

Welcome to a
**REFORMED
CHURCH**

A GUIDE FOR PILGRIMS

DANIEL R. HYDE



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To Joel Beeke

A father in the faith, a friend in the Lord, and a living example of what it means to be sober-minded, dignified, and self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness (Titus 2:2)

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ABBREVIATIONS

BC—Belgic Confession

Calvin, *Institutes*—John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, Vols. XX–XXI (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960).

CD—Canons of Dort

HC—Heidelberg Catechism

WCF—Westminster Confession of Faith

WLC—Westminster Larger Catechism

WSC—Westminster Shorter Catechism

One ROOTS: OUR HISTORY

*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.*¹

—George Santayana (1863–1952)

*To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child.*²

—Cicero (106–43 BC)

I want to begin with a little history lesson. I know, I know, we enlightened moderns are not much into history; for most of us, it's a dry subject we hated in school. We care about the here and now, and are busy planning our futures. We think our time is the most important time in human history. Because of this, we are guilty of what Oxford University Professor C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) described as “chronological snobbery.”³

This “snobbery” presents us with very real dangers. Since we live in a time when history is easily forgotten at best or dismissed as irrelevant at worst, we need to heed the words of the Spanish-American

philosopher George Santayana and the Roman philosopher Cicero, as quoted above. It is important for us to take these words to heart, for if we do not know our past, we will suffer its tragic mistakes again and again, remaining like little children forever.

Scripture speaks in this way, as well. After Jeremiah prophesied the coming destruction of Jerusalem because of the rebelliousness of the people of God, he spoke of a way of escape: “Thus says the LORD: ‘Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls’” (Jer. 6:16). The faithful were to look backward to the “ancient paths,” to the history of what God had done and said to His people in the past. Likewise, the Psalms abound in calls for God to work in the present because of what He did in the past. For instance, “O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old” (Ps. 44:1; cf. Pss. 78, 105, 106, 107). History, then, is to guide the church in the present.

My purpose in this chapter is to help you appreciate that Reformed churches did not come out of nowhere. As I noted in the introduction, Reformed churches are Christian, Protestant, and Reformed. They are *Christian* because they trace their roots to the early church of the centuries after the apostles died (100–500). The Reformed churches—also known as “Calvinist” churches, after the theologian and pastor of Geneva, Switzerland, John Calvin (1509–1564)—are *Protestant* churches because, like the “Lutheran” churches—after the theologian and pastor in Wittenberg, Germany, Martin Luther (1483–1546)—they trace their roots to the sixteenth-century “Protestant Reformation” of the Roman Catholic Church in Europe.⁴ They are *Reformed* churches because they emphasize certain doctrines that have a strong historical basis but are often neglected today.

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

Reformed churches are Christian churches because they trace their roots to the early Christian church.⁵ Like the early church, Reformed churches receive the Bible as the Word of God and believe it as such. Because of this, Reformed churches do not teach novel doctrines. What Athanasius (296–373) said of the books of the Bible is what we say about them: “These are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these.”⁶

A part of joining with the Christian church and standing on the Word of God is confessing what are known as the ecumenical creeds of the ancient church—the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian creeds, as well as the Definition of Chalcedon. The Belgic Confession (1561) speaks of these, saying, “we do willingly receive the three creeds, namely, that of the Apostles, of Nice, and of Athanasius; likewise that which, conformable thereunto, is agreed upon by the ancient fathers” (Art. 9). Those things that are “conformable thereunto” are expressed in the Definition of Chalcedon (451). The Second Helvetic Confession, written by the Zurich pastor Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75) in 1561 and published in 1566, also lists the ancient creeds the Reformed churches receive: “. . . we freely profess, whatsoever things are defined out of the Holy Scriptures, and comprehended in the creeds, and in the decrees of those four first and most excellent councils—held at Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon—together with blessed Athanasius’s creed and all other creeds like to these, touching the mystery of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Art. 11).

These creeds are called “ecumenical.” The term *ecumenical* comes from the Greek word *oikoumene*, which was used in the ancient world to describe the vastness of the Roman Empire. It is a way of describing the known world.⁷ These creeds are ecumenical, or universal, because they have been received and believed by Christian churches in all times and in all places. Because you may be unfamiliar with them, it will be helpful to review briefly their history and content.

