

THE CANONS OF DORT

The third of our doctrinal standards is the Canons of Dort, also called the Five Articles against the Remonstrants. These are statements of doctrine adopted by the Reformed Synod of Dort in 1618-1619. This Synod had an international dimension, since it was not only composed of the delegates of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands but also attended by twenty-seven representatives of foreign churches.

The Synod of Dort was held in view of the serious disturbance in the Reformed churches caused by the rise and spread of Arminianism. Arminius, a theological professor at the University of Leyden, and his followers departed from the Reformed faith in their teaching concerning five important points. They taught conditional election on the ground of foreseen faith, universal atonement, partial depravity, resistible grace, and the possibility of a lapse from grace. These views were rejected by the Synod, and the opposite views were embodied in what are now called the Canons of Dort or the Five Articles against the Remonstrants. In these Canons the Synod set forth the Reformed doctrine on these points, namely, unconditional election, particular atonement, total depravity, invincible grace, and the perseverance of the saints.

Each of the Canons consists of a positive and a negative part, the former being an exposition of the Reformed doctrine on the subject, and the latter a repudiation of the corresponding Arminian error. Although in form there are only four chapters, occasioned by the combination of the third and fourth sections into one, we properly speak of five Canons, and the third chapter is always designated as Chapter III/IV. All office-bearers of our churches are required to subscribe to these Canons as well as to the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism.

FIRST HEAD OF DOCTRINE

DIVINE ELECTION AND REPROBATION

ARTICLE 1

ALL MANKIND CONDEMNABLE BEFORE GOD

Since all men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse, and deserve eternal death,¹ God would have done no one an injustice if it had been His will to leave the whole human race in sin and under the curse, and to condemn it on account of its sin, according to these words of the apostle: so that ... *the whole world* [may be] *held accountable to God. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Rom 3:19, 23); *and, the wages of sin is death* (Rom 6:23)

¹Rom 5:12.

ARTICLE 2

THE SENDING OF THE SON OF GOD

But *this is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world* (1 Jn 4:9), *that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life* (Jn 3:16).

ARTICLE 3

THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

So that men may be brought to faith, God mercifully sends heralds of this most joyful message to whom He will and when He wills.¹ By their ministry men are called to repentance and to

faith in Christ crucified.² For *how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent* (Rom 10:14 –15)?

¹ Is 52:7.

² 1 Cor 1:23-24.

ARTICLE 4

A TWOFOLD OUTCOME

The wrath of God remains upon those who do not believe this gospel.¹ But those who receive it and embrace Jesus the Saviour with a true and living faith are delivered by Him from the wrath of God and from destruction, and are given eternal life.²

¹ Jn 3:36.

² Mk 16:16; Rom 10:9.

ARTICLE 5

THE CAUSE OF UNBELIEF, THE SOURCE OF FAITH

The cause or guilt for this unbelief, as well as for all other sins, is by no means in God, but rather in man.¹ Faith in Jesus Christ and salvation through Him, however, is the free gift of God, as it is written: *By grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God* (Eph 2:8). Similarly: *It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ ... to believe on Him* (Phil 1:29).

¹ Heb 4:6.

ARTICLE 6

GOD'S ETERNAL DECREE

That God in time confers the gift of faith on some, and not on others, proceeds from His eternal decree.¹ For He knows all His works from eternity,² and He *works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will* (Eph 1:11). According to this decree He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, no matter how hard they may be, and inclines them to believe; those not elected, however, He leaves in their own wickedness and hardness by a just judgment. And here especially is disclosed to us the profound, merciful, and at the same time just distinction between men equally worthy of condemnation, or that decree of election and reprobation which has been revealed in God's Word. Although perverse, impure, and unstable men twist this decree to their own destruction, it provides unspeakable comfort for holy and God-fearing souls.

¹ Acts 13:48.

² 1 Pet 2:8.

ARTICLE 7

ELECTION DEFINED

Election is the unchangeable purpose of God whereby, before the foundation of the world,¹ out of the whole human race, which had fallen by its own fault out of its original integrity into sin and perdition, He has, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His will, out of mere grace, chosen in Christ to salvation a definite number of specific persons, neither better nor more worthy than others, but involved together with them in a common misery. He has also from eternity appointed Christ to be the Mediator and Head of all the elect and the foundation of salvation and thus He decreed to give to Christ those who were to be saved, and effectually to call and draw them into His communion through His Word and Spirit. He decreed to give

them true faith in Him, to justify them, to sanctify them, and, after having powerfully kept them in the fellowship of His Son,² finally to glorify them, for the demonstration of His mercy and the praise of the riches of His glorious grace.³ As it is written: God chose us in Christ, *before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will — to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves* (Eph 1:4-6). And elsewhere, *those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified* (Rom 8:30).⁴

¹ Eph 1:4, 11. Jn 17:2,

² Jn 17:12.

³ Jn 17:24; Jn 6:37, 44.

⁴ Jn 17:2.

ARTICLE 8

ONE DECREE OF ELECTION

There are not various decrees of this election, but there is one and the same decree concerning all those that are to be saved under both the Old and the New Testament. For Scripture declares that the good pleasure, purpose, and counsel of the will of God is one.¹ According to this purpose He has chosen us from eternity both to grace and to glory, both to salvation and to the way of salvation, which He prepared for us that we should walk in it.²

¹ Deut 7:7; 9:6; Eph 1:4-5.

² Eph 2:10.

