Article 1: The Only God
We all believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that there is a single and simple spiritual being, whom we call God—

eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, infinite, almighty;

completely wise, just, and good, and the overflowing source of all good.

Article 2: The Means by Which We Know God
We know him by two means:

First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: his eternal power and his divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20.

All these things are enough to convict men and to leave them without excuse.

Second, he makes himself known to us more openly by his holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for his glory and for the salvation of his own.

Article 3: The Written Word of God
We confess that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of men, but that holy men of God spoke, being moved by the Holy Spirit, as Peter says.²

Afterwards our God—because of the special care he has for us and our salvation—commanded his servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit this revealed Word to writing. He himself wrote with his own finger the two tables of the law.

Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.

² 2 Pet. 1:21

Article 4: The Canonical Books
We include in the Holy Scripture the two volumes of the Old and New Testaments. They are canonical books with which there can be no quarrel at all.

In the church of God the list is as follows:
In the Old Testament,
the five books of Moses—
Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy;
the books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth;
the two books of Samuel, and two of Kings;
the two books of Chronicles, called Paralipomenon;
the first book of Ezra; Nehemiah, Esther, Job;
the Psalms of David;
the three books of Solomon—Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song;
the four major prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel;
and then the other twelve minor prophets—Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

In the New Testament,
the four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles;
The church may certainly read these books and learn from them as far as they agree with the canonical books. But they do not have such power and virtue that one could confirm from their testimony any point of faith or of the Christian religion. Much less can they detract from the authority of the other holy books.

Article 7: The Sufficiency of Scripture
We believe that this Holy Scripture contains the will of God completely and that everything one must believe to be saved is sufficiently taught in it.

For since the entire manner of service which God requires of us is described in it at great length, no one—

- even an apostle
- or an angel from heaven,
- as Paul says—

ought to teach other than what the Holy Scriptures have already taught us.

For since it is forbidden to add to or subtract from the Word of God, this plainly demonstrates that the teaching is perfect and complete in all respects.

Therefore we must not consider human writings—
- no matter how holy their authors may have been—equal to the divine writings;
- nor may we put custom, nor the majority,
- nor age,
- nor the passage of time or persons,
- nor councils, decrees, or official decisions above the truth of God,
- for truth is above everything else.

For all human beings are liars by nature and more vain than vanity itself.
Nevertheless, this distinction does not divide God into three, since Scripture teaches us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each has his own subsistence distinguished by characteristics—yet in such a way that these three persons are only one God.

It is evident then that the Father is not the Son and that the Son is not the Father, and that likewise the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son.

Nevertheless, these persons, thus distinct, are neither divided nor fused or mixed together.

For the Father did not take on flesh, nor did the Spirit, but only the Son.

The Father was never without his Son, nor without his Holy Spirit, since all these are equal from eternity, in one and the same essence.

There is neither a first nor a last, for all three are one in truth and power, in goodness and mercy.

**Article 9: The Scriptural Witness on the Trinity**

All these things we know from the testimonies of Holy Scripture as well as from the effects of the persons, especially from those we feel within ourselves.

The testimonies of the Holy Scriptures, which teach us to believe in this Holy Trinity, are written in many places of the Old Testament, which need not be enumerated but only chosen with discretion.
In the book of Genesis God says,  
“Let us make man in our image,  
according to our likeness.”  
So “God created man in his own image”—  
indeed, “male and female he created them.”  
“Behold, man has become like one of us.”

It appears from this  
that there is a plurality of persons  
within the Deity,  
when he says,  
“Let us make man in our image”—  
and afterwards he indicates the unity  
when he says,  
“God created.”

In all these passages we are fully taught  
that there are three persons  
in the one and only divine essence.  
And although this doctrine surpasses human understanding,  
we nevertheless believe it now,  
through the Word,  
waiting to know and enjoy it fully  
in heaven.

Furthermore,  
we must note the particular works and activities  
of these three persons in relation to us.  
The Father is called our Creator,  
by reason of his power.  
The Son is our Savior and Redeemer,  
by his blood.  
The Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier,  
by his living in our hearts.

This doctrine of the holy Trinity  
has always been maintained in the true church,  
from the time of the apostles until the present,  
against Jews, Muslims,  
and certain false Christians and heretics,  
such as Marcion, Mani,  
Praxeas, Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Arius,  
and others like them,  
who were rightly condemned by the holy fathers.

