaining to the state of justice. Because God wills to be recognized as their author he has placed the sword in the hands of the civil authorities to suppress sins committed against the first table of the Law as well as the second. For God's sake, then, we must not only submit to the authority of superiors but also respect and honor them as God's deputies and officials, commissioned to exercise a legitimate and holy charge.

40. We hold, then, that we must obey laws and statutes; pay customs, taxes and other duties; and submit to authority willingly and freely, even if the rulers are infidels, provided that the sovereign rule of God is preserved. Therefore, we despise those who reject authority, set up communes, hold goods in common, and overturn the order of justice.

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