ARTICLE 9

ELECTION NOT BASED ON FORESEEN FAITH

This election is not based on foreseen faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality of disposition, as a cause or condition in man required for being chosen, but men are chosen to faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, and so on. Election, therefore, is the fountain of every saving good, from which flow faith, holiness, and other saving gifts, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects.¹ This the apostle teaches when he says, *He chose us* (not because we were, but are) *to be holy and blameless in His sight* (Eph 1:4).

¹ Rom 8:30.

ARTICLE 10

ELECTION BASED ON GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE

The cause of this gracious election is solely the good pleasure of God. This good pleasure does not consist in this, that out of all possible conditions God chose certain qualities or actions of men as a condition for salvation, but in this, that out of the common mass of sinners He adopted certain persons to be His own possession. For it is written, *Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad* (Rom 9:11-13), and so on, she (namely, Rebecca), was told, *"The older will serve the younger"* (Gen 25:23). Just as it is written: *"I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated"* (Mal 1:2-3). And, *all who were appointed for eternal life believed* (Acts 13:48).

ARTICLE 11

ELECTION UNCHANGEABLE

As God Himself is most wise, unchangeable, all-knowing and almighty, so His election can neither be undone and redone, nor changed, revoked, or annulled; neither can the elect be cast away,¹ nor their number be diminished.²

¹ Jn 6:37.

² Jn 10:28.

ARTICLE 12

THE ASSURANCE OF ELECTION

The elect in due time, though in various stages and in different measure, are made certain of this their eternal and unchangeable election to salvation. They attain this assurance, however, not by inquisitively prying into the hidden and deep things of God,¹ but by observing in themselves,² with spiritual joy and holy delight, the unfailing fruits of election pointed out in the Word of God – such as a true faith in Christ, a childlike fear of God, a godly sorrow for their sins,³ and a hunger and thirst for righteousness.⁴

¹ Deut 29:29; 1 Cor 2:10-11.

² 2 Cor 13:5.

³ 2 Cor 7:10.

⁴ Mt 5:6.

ARTICLE 13

THE VALUE OF THIS ASSURANCE

The awareness and assurance of this election provide the children of God with greater reason for daily humbling themselves before God, for adoring the depth of His mercies, for cleansing themselves,¹ and for fervently loving Him in turn who first so greatly loved them.² It is therefore not at all true that this doctrine of election and the reflection on it makes them lax in observing the commands of God or falsely secure. In the just judgment of God, this usually happens to those who rashly presume to have the grace of election, or idly and boldly chatter about it, but refuse to walk in the ways of the elect.

¹ 1 Jn 3:3.

² 1 Jn 4:19.

ARTICLE 14

HOW ELECTION IS TO BE TAUGHT

This doctrine of divine election, according to the most wise counsel of God, was preached by the prophets, by Christ Himself, and by the apostles, under the Old as well as the New Testament, and was then committed to writing in the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, also today this doctrine should be taught in the church of God,¹ for which it was particularly intended, in its proper time and place, provided it be done with a spirit of discretion, in a reverent and holy manner, without inquisitively prying into the ways of the most High, to the glory of God's most holy Name, and for the living comfort of His people.²

¹ Acts 20:27; Job 36:23-26.

² Rom 11:33; 12:3; 1 Cor 4:6.

ARTICLE 15

REPROBATION DESCRIBED

Holy Scripture illustrates and recommends to us this eternal and undeserved grace of our election, especially when it further declares that not all men are elect but that some have not been elected, or have been passed by in the eternal election of God.¹ Out of His most free, most

just, blameless, and unchangeable good pleasure, God has decreed to leave them in the common misery into which they have by their own fault plunged themselves,² and not to give them saving faith and the grace of conversion. These, having been left in their own ways³ and under His just judgment, God has decreed finally to condemn and punish eternally, not only on account of their unbelief but also on account of all their other sins, in order to display His justice. This is the decree of reprobation, which by no means makes God the author of sin (the very thought is blasphemous!), but rather declares Him to be its awesome, blameless, and just judge and avenger.

¹ Rom 9:22.

² 1 Pet 2:8.

³ Acts 14:16.

ARTICLE 16

RESPONSES TO THE DOCTRINE OF REPROBATION

Some do not yet clearly discern in themselves a living faith in Christ,¹ an assured confidence of heart, peace of conscience, a zeal for childlike obedience, and a glorying in God through Christ;² nevertheless, they use the means through which God has promised to work these things in us. They ought not to be alarmed when reprobation is mentioned, nor to count themselves among the reprobate. Rather, they must diligently continue in the use of these means, fervently desire a time of more abundant grace, and expect it with reverence and humility. Others seriously desire to be converted to God, to please Him only, and to be delivered from the body of death.³ Yet they cannot reach that point on the way of godliness and faith which they would like. They should be even less terrified by the doctrine of reprobation, since a merciful God has promised not to snuff out the smouldering wick nor to break the bruised reed.⁴

Still others disregard God and the Saviour Jesus Christ and have completely given themselves over to the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth.⁵ For them this doctrine of reprobation is rightly fearsome as long as they do not seriously turn to God.⁶

¹ Jas 2:26.

² 2 Cor 1:12; Rom 5:11.

³ Phil 3:3; Rom 7:24.

⁴ Is 42:3; Mt 12:20.

⁵ Mt 13:22.

⁶ Heb 12:29.

ARTICLE 17

CHILDREN OF BELIEVERS WHO DIE IN INFANCY

We must judge concerning the will of God from His Word, which declares that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they are included with their parents.¹ Therefore, God-fearing parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in their infancy.²

¹ Gen 17:7; Is 59:21.

