

Waldensian Confession (A. D. 1655)

A brief confession of faith of the Reformed Churches of Piedmont

Published with their Manifesto on the occasion of the frightful massacres of the year 1655.

Having understood that our adversaries, not contented to have most cruelly persecuted us, and robbed us of all our goods and estates, have yet an intention to render us odious to the world by spreading abroad many false reports, and so not only to defame our persons, but likewise to asperse with most shameful calumnies that holy and wholesome doctrine which we profess, we feel obliged, for the better information of those whose minds may perhaps be preoccupied by sinister opinions, to make a short declaration of our faith, such as we have heretofore professed as conformable to the Word of God; and so every one may see the falsity of those their calumnies, and also how unjustly we are hated and persecuted for a doctrine so innocent.

I. That there is one only God, who is a spiritual essence, eternal, infinite, all-wise, all merciful, and all-just, in one word, all-perfect; and that there are three persons in that one only and simple essence: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

II. That this God manifested himself to men by his works of Creation and Providence, as also by his Word revealed unto us, first by oracles in divers manners, and afterwards by those written books which are called the Holy Scripture.

III. That we ought to receive this Holy Scripture (as we do) for divine and canonical, that is to say, for the constant rule of our faith and life: as also that the same is fully contained in the Old and New Testament; and that by the Old Testament we must understand only such books as God did entrust the Jewish Church with, and which that Church has always approved and acknowledged to be from God: namely, the five books of Moses, Joshua, the Judges, Ruth, I and II Samuel, I and II of the Kings, I and II of the Chronicles, one of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the four great and twelve minor Prophets: and the New Testament containing the four gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of St. Paul - 1 to the Romans, 2 to the Corinthians, 1 to the Galatians, 1 to the Ephesians, 1 to the Philippians, 1 to the Colossians {2 to the Thessalonians, 2 to Timothy, 1 to Titus, 1 to Philemon}, and the Epistle to the Hebrews; 1 of St. James, 2 of St. Peter, 3 of St. John, 1 of St. Jude, and the Revelation.

IV. We acknowledge the divinity of these sacred books, not only from the testimony of the Church, but more especially because of the eternal and indubitable truth of the doctrine therein contained, and of that most divine excellency, sublimity, and majesty which appears therein; and because of the operation of the Holy Spirit, who causes us to receive with reverence the testimony of the Church in that point, who opens our eyes to discover the beams of that celestial light which shines in the Scripture, and correct our taste to discern the divine savor of that spiritual food.

V. That God made all things of nothing by his own free will, and by the infinite power of the Word.

VI. That he governs and rules all by his providence, ordaining and appointing whatsoever happens in this world, without being the author or cause of any evil committed by the creatures, so that the guilt thereof neither can nor ought to be in any way imputed unto him.

VII. That the angels were all in the beginning created pure and holy, but that some of them have fallen into irreparable corruption and perdition; and that the rest have persevered in their first purity by an effect of divine goodness, which has upheld and confirmed them.

VIII. That man, who was created pure and holy, after the image of God, deprived himself through his own fault of that happy condition by giving credit to the deceitful words of the devil.

IX. That man by his transgression lost that righteousness and holiness which he had received, and thus incurring the wrath of God, became subject to death and bondage, under the dominion of him who has the power of death, that is, the devil; insomuch that our free will has become a servant and a slave to sin: and thus all men, both Jews and Gentiles, are, are by nature children of wrath, being all dead in their trespasses and sins, and consequently incapable of the least good motion to any thing which concerns their salvation: yea, incapable of one good thought without God's grace, all their imaginations being wholly evil, and that continually.

X. That all the posterity of Adam is guilty in him of his disobedience, infected by his corruption, and fallen into the same calamity with him, even the very infants from their mother's womb, whence is derived the name of original sin.

XI. That God saves from this corruption and condemnation those whom he has chosen {from the foundation of the world, not for any foreseen disposition, faith, or holiness in them, but} of his mercy in Jesus Christ his Son; passing by all the rest, according to the irreprehensible reason of his freedom and justice.

XII. That Jesus Christ having been ordained by the eternal decree of God to be the only Savior and only head of his body which is the Church, he redeemed it with his own blood in the fullness of time, and communicates unto the same all his benefits by means of the gospel.

XIII. That there are two natures in Jesus Christ, viz., divine and human, truly united in one and the same person, without confusion, division, separation, or alteration; each nature keeping its own distinct proprieties; and that Jesus Christ is both true God and true man.

XIV. That God so loved the world, that is to say, those whom he has chosen out of the world, that he gave his own Son to save us by his most perfect obedience (especially that obedience which he manifested in suffering the cursed death of the cross), and also by his victory over the devil, sin, and death.

XV. That Jesus Christ having made a full expiation for our sins by his most perfect sacrifice once offered on the cross, it neither can nor ought to be repeated upon any pretext whatsoever, as they pretend to do in the mass.

XVI. That the Lord Jesus having fully reconciled us unto God, through the blood of his cross, it is by virtue of his merits only, and not of our works, that we are absolved and justified in his sight.

XVII. That we are united to Jesus Christ and made partakers of his benefits by faith, which rests upon those promises of life which are made to us in his gospel.

XVIII. That this faith is the gracious and efficacious work of the Holy Spirit, who enlightens our souls, and persuades them to lean and rest upon the mercy of God, and so to apply the merits of Jesus Christ.