And so,  
in this matter we willingly accept  
the three ecumenical creeds—  
the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian—  
as well as what the ancient fathers decided  
in agreement with them.

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“For these are three who bear witness in heaven—  
the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit—  
and these three are one.”

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6 Gen. 1:26-27
7 Gen. 3:22
8 Matt. 3:17
9 Matt. 28:19
10 Luke 1:35
11 2 Cor. 13:14
12 1 John 5:7 (KJV)
Article 10: The Deity of Christ
We believe that Jesus Christ, according to his divine nature, is the only Son of God—
eternally begotten,
not made nor created,
for then he would be a creature.

He is in essence with the Father;
coeternal;
the exact image of the person of the Father and the “reflection of his glory,”
being in all things like him.

He is the Son of God not only from the time he assumed our nature but from all eternity,
as the following testimonies teach us when they are taken together.

Moses says that God “created the world”; and John says that “all things were created by the Word,”
which he calls God.
The apostle says that “God made the world by his Son.” He also says that “God created all things by Jesus Christ.”

And so it must follow that he who is called God, the Word, the Son, and Jesus Christ already existed when all things were created by him.
Therefore the prophet Micah says that his origin is “from ancient times, from eternity.”
And the apostle says that he has “neither beginning of days nor end of life.”

So then, he is the true eternal God, the Almighty, whom we invoke, worship, and serve.

13 Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3
14 Gen. 1:1
15 John 1:3
16 Heb. 1:2
17 Col. 1:16
18 Mic. 5:2
19 Heb. 7:3

Article 11: The Deity of the Holy Spirit
We believe and confess also that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son—
ever made, nor created, nor begotten, but only proceeding from the two of them.

In regard to order, he is the third person of the Trinity—of one and the same essence, and majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son.

He is true and eternal God, as the Holy Scriptures teach us.

Article 12: The Creation of All Things
We believe that the Father created heaven and earth and all other creatures from nothing, when it seemed good to him, by his Word—that is to say, by his Son.

He has given all creatures their being, form, and appearance, and their various functions for serving their Creator.

Even now he also sustains and governs them all, according to his eternal providence, and by his infinite power, that they may serve man, in order that man may serve God.

He has also created the angels good, that they might be his messengers and serve his elect.

Some of them have fallen from the excellence in which God created them into eternal perdition; and the others have persisted and remained in their original state, by the grace of God.
The devils and evil spirits are so corrupt that they are enemies of God and of everything good. They lie in wait for the church and every member of it like thieves, with all their power, to destroy and spoil everything by their deceptions.

So then, by their own wickedness they are condemned to everlasting damnation, daily awaiting their torments.

For that reason we detest the error of the Sadducees, who deny that there are spirits and angels, and also the error of the Manicheans, who say that the devils originated by themselves, being evil by nature, without having been corrupted.

**Article 13: The Doctrine of God’s Providence**

We believe that this good God, after he created all things, did not abandon them to chance or fortune but leads and governs them according to his holy will, in such a way that nothing happens in this world without his orderly arrangement.

Yet God is not the author of, nor can he be charged with, the sin that occurs. For his power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible that he arranges and does his work very well and justly even when the devils and wicked men act unjustly.

We do not wish to inquire with undue curiosity into what he does that surpasses human understanding and is beyond our ability to comprehend. But in all humility and reverence we adore the just judgments of God, which are hidden from us, being content to be Christ’s disciples, so as to learn only what he shows us in his Word, without going beyond those limits.

This doctrine gives us unspeakable comfort since it teaches us that nothing can happen to us by chance but only by the arrangement of our gracious heavenly Father. He watches over us with fatherly care, keeping all creatures under his control, so that not one of the hairs on our heads (for they are all numbered) nor even a little bird can fall to the ground without the will of our Father.

In this thought we rest, knowing that he holds in check the devils and all our enemies, who cannot hurt us without his permission and will.

For that reason we reject the damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God involves himself in nothing and leaves everything to chance.

20 Matt. 10:29-30

**Article 14: The Creation and Fall of Man**

We believe that God created man from the dust of the earth and made and formed him in his image and likeness—good, just, and holy; able by his own will to conform in all things to the will of God.

But when he was in honor he did not understand it and did not recognize his excellence. But he subjected himself willingly to sin and consequently to death and the curse, lending his ear to the word of the devil.