The Apostles’ Creed

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; I believe a holy catholic Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.⁸

Although it bears the title of their office, the apostles themselves did not write the Apostles’ Creed. It developed over several centuries (100–700) as the ancient churches developed a practice that, at baptism, the adult candidate for baptism would confess his or her faith publicly. Scholars have showed that passages such as

Ephesians 4:4–6 were used as creeds at the baptism of new converts.⁹ The first official version of the Apostles’ Creed was used in Rome as early as the second century.¹⁰ We can legitimately call this creed the Apostles’ Creed because its ideas and phrases come directly from the writings of the apostles in the New Testament Scriptures.

By the Apostles’ Creed, the Christian confesses that there is one God who exists in three persons. We call this the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The creed is structured in three simple parts that mirror this triune nature of God, as described by the Heidelberg Catechism: “The first is of *God the Father* and our *creation*; the second, of *God the Son* and our *redemption*; the third, of *God the Holy Ghost* and our *sanctification*” (Q&A 24).¹¹

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven and was Incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with

glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

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

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.¹²

The Nicene Creed was written in AD 325 at the ancient church's first ecumenical council, the Council of Nicea, the modern-day city of Iznik, Turkey.¹³ Representatives from throughout the churches of the ancient world gathered to respond to and reject the false teaching of a preacher named Arius (250–336).¹⁴ Arius taught that the Son of God was not eternal, but was the first creation of God the Father (a doctrine espoused in modern days by the Jehovah's Witnesses). This meant that Jesus Christ was less divine than God the Father.

Later, at the second ecumenical council, the Council of Constantinople in AD 381, the churches responded to the false teaching of a group called the Macedonians, who said that the Holy Spirit was not fully God. It was then that the beautiful phrases about the Holy Spirit in the Nicene Creed were added to complete this great creed. For this reason, this creed is also called the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

Because of its importance in the ancient church's first two councils, its depth of teaching, and its purpose in protecting the church

from false teaching about Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, the Nicene Creed is the most important of the ancient Christian creeds. Like the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed is organized around the triune nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while adding significant words about the church of Jesus Christ.¹⁵

The Athanasian Creed

(1) Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith;

(2) Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

(3) And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;

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

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

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

(44) This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.¹⁶

The Athanasian Creed is named after Athanasius, who was a deacon in the church in Alexandria, Egypt.¹⁷ Athanasius was one of the staunchest opponents of the teachings of Arius at the Council of Nicea. His firm stand is seen in this story about him: When he was told, “Athanasius, the world is against you,” Athanasius replied, “Then Athanasius is against the world.”

Like the Apostles’ Creed, the Athanasian Creed most likely was not written by its namesake but was taken from his writings against Arius. These parts of his writings were compiled as a beautifully poetic creed some time between AD 500 and 800.

The Athanasian Creed is divided into two parts. The first is a detailed confession of the doctrine of the Trinity, affirming that we believe and worship one God in Unity and Unity in Trinity. The second part is a detailed confession of the doctrine of the person of Christ, affirming that there is one Lord Jesus Christ, who is both perfect God and perfect man. Both of these parts of the creed open with a statement of the necessity to believe in the triune nature of God and the two natures of Christ in order to have salvation.¹⁸

The Definition of Chalcedon

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [coessential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the

Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of the natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

Although the Belgic Confession explicitly names only the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds in its confession of the doctrine of the Trinity, it also speaks of "that which, conformable thereunto, is agreed upon by the ancient fathers" (Art. 9). One of the ancient church fathers' documents that agreed with the creeds was the Definition of Chalcedon. The Definition of Chalcedon was written in AD 451 at the fourth ecumenical council, the Council of Chalcedon, a city in modern-day Turkey. At this council, the churches of the ancient world gathered to respond to several different false teachings about our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁹

