

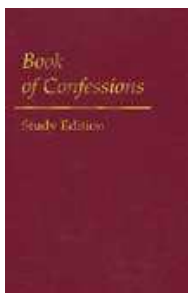
The Church and Its Confessions (G-2.0000)

The Presbyterian Church (USA) states its faith and bears witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ in the creeds and confessions found in *The Book of Confessions*. In these confessional statements the church declares to its members and to the world:

who and what it is,
what it believes,
what it resolves to do.

These statements identify the church as a community of people known by its convictions as well as by its actions. They guide the church in its study and interpretation of the Scriptures; they summarize the essence of Christian tradition; they direct the church in maintaining sound doctrines; they equip the church for its work of proclamation. These confessional statements are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed. The church is prepared to counsel with or even to discipline one ordained who seriously rejects the faith expressed in the confessions. Yet the church, in obedience to Jesus Christ, is open to the reform of its standards of doctrine as well as of governance. The church affirms "Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda," that is, "The church reformed, always reforming," according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) consists of these two documents:



Book of Confessions

- The Nicene Creed
- The Apostles' Creed
- The Scots Confession
- The Heidelberg Catechism
- The Second Helvetic Confession
- The Westminster Confession of Faith
- The Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms
- The Theological Declaration of Barmen
- The Confession of 1967
- A Brief Statement of Faith – PCUSA



Book of Order

- Government
- Worship
- Discipline

The Confessions



The Nicene Creed (AD 325-381)

Written during the 4th century A.D. in an attempt to unify the Christian church under Emperor Constantine. It is heavily influenced by the theologian Athanasius and the work of the first two ecumenical councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381). It was adopted by the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451. Its central doctrines are those of the Person of Jesus Christ and the reality of the Holy Spirit. It is the only creed accepted by all three major branches of Christendom including Protestant, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians.



The Apostles' Creed (AD 180-750)

Developed between the second and eighth centuries as a baptismal creed for new Christians this is the most popular creed used in worship by Western Christians. Its central doctrines are those of the Trinity and God the Creator.



The Scots Confession (1560) - John Knox

Written by John Knox and five other "Johns" (Willock, Winram, Spottiswood, Row and Douglas) at the conclusion of the Scottish civil war in response to medieval Catholicism and at the behest of the Scottish Parliament in five days. Its central doctrines are those of election and the Church. It was approved by the Reformation Parliament and Church of Scotland, attaining full legal status with the departure of Mary, Queen of Scots, in 1567.



The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

Written by Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus in Germany at the time of the breaking of the peace of Augsburg in response to the Lutherans and at the direction of Frederick the Elector. Its central doctrines are those of stewardship and the Lord's Supper. It is the most personal of the Reformed creeds.



The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)

Written by Heinrich Bullinger in Switzerland after surviving the Black Plague as a codicil to his will. It is in response to the Anabaptists and makes an attempt to reconcile with the Lutherans. It is influenced by Ulrich Zwingli, and its central doctrines are those of Covenant and Baptism.



The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)

Written by the Westminster Assembly at the call of Parliament, together with the following two catechisms, and heavily influenced by Reynolds. It is written in the context of the English Civil War and as a response to high church Anglicanism. The central doctrines of this and the following two catechisms are the sovereignty of God and the authority and proper interpretation of Scripture.



The Theological Declaration of Barmen (1934)

Written by Karl Barth and the confessing church in Nazi Germany in response to Hitler's national church. Its central doctrines concern the sin of idolatry and the lordship of Christ.



The Confession of 1967 - United Presbyterian Church

Written during the troubled 1960s and the civil rights movement in response to civil religion. Its central doctrines include reconciliation and the equality of all persons. Edward A. Dowey, Jr. headed the committee that composed it.



A Brief Statement of Faith - Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (1983)

After the two largest streams of Presbyterianism in the United States reunited to form the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 1983 a committee was appointed to draft a confession that would briefly summarize our faith. A lengthy process of writing and review led to its adoption by the presbyteries in 1991. Like the earliest creeds it is liturgical in style and suitable for use in worship.