² Acts 2:39; 1 Cor 7:14.

ARTICLE 18

NOT PROTEST BUT ADORATION

To those who complain about this grace of undeserved election and the severity of righteous reprobation,¹ we reply with this word of the apostle: *But who are you, O man, to talk back to*

God (Rom 9:20)? And with this word of our Saviour: Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?²

We, however, with reverent adoration of these mysteries, exclaim with the apostle: *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor?" "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen* (Rom 11:33-36).

¹ Job 40:1-5.

² Mt 20:15.

REJECTION OF ERRORS

Having explained the true doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, Synod rejects the following errors:

1

Error: The will of God to save those who would believe and persevere in faith and obedience is the whole and entire decree of election to salvation. Nothing else concerning this decree has been revealed in God's Word.

Refutation: This error is deceptive and clearly contradicts Scripture, which declares not only that God will save those who believe but also that He has chosen specific persons from eternity. Within time He grants to these elect, above others, both faith in Christ and perseverance. *I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of the world* (Jn 17:6). *And all who were appointed for eternal life believed*, (Acts 13:48). *For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight* (Eph 1:4).

2

Error: There are various kinds of divine election to eternal life. One is general and indefinite, another is particular and definite. The latter in turn is either incomplete, revocable, non-decisive, and conditional, or it is complete, irrevocable, decisive, and absolute. In the same fashion there is an election to faith and another to salvation. Therefore election can be to justifying faith, without being decisive to salvation.

Refutation: All this is an invention of the human mind without any basis in the Scriptures. The doctrine of election is thus corrupted and the golden chain of our salvation broken: *And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified* (Rom 8:30).

3

Error: The good pleasure and purpose of God of which Scripture speaks in the doctrine of election is not that He chose certain specific persons and not others, but that out of all possible conditions (such as the works of the law) He chose or selected the act of faith, which in itself is without merit, as well as the imperfect obedience of faith, to be a condition of salvation. In His grace He wished to count such faith as complete obedience and worthy of the reward of eternal life.

Refutation: This offensive error deprives God's good pleasure and Christ's merits of all efficacy, and draws people away from the truth of gracious justification and from the simplicity of Scripture. It contradicts the word of the apostle: *God has saved us and called us to a holy*

life — not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time (2 Tim 1:9).

4

Error: Election to faith depends on the condition that man should use the light of nature properly, and that he be pious, humble, meek, and fit for eternal life.

Refutation: If this were true, election would depend on man. This smacks of the teaching of Pelagius and is in open conflict with the teaching of the apostle, *All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast* (in Ephesians 2:3-9).

5

Error: Incomplete and non-decisive election of specific persons to salvation took place on the ground of foreseen faith, conversion, holiness, and godliness, which either began or continued for some time. Complete and decisive election, however, occurred because of foreseen perseverance in faith, conversion, holiness, and godliness till the end. This is the gracious and evangelical worthiness because of which the person who is chosen is more worthy than the one who is not chosen. Therefore faith, obedience of faith, holiness, godliness, and perseverance are not fruits of unchangeable election to glory. Instead, they are necessary conditions and causes required and foreseen as accomplished in those who are to be fully elected.

Refutation: This error militates against all of Scripture, which constantly impresses the following upon us: Election is *not by works but by Him who calls* (Rom 9:11); *And all who were appointed for eternal life believed* (Acts 13:48); *He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight* (Eph 1:4); *You did not choose me, but I chose you* (Jn 15:16); *And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace* (Rom 11:6); *This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins* (1 Jn 4:10).

6

Error: Not every election to salvation is unchangeable. Some of the elect can and do indeed perish everlastingly, notwithstanding any decree of God.

Refutation: This gross error makes God changeable, destroys the comfort which the believers obtain from the firmness of their election, and contradicts Holy Scripture: The elect can not be led astray (Mt 24:24); *And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given Me, but raise them up at the last day* (Jn 6:39); *those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified* (Rom 8:30).

7

Error: In this life there is no fruit, consciousness, or certainty of the unchangeable election to glory, except such as is based upon a changeable and uncertain condition.

Refutation: To speak about an uncertain certainty is not only absurd but also contrary to the experience of the believers. As a result of the awareness of their election, they glory with the apostle in this favour of God.¹ With the disciples of Christ they rejoice that their names are written in heaven.² They put the consciousness of their election over against the flaming darts of the devil, when they exclaim: *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen* (Rom 8:33)?

¹ Eph 1

² Lk 10:20

8

Error: God did not simply by an act of His righteous will decide to leave any person in the common state of sin and condemnation since his fall in Adam, nor did He decide to pass by any one in granting such grace as is necessary for faith and conversion.

Refutation: Scripture, however, states, *God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden* (Rom 9:18). It also declares, *The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them* (Mt 13:11). *Likewise, I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was Your good pleasure* (Mt 11:25, 26).

9

Error: God sends the gospel to one people rather than to another not merely and solely because of the good pleasure of His will, but because one people is better and worthier than another to which the gospel is not preached.

Refutation: Moses denies this when he addresses the people of Israel as follows: *To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the LORD set His affection on your forefathers and loved them, and He chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today* (Deut 10:14, 15). And Christ says, *Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes* (Mt 11:21).

SECOND HEAD OF DOCTRINE

CHRIST'S DEATH AND MAN'S REDEMPTION THROUGH IT

ARTICLE 1

THE PUNISHMENT WHICH GOD'S JUSTICE REQUIRES

God is not only supremely merciful but also supremely just. And as He Himself has revealed in His Word,¹ His justice requires that our sins, committed against His infinite majesty, should be punished² not only in this age but also in the age to come, both in body and soul. We cannot escape these punishments unless satisfaction is made to the justice of God.