One of those false teachings was Nestorianism. The followers of Nestorius taught that Christ's divine and human natures were so divided that Jesus Christ was two completely separate persons, not united in the one person of Christ. Another equally false teaching was that of Eutychianism. This belief system held that Christ's

natures were so united in His person that the divine nature swallowed up the human nature, thus leaving one mixed nature. The third false teaching was that of Apollinarianism. This school taught that Jesus had a true human body and a “lower soul” (which animals have), but that the “higher soul” (which only humans have) was replaced by the eternal *logos* (the “Word” of John 1:1). This meant that Jesus Christ was not as fully human as we are. As Gregory of Nazianzus (325–389) so famously said in opposing this belief, “That which He has not assumed He has not healed.”²⁰

Again, theologians, pastors, and church leaders had to meet as an ecumenical council to respond to these teachings and confess what the Word of God taught on the essential doctrine of who Jesus Christ is. The Definition is one paragraph in which the church confessed to believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, who has two natures, divine and human.²¹ This expression of the true humanity of Christ was stressed by calling Mary the “Mother [or “bearer”] of God according to the Manhood.” She gave birth to the Son of God’s human nature.

These four great creeds defined ancient Christianity against various errors for the first one thousand years of the church’s existence until the rise of many more errors in the centuries just before the Protestant Reformation. Because Reformed churches believe these creeds, they are historical Christian churches.

PROTESTANT CHURCHES

. . . our reformers have done no small service to the Church, in stirring up the world as from the deep darkness of ignorance, to read the Scriptures, in labouring diligently to make them better understood, and in happily throwing

light on certain points of doctrine of the highest practical importance.²²

Reformed churches are also Protestant churches.²³ German princes who supported Luther's ideas first used the term *protestant* at the Second Diet of Speyer (1529), a meeting between the Holy Roman emperor and his rulers. Some of these rulers issued a *protestatio* against the emperor, Charles V (1500–1558), because of their convictions against certain Roman Catholic teachings.²⁴

Reformed churches joined the Lutheran churches in protesting the Roman Catholic Church's false teachings. The main teachings to which these reform-minded groups objected were Rome's insistence that the Bible was only one authority among many, including tradition and the pope, and the teaching that sinners were saved from their sin and God's wrath by cooperating with God's grace in doing good works. The protestations of the Reformers were that Scripture *alone* (*sola Scriptura*) was the ultimate authority in the church and that sinners are saved by God's grace *alone* (*sola gratia*), which is received through faith *alone* (*sola fide*), which is placed in Christ *alone* (*solus Christus*). These teachings, along with others, were expressed by both the Lutherans and the Reformed in various confessions of faith, such as the Augsburg Confession (1530) and the French Confession (1559), by which they bore witness to the world; and in various catechisms, such as Luther's Small Catechism (1529) and Calvin's Genevan Catechism (1545), by which they sought to instruct their churches.

These protestations against the Roman Catholic Church are important for us because many of the churches in our neighborhoods have become like the church the original Protestants reacted against

so many years ago. Those first Protestants were known as evangelicals because they believed and preached the gospel of free grace. Today, many Protestant churches describe themselves as evangelical, but they have drifted far from the positions of the original Protestants. They still reject the pope, but the fact that many of them are governed by a pope-like, charismatic, and visionary leader calls out for protest and reformation. Likewise, evangelical churches claim to “just believe the Bible,” but many of them merely follow their pastors’ teachings and are filled with unbiblical traditions, such as altar calls and the “afterglow,” a worship service after a worship service for serious believers who wish to exercise their “spiritual gifts.” If we persist in “chronological snobbery,” we are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past and to remain childish in our outlook. The spirit of the original Protestants is still needed today.

REFORMED CHURCHES

As time passed during the Reformation, the Lutherans and the Reformed became distinct camps within Protestantism with distinct confessions. The Protestants who followed Luther’s teachings were derided as “Lutherans,” while the Protestants who differed from Luther in several ways were derided as “Calvinists,” though they called themselves “Reformed” Christians. This term, *Reformed*, was a shorthand way of saying, “Churches that are reformed according to the Word of God.”