Text and graphics taken from <http://www.creeds.net/reformed/creeds.htm>

Faith of the Church Catholic

In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (USA) gives witness to the faith of the Church catholic. The confessions express the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church in the recognition of canonical Scriptures and the formulation and adoption of the ecumenical creeds, notably the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds with their definitions of the mystery of the triune God and of the incarnation of the eternal Word of God in Jesus Christ.

Faith of the Protestant Reformation

In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (USA) identifies with the affirmations of the Protestant Reformation. The focus of these affirmations is the rediscovery of God's grace in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. The Protestant watchwords – grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone – embody principles of understanding which continue to guide and motivate the people of God in the life of faith.

The Great Themes of the Reformed Tradition

In its confessions, the Presbyterian Church (USA) expresses the faith of the Reformed tradition. Central to this tradition is the affirmation of the majesty, holiness, and providence of God who creates, sustains, rules, and redeems the world in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love. Related to this central affirmation of God's sovereignty are other great themes of the Reformed tradition:

1. The election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation;
2. Covenant life marked by a disciplined concern for order in the church according to the Word of God;
3. A faithful stewardship that shuns ostentation and seeks proper use of the gifts of God's creation;
4. The recognition of the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny, which calls the people of God to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God.

Thus, the creeds and confessions of this church reflect a particular stance within the history of God's people. They are the result of prayer, thought, and experience within a living tradition. They serve to strengthen personal commitment and the life and witness of the community of believers.

The Five Points of Calvinism • T.U.L.I.P.

In 1610, a year after the death of the Dutch seminary professor James Arminius, a document called the Five Articles of Faith were drawn up by his followers. The "Arminians" presented these five doctrines to the State of Holland in the form of a "Remonstrance", or protest, to reform the church: 1) God elects on the basis of foreseen faith or unbelief. 2) Christ died for every person, although only believers are saved. 3) Christ offers redemption to everyone but it becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it. 4) This grace may be resisted. 5) Whether all who believe will persevere to the end is a point that needs further investigation.



Jacobus Arminius

The Synod of Dort was convened in 1618 to examine the five Arminian points in the light of Scripture. Over 100 commissioners from Germany, the Palatinate, Switzerland, and England gathered in Holland and held 154 sessions over seven months to consider these matters. In the end, the Synod unanimously rejected Arminianism, and went further by drawing up its own "five points of Calvinism": 1) Total depravity; 2) Unconditional election; 3) Limited atonement; 4) Irresistible grace; 5) Perseverance of the saints (T.U.L.I.P. for short). Essentially, the Synod believed that salvation was a work of grace from beginning to end.

The Distinctives of the Reformed Faith



- Reformed Christians believe in justification by grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone.
 - *Roman Catholics* believe scripture and tradition held together to be authoritative.
 - Reformed Christians believe in the Trinity and in the full deity of Jesus Christ.
 - *Unitarian/Universalists* believe in God, but not in a Triune God.
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- Reformed Christians believe in the prior work of God's grace in the human heart leading to salvation, and in the predestination of all things according to God's sovereignty.
 - *Methodists* emphasize the initiative of the individual in turning toward God's grace.
 - Reformed Christians believe that the priesthood of all believers has replaced the special priesthood, and that ordination is by the Holy Spirit and not by any power granted in human succession.
 - *Anglican/Episcopalians*, like Roman Catholics, believe in a rigid hierarchy and apostolic succession.
 - Reformed Christians believe that baptism is a gift of the Holy Spirit not only upon the believer, but upon the whole household including children who are heirs of the covenant.
 - *Baptists* believe that baptism is a confirmation of our confession in Jesus Christ, and therefore cannot be done unless the child has reached an "age of understanding."
 - The Reformed Christian believes in a representative government rather than a strictly democratic one.
 - *Congregationalists* believe in a strictly democratic form of government where all decisions are made by the whole congregation.

Presbyterian Ethos and Personality

1. We are a *Biblical/Evangelical* people
2. We are an *Orthodox/Confessional* people
3. We are an *Ecumenical/ Connectional* people
4. We are a *Compassionate/Socially Conscious* people
5. We are a *Reasonable/Moderate* people
6. We are an *Orderly/Process Oriented* people
7. We are a *Studying/Thinking* people