For he transgressed the commandment of life, which he had received, and by his sin he separated himself from God, who was his true life, having corrupted his entire nature.
So he made himself guilty
and subject to physical and spiritual death,
    having become wicked,
    perverse,
    and corrupt in all his ways.
He lost all his excellent gifts
    which he had received from God,
and he retained none of them
except for small traces
    which are enough to make him
    inexcusable.

Moreover, all the light in us is turned to darkness,
as the Scripture teaches us:
    “The light shone in the darkness,
    and the darkness did not receive it.”
Here John calls men “darkness.”

Therefore we reject everything taught to the contrary
concerning man’s free will,
since man is nothing but the slave of sin
and cannot do a thing
unless it is “given him from heaven.”

For who can boast of being able
to do anything good by himself,
since Christ says,
    “No one can come to me
    unless my Father who sent me
draws him.”

Who can glory in his own will
when he understands that “the mind of the flesh
    is enmity against God”? 
Who can speak of his own knowledge
in view of the fact that “the natural man
does not understand the things of the Spirit of God”? 
In short,
who can produce a single thought,
since he knows that we are “not able to think a thing”
    about ourselves,
    by ourselves,
    but that “our ability is from God”? 

And therefore,
what the apostle says
ought rightly to stand fixed and firm:
    “God works within us both to will and to do
    according to his good pleasure.”

For there is no understanding nor will
conforming to God’s understanding and will
apart from Christ’s involvement,
as he teaches us when he says,
    “Without me you can do nothing.”

21 Ps. 49:20
22 John 1:5
23 John 3:27
24 John 6:44
25 Rom. 8:7
26 1 Cor. 2:14
27 2 Cor. 3:5
28 Phil. 2:13
29 John 15:5

Article 15: The Doctrine of Original Sin
We believe
that by the disobedience of Adam
original sin has been spread
through the whole human race.

It is a corruption of all nature—
an inherited depravity which even infects small infants
    in their mother’s womb,
and the root which produces in man
every sort of sin.
It is therefore so vile and enormous in God’s sight
    that it is enough to condemn the human race,
and it is not abolished
    or wholly uprooted
    even by baptism,
    seeing that sin constantly boils forth
    as though from a contaminated spring.

Nevertheless,
it is not imputed to God’s children
for their condemnation
but is forgiven
by his grace and mercy—
    not to put them to sleep
    but so that the awareness of this corruption
    might often make believers groan
    as they long to be set free
    from the “body of this death.”

Therefore we reject the error of the Pelagians
who say that this sin is nothing else than a matter of imitation.

30 Rom. 7:24
The Son took the “form of a servant” and was made in the “likeness of man,” truly assuming a real human nature, with all its weaknesses, except for sin; being conceived in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, without male participation.

And he not only assumed human nature as far as the body is concerned but also a real human soul, in order that he might be a real human being. For since the soul had been lost as well as the body he had to assume them both to save them both together.

Therefore we confess, against the heresy of the Anabaptists who deny that Christ assumed human flesh from his mother, that he “shared the very flesh and blood of children”; that he is “fruit of the loins of David” according to the flesh; “born of the seed of David” according to the flesh; “fruit of the womb of the virgin Mary”; “born of a woman”; “the seed of David”; “a shoot from the root of Jesse”; “the offspring of Judah,” having descended from the Jews according to the flesh; “from the seed of Abraham”—for he “assumed Abraham’s seed” and was “made like his brothers except for sin.”

In this way he is truly our Immanuel—that is: “God with us.”

33 Phil. 2:7
34 Heb. 2:14
35 Acts 2:30
36 Rom. 1:3
37 Luke 1:42
38 Gal. 4:4
39 2 Tim. 2:8
40 Rom. 15:12
41 Heb. 7:14
42 Heb. 2:17; 4:15
43 Matt. 1:23
Article 19: The Two Natures of Christ
We believe that by being thus conceived
the person of the Son has been inseparably united
and joined together
with human nature,
in such a way that there are not two Sons of God,
nor two persons,
but two natures united in a single person,
with each nature retaining its own distinct properties.

Thus his divine nature has always remained uncreated,
without beginning of days or end of life,44
filling heaven and earth.