¹ Ex 34:6-7.

² Rom 5:16.; Gal 3:10.;

ARTICLE 2

THE SATISFACTION MADE BY CHRIST

We ourselves, however, cannot make this satisfaction and cannot free ourselves from God's wrath. God, therefore, in His infinite mercy has given His only-begotten Son as our Surety.¹ For us or in our place He was made sin² and a curse on the cross³ so that He might make satisfaction on our behalf.

¹ Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8.

² 2 Cor 5:21.

³ Gal 3:13.

ARTICLE 3

THE INFINITE VALUE OF CHRIST'S DEATH

This death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sins,¹ of infinite value and worth, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world.²

¹ Heb 9:26, 28; 10:14.

² 1 Jn 2:2.

ARTICLE 4

WHY HIS DEATH HAS INFINITE VALUE

This death is of such great value and worth because the person who submitted to it is not only a true and perfectly holy man,¹ but also the only-begotten Son of God,² of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for these qualifications were necessary for our Saviour. Further, this death is of such great value and worth because it was accompanied by a sense of the wrath and curse of God³ which we by our sins had deserved.

¹ Heb 4:15; 7:26.

² 1 Jn 4:9.

³ Mt 27:46.

ARTICLE 5

THE UNIVERSAL PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

The promise of the gospel is that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life.¹ This promise ought to be announced and proclaimed universally and without discrimination to all peoples and to all men,² to whom God in His good pleasure sends the gospel, together with the command to repent and believe.³

¹ Jn 3:16.

² 1 Cor 1:23; Mt 28:19.

³ Acts 2:38; 16:31.

ARTICLE 6

WHY SOME DO NOT BELIEVE

That, however, many who have been called by the gospel neither repent nor believe in Christ but perish in unbelief¹ does not happen because of any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice of Christ offered on the cross, but through their own fault.

¹ Mt 22:14; Ps 95:11; Heb 4:6.

ARTICLE 7

WHY OTHERS DO BELIEVE

But to those who truly believe and by the death of Christ are freed from their sins and saved from perdition, this benefit comes only through God's grace, given to them from eternity in Christ.¹ God owes this grace to no one.²

¹ 2 Cor 5:18.

² Eph 2:8-9.

ARTICLE 8

THE EFFICACY OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST

For this was the most free counsel of God the Father, that the life-giving and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect.¹ It was His most gracious will and intent to give to them alone justifying faith and thereby to bring them unfailingly to salvation.² This means: God willed that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which He confirmed the new covenant)³ should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and tongue⁴ all those, and those only, who from eternity were chosen to salvation and were given to Him by the Father. God further willed that Christ should give to them faith,⁵ which, together with other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He acquired for them by His death; that He should cleanse them by His blood from all sins,⁶ both original and actual, both those committed after faith and before faith; and that He should guard them faithfully to the end⁷ and at last present them to Himself in splendour without any spot or wrinkle.⁸

¹ Jn 17:9.

² Eph 5:25-27. Lk 22:20;

³ Lk 22:20; Heb 8:6; .

⁴ Rev 5:9; .

⁵ Phil 1:2:9; .

⁶ 1 Jn 1:7; .

⁷ Jn 10:28.

⁸ Eph 5:27.

ARTICLE 9

THE FULFILMENT OF GOD'S COUNSEL

This counsel, proceeding from eternal love for the elect, has from the beginning of the world to the present time been powerfully fulfilled, and will also continue to be fulfilled, though the gates of hell vainly try to frustrate it.¹ In due time the elect will be gathered together into one,² and there will always be a church of believers,³ founded on the blood of Christ. This church shall steadfastly love and faithfully serve Him as her Saviour (who as bridegroom for His bride laid down His life for her on the cross)⁴ and celebrate His praises here and through all eternity.

¹ Mt 16:18.

² Jn 11:52.

³ 1 Kgs 19:18.

⁴ Eph 5:25.

REJECTION OF ERRORS

Having explained the true doctrine of the death of Christ and the redemption of man by this death, Synod rejects the following errors:

1

Error: God the Father has ordained His Son to the death of the cross without a specific and definite decree to save any. What Christ obtained by His death might have been necessary, profitable, and valuable, and might remain in all its parts complete, perfect, and intact, even though the redemption He acquired had actually never been applied to any person.

Refutation: This doctrine is offensive to the wisdom of the Father and the merits of Jesus Christ and is contrary to Scripture. For our Saviour says: *I lay down My life for the sheep, and I know them* (Jn 10:15, 27). And the prophet Isaiah says concerning the Saviour: *Though the LORD makes His life a guilt offering, He will see His offspring and prolong His days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in His hand* (Is 53:10). Finally, this error contradicts the article of faith concerning the catholic Christian church.

2

Error: It was not the purpose of Christ's death that He should confirm the new covenant of grace by His blood, but only that He should acquire for the Father the mere right to establish once more with man such a covenant as He might please, whether of grace or of works.

Refutation: This militates against Scripture, which teaches that Christ has become the Surety and Mediator of a better, that is, a new covenant, and that a will takes effect only at death.¹

¹ Heb 7:22, 9:15, 17.

3

Error: By His satisfaction Christ did not really merit for anyone either salvation itself or faith by which this satisfaction of Christ to salvation is effectually made one's own. He acquired for the Father only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man, and to prescribe new conditions as He might desire. It depends, however, on the free will of man to fulfil these conditions. Therefore it was possible that either no one or all men would fulfil them.

