

## A CONFSSIONAL CHURCH

In the confessional statements in the *Book of Confessions* the Presbyterian Church (USA) declares to its members and to the world

- Who and what it is;
- What it believes, and
- What it resolves to do.

These confessional statements drawn from the tradition of the whole church and the Reformed theological tradition

- Guide the church in its study and interpretation of Scripture;
- Summarize the essence of the Christian tradition;
- Direct the Church in maintaining sound doctrine, and
- Equip the Church for its work of proclamation and mission.

Confessional statements are always subordinate to Scripture, yet they are nonetheless standards that help shape the church's theology and practice and should, therefore, be appropriately considered. These nine statements found in the *Book of Confessions* range in origin from the fourth to the twentieth centuries and are catholic (belonging to the whole church), Protestant, and Reformed.

### NICENE CREED

This is the first ecclesiastically approved confessional statement of the church and was written in response to a heresy that

was threatening the church's unity. Arius, a priest from Alexandria, taught that Christ, while divine, was created by the Father and therefore not of the same substance or standing as the Father. In response the creed confesses: "We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father, through whom all things were made." The creed was adopted by a Council called by Emperor Constantine in Nicaea in 325. A second council in Constantinople in 381 refined the original document and gave us the creed as we have it today.

### APOSTLES CREED

This creed grew out of the baptismal practice of the church. Following a lengthy period of instruction and examination, candidates for baptism were asked to declare what they believed in the words of this creedal statement. It was probably originally interrogatory in form, i.e. "Do you believe in God the Father? *I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.*" Its roots reach to the second, if not first century church, but found its present form some time in the eighth century.

### THE SCOTS CONFSSION

This seventeenth-century confessional statement was written by six ministers, one of whom was John Knox, over a four-day period. Scotland, having gained England's

recognition of her sovereignty, proclaimed itself a Protestant nation and gave to these six the responsibility of drafting a statement of belief. Key points include the authority of Scripture, the sovereignty of God, and the marks of the "true church": "the true preaching of the Word of God," the "right administration of the sacraments," and "ecclesiastical discipline rightly administered."

### THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

This catechism was written in 1563 to clarify points of doctrine between Reformed and Lutheran Christians, especially as related to the meaning of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. It consists of 129 questions and answers and has three major sections relating to human sin, redemption, and the life of thankfulness.

### THE SECOND HELVETIC CONFSSION

This confessional statement was composed by Heinrich Bullinger as his personal statement of faith. It was adopted, before his death, by the Reformed Churches in Switzerland in 1566. It consists of thirty chapters, and reflects the theological struggles of the day, emphasizing many basic Reformed convictions: Scripture is to be interpreted in light of the total testimony of the Bible; God alone is to be worshiped and glorified; all things are governed by the providence of God; we are justified by grace through faith; Jesus Christ alone is Head of the Church.

## THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

The Westminster Assembly of Divines (1643-1648) was convened by the English Parliament for the purpose of reforming the theology, liturgy and polity of the Church of England. In 1647 the Presbyterian Church in Scotland adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith as well as the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, a directory for worship, a book of government, and the Psalter prepared by the Assembly. The Confession and the Catechisms represent a systematization of the theology of the Reformation. The Larger Catechism was prepared with public teaching in mind. The Shorter Catechism was intended primarily for use with children.

## THE THEOLOGICAL DECLARATION OF BARMEN

This twentieth-century confessional statement was adopted in 1934 by representatives from the Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches in Germany in response to the rise of National Socialism under Adolph Hitler. It affirms the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every sphere of life.

## THE CONFESSION OF 1967

This confessional statement was adopted by the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and sought to present the faith of the church in the midst of the social, political and ecclesiastical tur-

bulence of the 1960s. A strong emphasis of the confession is the call to reconciliation in personal and social relationships.

## A BRIEF STATEMENT OF FAITH

The occasion for this statement was the reunion of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States ("northern" and "southern" Presbyterian Churches) in 1983. The statement is Trinitarian in structure and is especially suited for liturgical use.

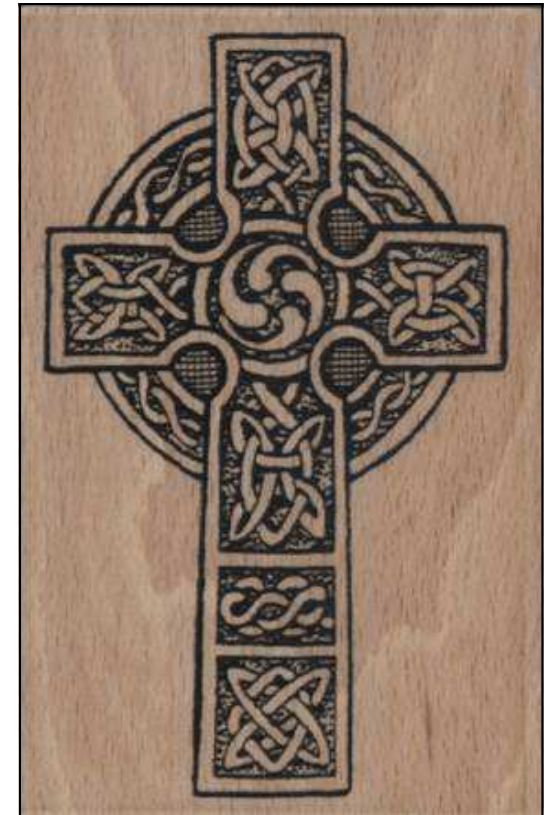
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The *Book of Confessions* is not intended to serve as a theological litmus test for true Presbyterians. Each confessional statement reflects the era in which it was written and the limitations of those who prepared it. None is considered inerrant or eternal, yet each contains truths that the Reformed Church has found to be useful both in understanding and declaring the faith which shapes its life and hope. Ours is a living faith. By the power of the Holy Spirit God continues to reveal his truth and purpose to us in each new generation. The source for that revelation has been and will ever continue to be the Holy Scriptures.

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# A Confessional Church *The Confessions Contained*

*in*



*The Book of Confessions*  
of the  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)