His human nature has not lost its properties
but continues to have those of a creature—
it has a beginning of days;
it is of a finite nature
and retains all that belongs to a real body.
And even though he,
by his resurrection,
gave it immortality,
that nonetheless did not change
the reality of his human nature;
for our salvation and resurrection
depend also on the reality of his body.

But these two natures
are so united together in one person
that they are not even separated by his death.

So then,
what he committed to his Father when he died
was a real human spirit which left his body.
But meanwhile his divine nature remained
united with his human nature
even when he was lying in the grave;
and his deity never ceased to be in him,
just as it was in him when he was a little child,
though for a while it did not show itself as such.

These are the reasons why we confess him
to be true God and true man—
true God in order to conquer death
by his power,
and true man that he might die for us
in the weakness of his flesh.

44 Heb. 7:3

Article 20: The Justice and Mercy of God in Christ
We believe that God—
who is perfectly merciful
and also very just—
sent his Son to assume the nature
in which the disobedience had been committed,
in order to bear in it the punishment of sin
by his most bitter passion and death.

So God made known his justice toward his Son,
who was charged with our sin,
and he poured out his goodness and mercy on us,
who are guilty and worthy of damnation,
giving to us his Son to die,
by a most perfect love,
and raising him to life
for our justification,
in order that by him
we might have immortality
and eternal life.

Article 21: The Atonement
We believe
that Jesus Christ is a high priest forever
according to the order of Melchizedek—
made such by an oath—
and that he presented himself
in our name
before his Father,
to appease his wrath
with full satisfaction
by offering himself
on the tree of the cross
and pouring out his precious blood
for the cleansing of our sins,
as the prophets had predicted.

For it is written
that “the chastisement of our peace”
was placed on the Son of God
and that “we are healed by his wounds."
He was “led to death as a lamb”;
he was “numbered among sinners”45
and condemned as a criminal by Pontius Pilate,
though Pilate had declared
that he was innocent.
So he paid back what he had not stolen,\(^{46}\) and he suffered—
the “just for the unjust,”\(^{47}\) in both his body and his soul—in such a way that when he senses the horrible punishment required by our sins his sweat became like “big drops of blood falling on the ground.”\(^{48}\)
He cried, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”\(^ {49}\)

And he endured all this for the forgiveness of our sins.

Therefore we rightly say with Paul that we “know nothing but Jesus and him crucified”;\(^ {50}\) we consider all things as “dung for the excellence of the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”\(^ {51}\)
We find all comforts in his wounds and have no need to seek or invent any other means to reconcile ourselves with God than this one and only sacrifice, once made, which renders believers perfect forever.

This is also why the angel of God called him Jesus—that is, “Savior”—because he would save his people from their sins.\(^ {52}\)

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Article 22: The Righteousness of Faith

We believe that for us to acquire the true knowledge of this great mystery the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts a true faith that embraces Jesus Christ, with all his merits, and makes him its own, and no longer looks for anything apart from him.

For it must necessarily follow that either all that is required for our salvation is not in Christ or, if all is in him, then he who has Christ by faith has his salvation entirely.

Therefore, to say that Christ is not enough but that something else is needed as well is a most enormous blasphemy against God—for it then would follow that Jesus Christ is only half a Savior. And therefore we justly say with Paul that we are justified “by faith alone” or by faith “apart from works.”\(^ {53}\)

However, we do not mean, properly speaking, that it is faith itself that justifies us—for faith is only the instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness.

But Jesus Christ is our righteousness in making available to us all his merits and all the holy works he has done for us and in our place. And faith is the instrument that keeps us in communion with him and with all his benefits.

When those benefits are made ours they are more than enough to absolve us of our sins.

\(^{53}\) Rom. 3:28
Article 24: The Sanctification of Sinners
We believe that this true faith, produced in man by the hearing of God’s Word and by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and makes him a “new man,”\(^{57}\) causing him to live the “new life”\(^{58}\) and freeing him from the slavery of sin.

Therefore, far from making people cold toward living in a pious and holy way, this justifying faith, quite to the contrary, so works within them that apart from it they will never do a thing out of love for God but only out of love for themselves and fear of being condemned.

So then, it is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being, seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls “faith working through love,”\(^{59}\) which leads a man to do by himself the works that God has commanded in his Word.

These works, proceeding from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable to God, since they are all sanctified by his grace.