The Lutheran churches gathered various catechisms and confessions into one book, called the *Book of Concord* (1580), but the Reformed churches of various regions in Europe utilized different confessional standards.²⁵ Reformed churches could be found

throughout Europe: in German-speaking Zurich, Switzerland, under Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) and later Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575); in Strasbourg, under Martin Bucer (1491–1551); in Basel, under Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531); and in Berne, under Berthold Haller (1492–1536). They also could be found in French-speaking Switzerland, including Lausanne, under Pierre Viret (1511–71); in Neuchatel, under William Farel (1489–1565); and in Geneva, under Farel, originally, then under Calvin; as well as throughout France itself. Reformed churches spread east to Hungary and west to the Netherlands and into England under Edward VI (1537–53) and his archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556). They also spread north to Poland, under Johannes à Lasco (1499–1560), and Heidelberg, Germany, under Elector Frederick III (1515–76), his main theologian, Zacharius Ursinus (1534–83), and his preacher, Caspar Olevianus (1536–87); and south, among the Waldensians in the mountains of northern Italy.

Eventually, two great collections of confessions became the basic statements of the Reformed churches. The Reformed churches from the continent of Europe held to the Three Forms of Unity: the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Canons of Dort (1618–19). Those from Great Britain, known as Presbyterians, held to the Westminster Standards: the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), the Westminster Larger Catechism (1648), and the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1648), to which were added the Directory for Publick Worship (1645) and the Form of Presbyterial Church Government (1645).

We speak of the Three Forms of Unity because there are three forms (*formulae*) expressing our beliefs (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort) and because these

confessions, like all creeds, are meant to unify us in heart, soul, mind, and strength in what we believe the Word of God teaches.

The Belgic Confession

We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that he is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good. (Art. 1)

The Belgic Confession of Faith was first published in 1561, having been written, among others, by Guido de Brès (1522–67), a French-speaking Reformed pastor in the southern Netherlands who later would die for his faith.²⁶ It was written on behalf of the persecuted Reformed churches throughout the Netherlands (now Holland, Belgium, and northern France) as an explanation of their Reformed Christian faith to the Roman Catholic king of Spain, Philip II, who ruled over the Netherlands at that time. Its immediate purpose was to demonstrate that the Reformed Christians were not trying to overthrow Philip and his government, as were some radical groups among the Anabaptists. Among the teachings of some Anabaptists was the belief that all earthly rulers were illegitimate and that only Jesus Christ was King.²⁷ To demonstrate that the Reformed in the Netherlands did not believe this, the confession sought to express that Reformation theology was simply the faith of the ancient church.

The content of this confession is as inspiring as the attitude of

those Reformed Christians who confessed it. In an attached letter to the king, the Reformed Christians said: “But having the fear of God before our eyes, and being in dread of the warning of Jesus Christ, who tells us that He shall forsake us before God and His Father if we deny Him before men, we suffer our backs to be beaten, our tongues to be cut, our mouths to be gagged and our whole body to be burnt, for we know that he who would follow Christ must take up his cross and deny himself.”²⁸

The Belgic Confession professes the basic Christian doctrines of the Word of God, organized in a very understandable way. The confession is divided into six major parts according to the classic topics (*loci*) of theology: confessions about God (Arts. 1–13); confessions about man (Arts. 14–15); confessions about Christ (Arts. 16–21); confessions about salvation (Arts. 22–26); confessions about the church (Arts. 27–36); and confessions about the end (Art. 37).²⁹

The Heidelberg Catechism

What is thy only comfort in life and in death?

That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto him. (Q&A 1)

The Heidelberg Catechism was written and published in 1563 in Heidelberg, Germany, at the request of Frederick III, ruler of the region in Germany called the Palatinate, in order to instruct his people in the Reformation's teachings. Although the word *catechism* might sound "catholic" to us, a catechism is simply a document that instructs in the basics of the Christian faith by using questions and answers; this is sometimes called the "Socratic method" of instruction.³⁰ The primary author of the Heidelberg Catechism was Zacharius Ursinus, a twenty-eight-year-old professor of theology. Others, such as Caspar Olevianus, a twenty-six-year-old preacher at the Holy Ghost Church in Heidelberg, assisted as a committee.³¹

Written in German, the catechism was intended solely for the region of the Palatinate, but it quickly underwent several editions and translations. It was translated into Latin (1563), Dutch (1563), English (1572), Hungarian (1577), French (1590), Greek (1609), Romansch (1613), Czech (1619), and Romanian (1648).³² It became, and remains, the most popular, widely used, and comforting catechism of the Reformation period. It was even the first explanation of Reformed theology used in America when immigrants came here in the early 1600s.