XIX. That Jesus Christ is our true and only Mediator, not only redeeming us, but also interceding for us, and that by virtue of his merits and intercession we have access unto the Father, to make our supplications unto him, with a holy confidence that he will grant our requests, it being needless to have recourse to any other intercessor besides himself.

XX. That as God promised us regeneration in Jesus Christ, so those who are united to him by a living faith ought to apply, and do really apply themselves, unto good works.

XXI. That good works are so necessary to the faithful that they can not attain the kingdom of heaven without the same, seeing that God has prepared them that we should walk therein; and there fore we ought to flee from vice, and apply ourselves to Christian virtues, making use of fasting, and all other means which may conduce to so holy a thing.

XXII. That, although our good works can not merit any thing, yet the Lord will reward or recompense them with eternal life, through the merciful continuation of his grace, and by virtue of the unchangeable constancy of his promises made unto us.

XXIII. That those who are already in the possession of eternal life in consequence of their faith and good works ought to be considered as saints and glorified persons, and to be praised for their virtue and imitated in all good actions of their life, but neither worshipped nor invoked, for God only is to be prayed unto, and that through Jesus Christ.

XXVIII. That God does not only instruct us by his Word, but has also ordained certain sacraments to be joined with it, as means to unite us to Jesus Christ, and to make us partakers of his benefits; and that there are only two of them belonging in common to all

the members of the Church under the New Testament - to wit, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

XXIX. That Christ has instituted the sacrament of Baptism to be a testimony of our adoption, and that therein we are cleansed from our sins by the blood of Jesus Christ, and renewed in holiness of life.

XXX. That he has instituted the Holy Supper, or Eucharist, for the nourishment of our souls, to the end that eating effectually the flesh of Christ, and drinking effectually his blood, by a true and living faith, and by the incomprehensible virtue of the Holy Spirit, and so uniting ourselves most closely and inseparably to Christ, we come to enjoy in him and by him the spiritual and eternal life.

Now to the end that every one may clearly see what our belief is as to this point, we here insert the very expressions of that prayer which we make use of before the Communion, as they are written in our Liturgy or form of celebrating the Holy Supper, and likewise in our public Catechism, which are to be seen at the end of our Psalms; these are the words of the prayer:

'Seeing our Lord has not only once offered his body and blood for the remission of our sins, but is willing also to communicate the same unto us as the food of eternal life, we humbly beseech thee to grant us this grace that in true sincerity of heart and with an ardent zeal we may receive from him so great a benefit; that is, that we may be made partakers of his body and blood, or rather of his whole self, by a sure and certain faith.'

The words of the Liturgy are these: 'Let us then believe first of all the promises which Christ (who is the infallible truth) has pronounced with his own mouth, viz., that he will make us truly partakers of his body and blood, that so we may possess him entirely, in such a manner that he may live in us and we in him.'

The words of our Catechism are the same, Nella Dominica 53.

XXXI. That it is necessary the Church should have pastor known by those who are employed for that purpose to be well instructed and of a good life, as well to preach the Word of God as to administer the sacraments, and wait upon the flock of Christ

(according to the rules of a good and holy discipline), together with elders and deacons, after the manner of the primitive Church.

XXXII. That God has established kings and magistrates to govern the people, and that the people ought to be subject and obedient unto them, by virtue of that ordination, not only for fear, but also for conscience' sake, in all things that are conformable to the Word of God, who is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

XXXIII. Finally, that we ought to receive the symbol of the Apostles, the Lord's Prayer, and the Decalogue as fundamentals of our faith and our devotion.

Conclusion

And for a more ample declaration of our faith we do here reiterate the same protestation which we caused to be printed in 1603, that is to say, that we do agree in sound doctrine with all the Reformed Churches of France, Great Britain, the Low Countries, Germany, Switzerland, Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, and others, as it is set forth by them in their confessions; as also in the Confession of Augsburg, as it was explained by the author,[1] promising to persevere constantly therein with the help of God, both in life and death, and being ready to subscribe to that eternal truth of God with our own blood, even as our ancestors have done from the days of the Apostles, and especially in these latter ages.

Therefore we humbly entreat all the Evangelical and Protestant Churches, notwithstanding our poverty and lowness, to look upon us as true members of the mystical body of Christ, suffering for his name's sake, and to continue unto us the help of their prayers to God, and all other effects of their charity, as we have heretofore abundantly experienced, for which we return them our most humble thanks, entreating the Lord with all our heart to be their rewarder, and to pour upon them the most precious blessings of grace and glory, both in this life and in that which is to come. Amen.

1. Viz., the editio variata of 1540, which Calvin subscribed at Strasburg.

XXIV. That God has chosen one Church in the world for the salvation of men, and that this Church has one only head and foundation, which is Jesus Christ.

XXV. That this Church is the company of the faithful, who, having been elected by God before the foundation of the world, and called with a holy calling, unite themselves to follow the Word of God, believing whatsoever he teaches them therein, and living in his fear.

XXVI. That this Church can not fail, nor be annihilated, but must endure forever {and that all the elect are upheld and preserved by the power of God in such sort that they all persevere in the faith unto the end, and remain united in the holy Church, as so many living members thereof}.

XXVII. That all men ought to join with that Church, and to continue in the communion thereof.