Yet they do not count toward our justification—for by faith in Christ we are justified, even before we do good works. Otherwise they could not be good, any more than the fruit of a tree could be good if the tree is not good in the first place.

So then, we do good works, but not for merit—for what would we merit? Rather, we are indebted to God for the good works we do, and not he to us, since it is he who “works in us both to will and do according to his good pleasure”\(^{60}\)—

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54 Ps. 32:1; Rom. 4:6
55 Rom. 3:24
56 Ps. 143:2
Article 26: The Intercession of Christ

We believe that we have no access to God except through the one and only Mediator and Intercessor: Jesus Christ the Righteous.62

He therefore was made man, uniting together the divine and human natures, so that we human beings might have access to the divine Majesty. Otherwise we would have no access.

But this Mediator, whom the Father has appointed between himself and us, ought not terrify us by his greatness, so that we have to look for another one, according to our fancy.

For neither in heaven nor among the creatures on earth is there anyone who loves us more than Jesus Christ does. Although he was “in the form of God,” he nevertheless “emptied himself,” taking the form of “a man” and “a servant” for us; and he made himself “completely like his brothers.”

So we would always be in doubt, tossed back and forth without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be tormented constantly if they did not rest on the merit of the suffering and death of our Savior.

57 2 Cor. 5:17  
58 Rom. 6:4  
59 Gal. 5:6  
60 Phil. 2:13  
61 Luke 17:10

Article 25: The Fulfillment of the Law

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended with the coming of Christ, and that all foreshadowings have come to an end, so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians.

Yet the truth and substance of these things remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled.

Nevertheless, we continue to use the witnesses drawn from the law and prophets to confirm us in the gospel and to regulate our lives with full integrity for the glory of God, according to his will.

52  Belgic Confession thus keeping in mind what is written: “When you have done all that is commanded you, then you shall say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have done what it was our duty to do.’”63

Yet we do not wish to deny that God rewards good works—but it is by his grace that he crowns his gifts.

Moreover, although we do good works we do not base our salvation on them; for we cannot do any work that is not defiled by our flesh and also worthy of punishment.

And even if we could point to one, memory of a single sin is enough for God to reject that work.

So we would always be in doubt, tossed back and forth without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be tormented constantly if they did not rest on the merit of the suffering and death of our Savior.

23  Belgic Confession
What more do we need?
For Christ himself declares:
“I am the way, the truth, and the life;
no one comes to my Father
but by me.”

Why should we seek
another intercessor?

Since it has pleased God
to give us his Son as our Intercessor,
let us not leave him for another—
or rather seek, without ever finding.
For when God gave him to us
he knew well that we were sinners.

Therefore,
in following the command of Christ
we call on the heavenly Father
through Christ,
our only Mediator,
as we are taught by the Lord’s Prayer,
being assured that we shall obtain
all we ask of the Father
in his name.

Article 27: The Holy Catholic Church
We believe and confess
one single catholic or universal church—
a holy congregation and gathering
of true Christian believers,
awaiting their entire salvation in Jesus Christ
being washed by his blood,
and sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.
And to preserve this unity more effectively, it is the duty of all believers, according to God’s Word, to separate themselves from those who do not belong to the church, in order to join this assembly wherever God has established it, even if civil authorities and royal decrees forbid and death and physical punishment result.

And so, all who withdraw from the church or do not join it act contrary to God’s ordinance.

**Article 29: The Marks of the True Church**

We believe that we ought to discern diligently and very carefully, by the Word of God, what is the true church— for all sects in the world today claim for themselves the name of “the church.”

We are not speaking here of the company of hypocrites who are mixed among the good in the church and who nonetheless are not part of it, even though they are physically there. But we are speaking of distinguishing the body and fellowship of the true church from all sects that call themselves “the church.”

The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks:

The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel;

it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them;

it practices church discipline for correcting faults.

In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head. By these marks one can be assured of recognizing the true church—and no one ought to be separated from it.

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This church has existed from the beginning of the world and will last until the end, as appears from the fact that Christ is eternal King who cannot be without subjects.

And this holy church is preserved by God against the rage of the whole world, even though for a time it may appear very small in the eyes of men—as though it were snuffed out.

For example, during the very dangerous time of Ahab the Lord preserved for himself seven thousand men who did not bend their knees to Baal.74

And so this holy church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or certain persons. But it is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world, though still joined and united in heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith.