The catechism explains the Christian faith in three parts, following the outline of the New Testament letter of the apostle Paul to the Romans. After questions 1–2 address the theme of the Christian's comfort and confidence in Jesus Christ and present an outline of the catechism, the rest of the catechism is structured in this way: guilt/sin (Q&A 3–11; Rom. 1:18–3:20); grace/salvation (Q&A 12–85; Rom. 3:21–11:36); and gratitude/service (Q&A 86–129; Rom. 12–16).³³

The Canons of Dort

What, therefore, neither the light of nature nor the law could do, that God performs by the operation of his Holy Spirit through the word or ministry of reconciliation: which is the glad tidings concerning the Messiah, by means whereof it hath pleased God to save such as believe, as well under the Old as under the New Testament. (3/4.6)

The last of the Three Forms of Unity is the Canons of Dort, written in 1618–19 in Dordrecht, Holland. After the Reformed Christian faith became more established in the Netherlands, a great controversy arose within the church there. A teacher of theology at the University of Leiden, James Arminius (1560–1609), was accused of teaching new doctrines contrary to the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism.³⁴ After his death, more than forty of his followers wrote what was called *The Remonstrance* (1610), an official protest to the government, outlining their theology and asking for toleration. To give you the background for the Canons of Dort, it is necessary to quote this document:

Article I: That God by an eternal and immutable decree has in Jesus Christ his Son determined before the foundation of the world *to save out of the fallen sinful human race those in Christ, for Christ's sake, and through Christ who by the grace of the Holy Spirit shall believe in this his Son Jesus Christ and persevere in this faith and obedience of faith; and on the other hand to leave the incorrigible and unbelieving in sin and under wrath and condemn (them)*

as alienate from Christ—according to the word of the holy gospel in John 3:36: “He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life, and whosoever is disobedient to the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him,” and also other passages of the Scriptures.

Article 2: That in agreement with this *Jesus Christ the Savior of the world died for all men and for every man, so that he merited reconciliation and forgiveness of sins for all* through the death of the cross; yet so that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except the believer—also according to the word of the gospel of John 3:16: “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” And in the first epistle of John 2:2: “He is the propitiation for our sins; and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

Article 3: That man does not have saving faith of himself nor by the power of his own free will, since he in the state of apostasy and sin can not of and through himself think, will or do any good which is truly good (such as is especially saving faith); but that it is necessary that he be regenerated by God, in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, affections or will, and all powers, in order that he may rightly understand, meditate upon, will, and perform that which is truly good, according to the word of Christ, John 15:5: “Without me ye can do nothing.”

Article 4: That this grace of God is the commencement, progression, and completion of all good, also in so far that regenerate man cannot, apart from this prevenient or assisting, awakening, consequent and cooperating grace, think, will or do the good or resist any temptations to evil; so that all good works or activities which can be conceived must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ. *But with respect to the mode of this grace, it is not irresistible*, since it is written concerning many that they have resisted the Holy Spirit. Acts 7 and elsewhere in many places.

Article 5: That those who are incorporated into Jesus Christ and thereby become partakers of his life-giving Spirit have abundant strength to strive against satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh and to obtain the victory; it being well understood (that this is) through the assistance of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and that Jesus Christ assists them through his Spirit in all temptations, extends the hand, and—if only they are prepared for warfare and desire his help and are not negligent—keeps them standing, so that by no cunning or power of satan can they be led astray or plucked out of Christ's hands, according to the word of Christ, John 10, "No one shall pluck them out of my hands." *But whether they can through negligence fall away from the first principle of their life in Christ, again embrace the present world, depart from the pure doctrine once given to them, lose the good conscience, and neglect grace, must first be more carefully determined from the Holy Scriptures before we shall be able to teach this with the full persuasion of our heart.*³⁵