Refutation: Those who teach this error think contemptuously of the death of Christ, do not at all acknowledge its most important fruit or benefit, and bring back out of hell the Pelagian error.

4

Error: The new covenant of grace which God the Father, through the mediation of the death of Christ, made with man, does not consist herein that we are justified before God and saved by faith, inasmuch as it accepts the merit of Christ. It consists in the fact that God has revoked the demand of perfect obedience of the law and regards faith as such and the obedience of faith, though imperfect, as the perfect obedience of the law. He graciously deems it worthy of the reward of eternal life.

Refutation: This doctrine contradicts Scripture: *They are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood* (Rom 3:24, 25). Those who teach this error proclaim, as did the ungodly Socinus, a new and strange justification of man before God, against the consensus of the whole church.

5

Error: All men have been accepted into the state of reconciliation and into the grace of the covenant, so that no one is liable to condemnation on account of original sin, and no one shall be condemned because of it, but all are free from the guilt of original sin.

Refutation: This opinion is in conflict with Scripture, which teaches that we are *by nature objects of wrath* (Eph 2:3).

6

Error: As far as God is concerned, He wished to bestow equally upon all people the benefits acquired by the death of Christ; however, some obtain the pardon of sin and eternal life and others do not. This distinction depends on their own free will, which applies itself to the grace that is offered indifferently, and not on the special gift of mercy which so powerfully works in them that they rather than others apply this grace to themselves.

Refutation: Those who teach this, misuse the difference between the acquisition and the application of salvation and confuse the minds of imprudent and inexperienced people. While they pretend to present this distinction in a sound sense, they seek to instil into the minds of people the pernicious poison of Pelagianism.

7

Error: Christ could not die, did not need to die, and did not die for those whom God loved in the highest degree and elected to eternal life, since these do not need the death of Christ.

Refutation: This doctrine contradicts the apostle, who declares: The Son of God *loved me and gave Himself for me* (Gal 2:20). Likewise: *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ Jesus who died* (Rom 8:33, 34), namely, for them. And the Saviour assures us: *I lay down My life for the sheep* (Jn 10:15). And: *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends* (Jn 15:12, 13).

THIRD AND FOURTH HEADS OF DOCTRINE

THE CORRUPTION OF MAN,
HIS CONVERSION TO GOD,
AND THE MANNER IN WHICH IT OCCURS

ARTICLE 1

THE EFFECT OF THE FALL

In the beginning man was created in the image of God. He was adorned in his mind with true and wholesome knowledge of his Creator and of all spiritual things; his will and heart were upright, all his affections pure, and therefore man was completely holy.¹

But rebelling against God through the instigation of the devil and through his own free will, he deprived himself of these excellent gifts,² and instead brought upon himself blindness, horrible darkness, futility, and perverseness of judgment in his mind; wickedness, rebelliousness, and stubbornness in his will and heart; and impurity in all his affections.³

¹ Gen 1:26-27.

² Gen 3:1-7.

³ Eph 4:17-19.

ARTICLE 2

THE SPREAD OF CORRUPTION

Since after the fall man became corrupt, he as a corrupt father brought forth corrupt children¹ Thus the corruption has spread from Adam to all his descendants,² with the exception of Christ alone,³ not by imitation, as the Pelagians of old maintained, but by the propagation of a perverted nature, according to the righteous judgment of God.

¹ Job 14:4; Ps 51:5.

² Rom 5:12.

³ Heb 4:15.

ARTICLE 3

MAN'S TOTAL INABILITY

Therefore all men are conceived in sin and are born as children of wrath, incapable of any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in sins, and slaves of sin.¹ And without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit² they neither will nor can return to God, reform their depraved nature, or prepare themselves for its reformation.

¹ Eph 2:1, 3; Jn 8:34; Rom 6:16-17.

² Jn 3:3-6; Tit 3:5.

ARTICLE 4

THE INADEQUACY OF THE LIGHT OF NATURE

To be sure, there is left in man after the fall, some light of nature, whereby he retains some notions about God,¹ about natural things, and about the difference between what is honourable and shameful, and shows some regard for virtue and outward order.² But so far is he from arriving at the saving knowledge of God and true conversion through this light of nature that he does not even use it properly in natural and civil matters. Rather, whatever this light may be, man wholly pollutes it in various ways and suppresses it by his wickedness. In doing so, he renders himself without excuse before God.³

¹ Rom 1:19-20.;

² Rom 2:14-15.

³ Rom 1:18, 20.

ARTICLE 5

THE INADEQUACY OF THE LAW

What holds for the light of nature also applies to the Ten Commandments, given by God through Moses particularly to the Jews. For though it reveals the greatness of sin, and more and more convicts man of his guilt, yet it neither points out a remedy nor gives him power to rise out of this misery. Rather, weakened by the flesh, it leaves the transgressor under the curse. Man cannot, therefore, through the law obtain saving grace.¹

¹ Rom 3:19-20; 7:10, 13; Rom 8:3; 2 Cor 3:6-7.

ARTICLE 6

THE NEED FOR THE GOSPEL

What, therefore, neither the light of nature nor the law can do, God performs by the power of the Holy Spirit through the word or ministry of reconciliation,¹ which is the gospel of the Messiah, by which it has pleased God to save men who believe,² both under the old and under the new dispensation.

¹ 2 Cor 5:18-19.

² 1 Cor 1:21.