74 1 Kings 19:18

**Article 28: The Obligations of Church Members**

We believe that since this holy assembly and congregation is the gathering of those who are saved and there is no salvation apart from it, no one ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself, regardless of his status or condition.

But all people are obliged to join and unite with it, keeping the unity of the church by submitting to its instruction and discipline, by bending their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and by serving to build up one another, according to the gifts God has given them as members of each other in the same body.
As for those who can belong to the church, we can recognize them by the distinguishing marks of Christians: namely by faith, and by their fleeing from sin and pursuing righteousness, once they have received the one and only Savior, Jesus Christ. They love the true God and their neighbors, without turning to the right or left, and they crucify the flesh and its works.

Though great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their lives, appealing constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of the Lord Jesus, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins, through faith in him.

As for the false church, it assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God; it does not want to subject itself to the yoke of Christ; it does not administer the sacraments as Christ commanded in his Word; it rather adds to them or subtracts from them as it pleases; it bases itself on men, more than on Jesus Christ; it persecutes those who live holy lives according to the Word of God and who rebuke it for its faults, greed, and idolatry.

These two churches are easy to recognize and thus to distinguish from each other.

**Article 30: The Government of the Church**

We believe that this true church ought to be governed according to the spiritual order that our Lord has taught us in his Word. There should be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments. There should also be elders and deacons, along with the pastors, to make up the council of the church.

By this means true religion is preserved; true doctrine is able to take its course; and evil men are corrected spiritually and held in check, so that also the poor and all the afflicted may be helped and comforted according to their need.

By this means everything will be done well and in good order in the church, when such persons are elected who are faithful and are chosen according to the rule that Paul gave to Timothy.

75 1 Tim. 3

**Article 31: The Officers of the Church**

We believe that ministers of the Word of God, elders, and deacons ought to be chosen to their offices by a legitimate election of the church, with prayer in the name of the Lord, and in good order, as the Word of God teaches.

So everyone must be careful not to push one’s self forward improperly, but all must wait until called by God, so that they may be assured of their calling and be certain and sure that it is from the Lord.

As for the ministers of the Word, they all have the same power and authority, no matter where they may be, since they are all servants of Jesus Christ, the only universal bishop, and the only head of the church.

Moreover, to keep God’s holy order from being violated or despised, we say that everyone ought, as much as possible, to hold the ministers of the Word and elders of the church in special esteem,
because of the work they do, 
and be at peace with them, 
without grumbling, quarreling, or fighting.

Article 32: The Order and Discipline of the Church
We also believe that 
although it is useful and good 
for those who govern the churches 
to establish and set up 
a certain order among themselves 
for maintaining the body of the church, 
they ought always to guard against deviating 
from what Christ, 
our only Master, 
has ordained 
for us.

Therefore we reject all human innovations 
and all laws imposed on us, 
in our worship of God, 
which bind and force our consciences 
in any way.

So we accept only what is proper 
to maintain harmony and unity 
and to keep all in obedience 
to God.

To that end excommunication, 
with all it involves, 
according to the Word of God, 
is required.

Article 33: The Sacraments
We believe that our good God, 
mindful of our crudeness and weakness, 
has ordained sacraments for us 
to seal his promises in us, 
to pledge his good will and grace toward us, 
and also to nourish and sustain our faith.
He has added these to the Word of the gospel 
to represent better to our external senses 
both what he enables us to understand by his Word 
and what he does inwardly in our hearts, 
confirming in us 
the salvation he imparts to us.

For they are visible signs and seals 
of something internal and invisible, 
by means of which God works in us

through the power of the Holy Spirit. 
So they are not empty and hollow signs 
to fool and deceive us, 
for their truth is Jesus Christ, 
without whom they would be nothing.

Moreover, 
we are satisfied with the number of sacraments 
that Christ our Master has ordained for us.
There are only two: 
the sacrament of baptism 
and the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ.

Article 34: The Sacrament of Baptism
We believe and confess that Jesus Christ, 
in whom the law is fulfilled, 
has by his shed blood 
put an end to every other shedding of blood, 
which anyone might do or wish to do 
in order to atone or satisfy for sins.

Having abolished circumcision, 
which was done with blood, 
he established in its place 
the sacrament of baptism. 
By it we are received into God’s church 
and set apart from all other people and alien religions, 
that we may be dedicated entirely to him, 
bearing his mark and sign. 
It also witnesses to us that he will be our God forever, 
since he is our gracious Father.