Because of this teaching, a synod, that is, a gathering of churches, was called with pastors and theologians from throughout the Netherlands and from throughout Europe: Great Britain, the Palatinate, Hesse, Zurich, Berne, Basel, Schaffhausen, Geneva, Bremen, Emden, and Nassau-Wetteravia; delegates from France and Brandenburg were invited but were prevented from attending.³⁶ Of this synod, the English Puritan John Owen (1616–1683) said, “The divines of that assembly . . . were esteemed of the best that all the reformed churches of Europe (that of France excepted) could afford.”³⁷

The result of this synod was the rejection of Arminianism in the Canons of Dort. A “canon” is simply a “rule,” so the Canons of Dort are the rules of faith written by the Synod of Dort. These canons are the official teachings of the Reformed churches on what are commonly called the Five Points of Calvinism, which are often summarized by the acronym TULIP.³⁸ It is important to note, though, that the canons were composed as a response to false teaching, not to summarize the entire Reformed faith. The Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism were assumed to accomplish that task.

Since the canons responded to the points of the Arminians, their teachings are divided into four parts: unconditional election; limited atonement; man’s total depravity and God’s irresistible grace; and the preservation/perseverance of the saints.

The Westminster Standards

What is the chief end of man?

Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

(WSC, Q&A 1)

The Westminster Standards—the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), the Westminster Larger Catechism (1648), and the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1648)—were written during the brief period of Puritan ascendancy in mid-seventeenth-century England. The so-called “Long Parliament” dealt with the question of what form the English church would take. In January 1643, Parliament met to abolish the office of bishop, which practically ruled the Church of England. This led to the calling of an assembly of 121 theologians and elders (“divines”) in July 1643. While Parliament expected a revision of the Church of England’s Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion in order to unite the kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, the delegates to the assembly came to see that something more was needed. In the summer of 1644, a committee was created to write a confession of the united Reformed faith in Great Britain.³⁹

The Westminster Confession of Faith follows a classic order of Christian doctrine, as exemplified in the aforementioned Belgic Confession: Holy Scripture (Chap. 1); God (Chaps. 2–5); man (Chaps. 6–7); Christ (Chap. 8); salvation (Chaps. 9–24); the church (Chaps. 25–31); and the intermediate state and the end (Chaps. 32–33).

Likewise, both the Larger and Shorter catechisms open with an introductory set of questions and then move to the heart of their teaching: introduction (WLC, Q&A 1–5; WSC, Q&A 1–3); doctrine (WLC, Q&A 6–90; WSC, Q&A 4–38); and duty (WLC, Q&A 91–196; WSC, Q&A 39–107).

CONCLUSION

The foregoing demonstrates that the churches of the Protestant Reformation known as Reformed churches have deep roots historically

and theologically. These roots are the ancient Christian creeds and the Reformed confessions and catechisms. Because these creeds, confessions, and catechisms are based on the teachings of the Bible, Reformed churches have deep biblical roots, as well. These roots give stability to modern Christians who have become detached from history, and maturity to those who were once like children.

Notes

- 1 George Santayana, *The Life of Reason*, Great Books in Philosophy (1905–1906; repr., Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1998), 82.
- 2 Cicero, *De Oratore*, sec. 120. The Latin text is as follows *Nescire autem quid ante quam natus sis acciderit, id est semper esse puerum.*
- 3 C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (1955; repr., New York: Harcourt Trade Publishers, 1966), 204, 205, 211, 214.
- 4 On the history of these titles, see Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Penguin, 2003), xix–xx.
- 5 For a basic history of the early centuries of the Christian church, see Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (1967; repr., New York: Penguin, 1990).
- 6 Athanasius, “Festal Letter 39.6,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series, Vol. 4: Athanasius: Select Words and Letters*, ed. Archibald Robertson (1892; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 552.
- 7 Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 561.
- 8 *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Church, 1976), 3.
- 9 F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 335–336.
- 10 For an extensive history of the Apostles’ Creed, see Liuwé H. Westra, *The Apostles’ Creed: Origin, History, and Some Early Commentaries*, Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia 43 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepolis Publishers, 2002).
- 11 On this basic description of the creed, see Daniel R. Hyde, *The Good Confession: An Exploration of the Christian Faith* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 19.