ARTICLE 7

WHY THE GOSPEL IS SENT TO SOME AND NOT TO OTHERS

Under the old dispensation God revealed this mystery of His will to few. Under the new dispensation, however, He took the distinction between the peoples away and revealed it to a larger number.¹ The cause of this very distribution of the gospel is not to be ascribed to the worthiness of one people above another, nor to the better use of the light of nature, but to the sovereign good pleasure and undeserved love of God.² Therefore we to whom so great a grace

is granted, beyond and contrary to all we deserve, ought to acknowledge it with a humble and grateful heart.³ But as regards to others whom this grace is not given, we ought with the apostle to adore the severity and righteousness of the judgments of God⁴ but by no means inquisitively to pry into them.⁵

¹ Eph 1:9; 2:14; Col 3:11.

² Rom 2:11; Mt 11:26.

³ Rom 11:22-23.

⁴ Rev 16:7.

⁵ Deut 29:29.

ARTICLE 8

THE EARNEST CALL BY THE GOSPEL

But as many as are called by the gospel are earnestly called,¹ for God earnestly and most sincerely reveals in His Word what is pleasing to Him, namely, that those who are called should come to Him.² He also earnestly promises rest for their souls and eternal life to all who come to Him and believe.³

¹ Is 55:1; Mt 22:4.

² Rev 22:17.

³ Jn 6:37; Mt 11:28-29.

ARTICLE 9

WHY SOME WHO ARE CALLED DO NOT COME

It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of the Christ offered by the gospel, nor of God, who calls through the gospel and who even confers various gifts upon them, that many who are called through the ministry of the gospel do not come and are not converted. The fault lies in themselves.¹ Some of them do not care and do not accept the word of life. Others do indeed receive it, but they do not accept it into their hearts, and therefore, after the joy of a temporary faith has vanished, they turn away. Still others choke the seed of the word by the thorns of the cares and the pleasures of this world, and bring forth no fruit. This our Saviour teaches in the Parable of the Sower.²

¹ Mt 11:20-24; 22:1-8; 23:37.

² Mt 13.

ARTICLE 10

WHY OTHERS WHO ARE CALLED DO COME

Others who are called by the ministry of the gospel do come and are converted. This is not to be ascribed to man. He does not distinguish himself by his free will above others who are furnished with equal or sufficient grace for faith or conversion (as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains). It is to be ascribed to God.¹ He has chosen His own in Christ from eternity and calls them effectually within time. He gives them faith and repentance; He delivers them from the power of darkness and transfers them to the kingdom of His Son.² All this He does that they may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvellous light,³ and may boast not of themselves but of the Lord,⁴ according to the testimony of the apostles in various places.

¹ Rom 9:16.

² Col 1:13; Gal 1:4.

³ 1 Pet 2:9.

⁴ 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17; Eph 2:8-9.

ARTICLE 11

HOW GOD BRINGS ABOUT CONVERSION

God carries out His good pleasure in the elect and works in them true conversion in the following manner. He takes care that the gospel is preached to them, and powerfully enlightens their minds by the Holy Spirit, so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God.¹ By the efficacious working of the same regenerating Spirit He also penetrates into the innermost recesses of man.² He opens the closed and softens the hard heart,³ circumcises that which was uncircumcised, and instils new qualities into the will.⁴ He makes the will, which was dead, alive; which was bad, good; which was unwilling, willing; and which was stubborn, obedient.⁵ He moves and strengthens it so that, like a good tree, it may be able to produce the fruit of good works.⁶

¹ Heb 6:4-5; 1 Cor 2:10-14.

² Heb 4:12.

³ Acts 16:14.

⁴ Deut 30:6.

⁵ Ez 11:19; 36:26.

⁶ Mt 7:18.

ARTICLE 12

REGENERATION IS THE WORK OF GOD ALONE

This conversion is the regeneration, the new creation, the raising from the dead, the making alive,¹ so highly spoken of in the Scriptures, which God works in us without us. But this regeneration is by no means brought about only by outward teaching, by moral persuasion, or by such a mode of operation that, after God has done His part, it remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not regenerated, converted or not converted. It is, however, clearly a supernatural, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, marvellous, mysterious, and inexpressible work. According to Scripture, inspired by the Author of this work, regeneration is not inferior in power to creation or the raising of the dead.² Hence all those in whose hearts God works in this amazing way are certainly, unfailingly, and effectually regenerated and do actually believe.³ And then the will so renewed is not only acted upon and moved by God but, acted upon by God, the will itself also acts. Therefore man himself is rightly said to believe and repent through the grace he has received.

¹ Jn 3:3; 2 Cor 4:6; 5:17; Eph 5:14.

² Jn 5:25; Rom 4:17.

³ Phil 2:13.

ARTICLE 13

REGENERATION IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE

In this life believers cannot fully understand the way in which God does this work. Meanwhile, however, it is enough for them to know and experience that by this grace of God they believe with the heart and love their Saviour.¹

¹ Jn 3:18; Rom 10:9.

ARTICLE 14

HOW FAITH IS A GIFT OF GOD

Faith is therefore a gift of God,¹ not because it is merely offered by God to the free will of man, but because it is actually conferred on man, instilled and infused into him. Nor is it a gift

in the sense that God confers only the power to believe and then awaits from man's free will the consent to believe or the act of believing. It is, however, a gift in the sense that He who works both to will and to work,² and indeed all things in all, brings about in man both the will to believe and the act of believing.

¹ Eph 2:8.

² Phil 2:13.