Therefore he has commanded 
that all those who belong to him 
be baptized with pure water 
“in the name of the Father, 
and the Son, 
and the Holy Spirit.”76
In this way he signifies to us 
that just as water washes away the dirt of the body when it is poured on us 
and also is seen on the body of the baptized when it is sprinkled on him, 
so too the blood of Christ does the same thing internally, 
in the soul, 
by the Holy Spirit. 
It washes and cleanses it from its sins 
and transforms us from being the children of wrath 
into the children of God.
Therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of what Christ has done for them, just as the Lord commanded in the law that by offering a lamb for them the sacrament of the suffering and death of Christ would be granted them shortly after their birth. This was the sacrament of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, baptism does for our children what circumcision did for the Jewish people. That is why Paul calls baptism the “circumcision of Christ.”

76 Matt. 28:19
77 Col. 2:11

Article 35: The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
We believe and confess that our Savior Jesus Christ has ordained and instituted the sacrament of the Holy Supper to nourish and sustain those who are already born again and ingrafted into his family: his church.

Now those who are born again have two lives in them. The one is physical and temporal—

   they have it from the moment of their first birth,
   and it is common to all.

The other is spiritual and heavenly,

   and is given them in their second birth;
   it comes through the Word of the gospel in the communion of the body of Christ;
   and this life is common to God’s elect only.

Thus, to support the physical and earthly life God has prescribed for us an appropriate earthly and material bread, which is as common to all as life itself also is. But to maintain the spiritual and heavenly life that belongs to believers he has sent a living bread that came down from heaven: namely Jesus Christ, who nourishes and maintains the spiritual life of believers when eaten—

33  Belgic Confession

This does not happen by the physical water but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God, who is our Red Sea, through which we must pass to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, who is the devil, and to enter the spiritual land of Canaan.

So ministers, as far as their work is concerned, give us the sacrament and what is visible, but our Lord gives what the sacrament signifies—namely the invisible gifts and graces; washing, purifying, and cleansing our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts and filling them with all comfort; giving us true assurance of his fatherly goodness; clothing us with the “new man” and stripping off the “old,” with all its works.

For this reason we believe that anyone who aspires to reach eternal life ought to be baptized only once without ever repeating it—

   for we cannot be born twice.

Yet this baptism is profitable not only when the water is on us and when we receive it but throughout our entire lives.

For that reason we detest the error of the Anabaptists who are not content with a single baptism once received and also condemn the baptism of the children of believers. We believe our children ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as little children were circumcised in Israel on the basis of the same promises made to our children.

And truly, Christ has shed his blood no less for washing the little children of believers than he did for adults.
that is, when appropriated and received spiritually by faith.

To represent to us this spiritual and heavenly bread Christ has instituted an earthly and visible bread as the sacrament of his body and wine as the sacrament of his blood. He did this to testify to us that just as truly as we take and hold the sacraments in our hands and eat and drink it in our mouths, by which our life is then sustained, so truly we receive into our souls, for our spiritual life, the true body and true blood of Christ, our only Savior. We receive these by faith, which is the hand and mouth of our souls.

Now it is certain that Jesus Christ did not prescribe his sacraments for us in vain, since he works in us all he represents by these holy signs, although the manner in which he does it goes beyond our understanding and is incomprehensible to us, just as the operation of God’s Spirit is hidden and incomprehensible.

Yet we do not go wrong when we say that what is eaten is Christ’s own natural body and what is drunk is his own blood—but the manner in which we eat it is not by the mouth but by the Spirit, through faith. In that way Jesus Christ remains always seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven—but he never refrains on that account to communicate himself to us through faith.

This banquet is a spiritual table at which Christ communicates himself to us with all his benefits. At that table he makes us enjoy himself as much as the merits of his suffering and death, as he nourishes, strengthens, and comforts our poor, desolate souls by the eating of his flesh, and relieves and renews them by the drinking of his blood.

Moreover, though the sacraments and thing signified are joined together, not all receive both of them. The wicked person certainly takes the sacrament to his condemnation, but does not receive the truth of the sacrament, just as Judas and Simon the Sorcerer both indeed received the sacrament, but not Christ, who was signified by it. He is communicated only to believers.