- 12 *Psalter Hymnal*, 4.
- 13 For studies of the Nicene Creed, see T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988); L. Charles Jackson, *Faith of our Fathers: A Study of the Nicene Creed* (Moscow, Ida.: Canon Press, 2007).
- 14 For recent studies of Arius, see Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (1987; rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- 15 On this basic description of the Nicene Creed, see Hyde, *The Good Confession*, 20.
- 16 For the complete text, see *Psalter Hymnal*, 5–6.
- 17 Studies of the Athanasian Creed are few and far between. One excellent book is J. N. D. Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed*, The Paddock Lectures, 1962–63 (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1964). For an introduction to Athanasius, see Thomas G. Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction*, Great Theologians Series (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2007).
- 18 On this basic description of the Athanasian Creed, see Hyde, *The Good Confession*, 20.
- 19 For a basic exposition of the doctrines taught in the Definition of Chalcedon, see Daniel R. Hyde, *God With Us: Knowing the Mystery of Who Jesus Is* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007).
- 20 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle 101: To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series, Vol. 7: Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen*, trans. Charles Gordon Brown and James Edward Swallow (1894; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 440.
- 21 On this basic description of the Definition of Chalcedon, see Hyde, *The Good Confession*, 20–21.
- 22 John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (Audubon, N.J.: Old Paths Publications, 1994), 25.
- 23 For some basic introductions to the Protestant Reformation, see Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1991); Lewis W. Spitz, *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements*, 2 vols. (1971; rev. ed., St. Louis: Concordia, 1987).
- 24 MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, xx.
- 25 On the *Book of Concord*, see *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans.

- Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000); *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).
- 26 On the authorship of the Belgic Confession, see Nicolaas H. Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources*, Texts & Studies in Reformation & Post-Reformation Thought, gen. ed. Richard A. Muller (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Daniel R. Hyde, *With Heart and Mouth: An Exposition of the Belgic Confession* (Grandville, Mich.: Reformed Fellowship, 2008).
- 27 For a basic introduction to the Anabaptists, see William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).
- 28 “Dedicatory Epistle to Philip II,” trans. Alastair Duke, cited in Hyde, *With Heart and Mouth*, 500–501.
- 29 On this basic description of the Belgic Confession, see Hyde, *The Good Confession*, 22. For a more comprehensive history and commentary, see Hyde, *With Heart and Mouth*.
- 30 The word *catechism* comes from the Greek verb *katēcheō*, which occurs eight times in the New Testament (Luke 1:4; Acts 18:25; 21:21, 24; Rom. 2:18; 1 Cor. 14:19; Gal. 6:6 [twice]).
- 31 *The Church’s Book of Comfort*, ed. Willem Van’t Spijker, trans. Gerrit Bilkes (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 27–61; Lyle D. Bierma with Charles D. Gunnoe Jr., Karin Y. Maag, and Paul W. Fields, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology*, Texts & Studies in Reformation & Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 49–74.
- 32 Bierma, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism*, 103–117.
- 33 On this basic description of the Heidelberg Catechism, see Hyde, *The Good Confession*, 22–23.
- 34 On Arminius, see W. Robert Godfrey, “Who Was Arminius?” *Modern Reformation* 1:3 (May/June 1992): 5–7, 24; Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); and “Arminius and the Reformed Tradition,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 70:1 (Spring 2008): 19–48.
- 35 *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618–19*, ed. Peter Y. De Jong (Grandville, Mich.: Reformed Fellowship, 2008), 207–209. Italicized portions are the areas of controversy. One should note

- that Article 3 in and of itself is not objectionable, and this is why the Canons of Dort have a “Third and Fourth Head of Doctrine” combined.
- 36 For the names of these delegates, see *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 213–21.
- 37 John Owen, “The Nature of Apostasy from the Profession of the Gospel and the Punishment of Apostates Declared,” in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, 16 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 7:74.
- 38 The names of the five doctrines that form the TULIP acronym are total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.
- 39 For some of the history of the Westminster Assembly, see S. W. Carruthers, *The Everyday Work of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Greenville, S.C.: Reformed Academic Press, 1994).