ARTICLE 15

THE PROPER ATTITUDE WITH RESPECT TO GOD'S UNDESERVED GRACE

This grace God owes to no one. For what could He owe to man? Who has given Him first that he might be repaid?¹ What could God owe to one who has nothing of his own but sin and falsehood? He, therefore, who receives this grace owes and renders eternal thanks to God alone. He who does not receive this grace, however, either does not care at all for these spiritual things and is pleased with what he has, or in false security vainly boasts that he has what he does not have.² Further, about those who outwardly profess their faith and amend their lives we are to judge and speak in the most favourable way,³ according to the example of the apostles, for the inner recesses of the heart are unknown to us. As for those who have not yet been called, we should pray for them to God, who calls into existence the things that do not exist.⁴ But we must by no means act haughtily,⁵ as if we had distinguished ourselves from them.

¹ Rom 11:35.

² Amos 6:1; Jer 7:4.

³ Rom 14:10.

⁴ Rom 4:17.

⁵ 1 Cor 4:7.

ARTICLE 16

MAN'S WILL NOT TAKEN AWAY BUT MADE ALIVE

Man through his fall did not cease to be man, endowed with intellect and will; and sin, which has pervaded the whole human race, did not deprive man of his human nature, but brought upon him depravity and spiritual death.¹ So also this divine grace of regeneration does not act upon men as if they were blocks and stones and does not take away the will and its properties, or violently coerce it, but makes the will spiritually alive, heals it, corrects it, pleasantly and at the same time powerfully bends it.² As a result, where formerly the rebellion and resistance of the flesh fully dominated, now a prompt and sincere obedience of the Spirit begins to prevail, in which the true, spiritual renewal and freedom of our will consists. And if the wonderful Maker of all good did not deal with us in this way, man would have no hope of rising from his fall through this free will, by which he, when he was still standing, plunged himself into ruin.

¹ Rom 8:2; Eph 2:1.

² Ps 51:12; Phil 2:13.

ARTICLE 17

THE USE OF MEANS

The almighty working of God whereby He brings forth and sustains this our natural life does not exclude but requires the use of means, by which He according to His infinite wisdom and goodness has willed to exercise His power.¹ So also the aforementioned supernatural working

of God whereby He regenerates us,² in no way excludes or cancels the use of the gospel, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul.³ For this reason the apostles and the teachers who succeeded them, reverently instructed the people concerning this grace of God, to His glory and to the abasement of all pride. In the meantime, however, they did not neglect to keep them, by the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the administration of the Word, the sacraments, and discipline.⁴ So today those who give or receive instruction in the church should not dare to tempt God by separating what He in His good pleasure has willed to be closely joined together. For grace is conferred through admonitions,⁵ and the more readily we do our duty, the more this favour of God, who works in us, usually manifests itself in its lustre, and so His work best proceeds. To God alone, both for the means and for their saving fruit and efficacy, all glory is due throughout eternity.⁶ Amen.

¹ Is 55:10-11; 1 Cor 1:21.

² Jas 1:18.

³ 1 Pet 1:23, 25; 2:2.

⁴ Acts 2:42; 2 Cor 5:11-21; 2 Tim 4:2.

⁵ Rom 10:14-17.

⁶ Jude 24,25.

REJECTION OF ERRORS

Having explained the true doctrine of the corruption of man and his conversion to God, Synod rejects the following errors:

1

Error: Properly speaking, it cannot be said that original sin as such is sufficient to condemn the whole human race or to deserve temporal and eternal punishment.

Refutation: This contradicts the words of the apostle when he declares: *sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned* (Rom 5:12). And: *The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation* (Rom 5:16). Also: *For the wages of sin is death* (Rom 6:23).

2

Error: The spiritual gifts or the good qualities and virtues, such as goodness, holiness, righteousness, cannot have belonged to the will of man when he was first created, and therefore cannot have been separated from his will when he fell.

Refutation: This error is contrary to the description of the image of God which the apostle gives 4:24, when he connects it with righteousness and holiness, which undoubtedly belong to the will.¹

¹ Eph 4:24.

3

Error: In spiritual death the spiritual gifts are not separate from the will of man, since the will as such has never been corrupted but only hampered by the darkness of the mind and the unruliness of the passions. If these hindrances have been removed, the will can exert its full innate power. The will is of itself able to will and to choose, or else not to will and not to choose, all manner of good which may be presented to it.

Refutation: This is an innovation and an error, and tends to extol the powers of the free will, contrary to what the prophet Jeremiah states, *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure* (Jer 17:9). And the apostle Paul writes: *All of us also lived among them* (the sons of disobedience) *at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful natures and following its desires and thoughts* (Eph 2:3).

4

Error: The unregenerate man is not really or totally dead in sins, or deprived of all powers unto spiritual good. He can yet hunger and thirst after righteousness and life, and offer the sacrifice of a contrite and broken spirit which is pleasing to God.

Refutation: These things are in conflict with the clear testimonies of Scripture: *you were dead in your transgressions and sins* (Eph 2:1, cf. 2:5). And *every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time*, (Gen 6:5 and 8:21). Moreover, only the regenerate and those who are called blessed hunger and thirst after deliverance from misery and after life, and offer to God the sacrifice of a broken spirit.¹

¹ Ps 51:19; Mt 5:6.

5

Error: The corrupt and natural man can so well use the common grace (which for the Arminians is the light of nature), or the gifts still left him after the fall, that he can gradually gain by their good use a greater, that is, the evangelical or saving grace, and salvation itself. In this way God on His part shows Himself ready to reveal Christ to all men, since He administers to all sufficiently and efficaciously the means necessary for the knowledge of Christ, for faith and repentance.