Finally, with humility and reverence we receive the holy sacrament in the gathering of God’s people, as we engage together, with thanksgiving, in a holy remembrance of the death of Christ our Savior, and as we thus confess our faith and Christian religion. Therefore no one should come to this table without examining himself carefully, lest “by eating this bread and drinking this cup he eat and drink to his own judgment.”

In short, by the use of this holy sacrament we are moved to a fervent love of God and our neighbors. Therefore we reject as desecrations of the sacraments all the muddled ideas and damnable inventions that men have added and mixed in with them. And we say that we should be content with the procedure that Christ and the apostles have taught us and speak of these things as they have spoken of them.

78 1 Cor. 11:27
Article 36: The Civil Government
We believe that because of the depravity of the human race our good God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers. He wants the world to be governed by laws and policies so that human lawlessness may be restrained and that everything may be conducted in good order among human beings.

For that purpose he has placed the sword in the hands of the government, to punish evil people and protect the good.

And being called in this manner to contribute to the advancement of a society that is pleasing to God, the civil rulers have the task, subject to God's law, of removing every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and to every aspect of divine worship.

They should do this while completely refraining from every tendency toward exercising absolute authority, and while functioning in the sphere entrusted to them, with the means belonging to them.

They should do it in order that the Word of God may have free course; the kingdom of Jesus Christ may make progress; and every anti-Christian power may be resisted.*

Moreover everyone, regardless of status, condition, or rank, must be subject to the government, and pay taxes, and hold its representatives in honor and respect,

*The Synod of 1958, in line with 1910 and 1938, substituted the above statement for the following (which it judged unbiblical):
And the government's task is not limited to caring for and watching over the public domain but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry, with a view to removing and destroying all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist; to promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ; and to furthering the preaching of the gospel everywhere; to the end that God may be honored and served by everyone, as he requires in his Word.

Article 37: The Last Judgment
Finally we believe, according to God's Word, that when the time appointed by the Lord is come (which is unknown to all creatures) and the number of the elect is complete, our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, bodily and visibly, as he ascended, with great glory and majesty, to declare himself the judge of the living and the dead. He will burn this old world, in fire and flame, in order to cleanse it.

Then all human creatures will appear in person before that great judge—men, women, and children, who have lived from the beginning until the end of the world. They will be summoned there by the voice of the archangel and by the sound of the divine trumpet.79

For all those who died before that time will be raised from the earth, their spirits being joined and united with their own bodies in which they lived.

**The Synod of 1985 directed that the following paragraph be taken from the body of the text and be placed in a footnote: And on this matter we denounce the Anabaptists, other anarchists, and in general all those who want to reject the authorities and civil officers and to subvert justice by introducing common ownership of goods and corrupting the moral order that God has established among human beings.
And as for those who are still alive, they will not die like the others but will be changed “in the twinkling of an eye” from “corruptible to incorruptible.”

Then “the books” (that is, the consciences) will be opened, and the dead will be judged according to the things they did in the world, whether good or evil. Indeed, all people will give account of all the idle words they have spoken, which the world regards as only playing games. And then the secrets and hypocrisies of men will be publicly uncovered in the sight of all.

Therefore, with good reason the thought of this judgment is horrible and dreadful to wicked and evil people. But it is very pleasant and a great comfort to the righteous and elect, since their total redemption will then be accomplished. They will then receive the fruits of their labor and of the trouble they have suffered; their innocence will be openly recognized by all; and they will see the terrible vengeance that God will bring on the evil ones who tyrannized, oppressed, and tormented them in this world.

The evil ones will be convicted by the witness of their own consciences, and shall be made immortal—but only to be tormented in the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

In contrast, the faithful and elect will be crowned with glory and honor. The Son of God will “confess their names” before God his Father and the holy and elect angels; all tears will be “wiped from their eyes,” and their cause—at present condemned as heretical and evil by many judges and civil officers—will be acknowledged as the “cause of the Son of God.” And as a gracious reward the Lord will make them possess a glory such as the heart of man could never imagine.

So we look forward to that great day with longing in order to enjoy fully the promises of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

79 1 Thess. 4:16  
80 1 Cor. 15:51-53  
81 Rev. 20:12  
82 Matt. 12:36  
83 Matt. 25:14  
84 Matt. 10:32  
85 Rev. 7:17