Refutation: Not only the experience of all ages but also Scripture testifies that this is untrue. *He has revealed his word to Jacob, His laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know His laws* (Ps 147:19, 20). *In the past, He let all nations go their own way* (Acts 14:16). And Paul and his companions were *kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to* (Acts 16:6, 7).

6

Error: In the true conversion of man no new qualities, powers, or gifts can be infused by God into the will. Therefore faith, through which we are first converted and because of which we are called believers, is not a quality or gift infused by God but only an act of man. It cannot be called a gift except with respect to the power to attain to this faith.

Refutation: This teaching contradicts the Holy Scriptures, which declare that God infuses new qualities of faith, of obedience, and of the consciousness of His love into our hearts: *I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts* (Jer 31:33). And: *I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground* (Is 44:3). And: *God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us* (Rom 5:5). This also conflicts with the constant practice of the church, which prays by the mouth of the prophet: *Restore me, and I will return, because You are the LORD my God* (Jer 31:18).

7

Error: The grace whereby we are converted to God is only a gentle advising. This manner of working which consists in advising is the most noble manner in the conversion of man and is most in harmony with man's nature. There is no reason why this advising grace alone should

not be sufficient to make the natural man spiritual. Indeed, God does not bring about the consent of the will except through this moral persuasion. The power of the divine working surpasses the working of Satan, in that God promises eternal while Satan promises only temporal goods.

Refutation: This is entirely Pelagian and contrary to the whole Scripture, which teaches beyond this moral persuasion yet another, far more powerful and divine manner of the working of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of man: *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh* (Ezek 36:26).

8

Error: In regenerating man God does not use the powers of His omnipotence so as to forcefully and unfailingly bend man's will to faith and conversion. Even if all the works of grace have been accomplished which God employs to convert man and even if God intends his regeneration and wills to regenerate him, man may yet so resist God and the Holy Spirit, and indeed often does so resist, that he entirely prevents his regeneration. It therefore remains in man's power to be regenerated or not.

Refutation: This is nothing less than the denial of all the efficacy of God's grace in our conversion, and the subjecting of the working of Almighty God to the will of man. It is contrary to the apostles, who teach *His incomparably great power for us who believe* (Eph 1:19); who pray our God that *by His power He may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith* (2 Thess 1:11), and who declare that *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness* (2 Pet 1:3).

9

Error: Grace and free will are partial causes which together work the beginning of conversion. In the order of these causes grace does not precede the working of the will. God does not effectually help the will of man to come to conversion until the will of man moves itself and determines to do this.

Refutation: The early church long ago condemned this doctrine of the Pelagians according to the words of the apostle: *It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy* (Rom 9:16). Also: *For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive?* (1 Cor 4:7). And: *it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose* (Phil 2:13).

FIFTH HEAD OF DOCTRINE **THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS**

ARTICLE 1 **THE REGENERATE NOT FREE FROM INDWELLING SIN**

Those whom God according to His purpose calls into the fellowship of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerates by His Holy Spirit, He certainly sets free from the dominion and slavery of sin,¹ but not entirely in this life from the flesh and the body of sin.²

¹ Jn 8:34; Rom 6:17.

² Rom 7:21-24.

ARTICLE 2 **DAILY SINS OF WEAKNESS**

Therefore daily sins of weakness spring up and defects cling to even the best works of the saints.¹ These are for them a constant reason to humble themselves before God, to flee to the crucified Christ, to put the flesh to death more and more through the Spirit of prayer and by holy exercises of godliness,² and to long and strive for the goal of perfection until at last,³ delivered from this body of death, they reign with the Lamb of God in heaven.⁴

¹ 1 Jn 1:8.

² Col 3:5.

³ 1 Tim 4:7; Phil 3:12, 14.

⁴ Rev 5:6, 10.

ARTICLE 3

GOD PRESERVES HIS OWN

Because of these remnants of indwelling sin and also because of the temptations of the world and of Satan, those who have been converted could not remain standing in that grace if left to their own strength.¹ But God is faithful, who mercifully confirms them in the grace once conferred upon them and powerfully preserves them in that grace to the end.²

¹ Rom 7:20;

² 1 Cor 10:13; 1 Pet 1:5.

ARTICLE 4

SAINTS MAY FALL INTO SERIOUS SINS

Although the power of God whereby He confirms and preserves true believers in grace is so great¹ that it cannot be conquered by the flesh, yet the converted are not always so led and moved by God that they cannot in certain particular actions turn aside through their own fault from the guidance of grace and be seduced by and yield to the lusts of the flesh. They must therefore constantly watch and pray that they may not be led into temptation.² When they do not watch and pray,³ they not only can be drawn away by the flesh, the world, and Satan into serious and atrocious sins, but with the righteous permission of God are sometimes actually drawn away. The lamentable fall of David, Peter, and other saints, described in Holy Scripture, demonstrates this.⁴

¹ Eph 1:19.

² Mt 26:41.

³ 1 Thess 5:6, 17.

⁴ 2 Sam 11; Mt 26.

ARTICLE 5

THE EFFECTS OF SUCH SERIOUS SINS

By such gross sins, however, they greatly offend God, incur the guilt of death, grieve the Holy Spirit, suspend the exercise of faith, severely wound their consciences, and sometimes for a while lose the sense of God's favour¹ – until they return to the right way through sincere repentance and God's fatherly face again shines upon them.²

¹ 2 Sam 12; Eph 4:30.

² Ps 32:3-5; Num 6:25.

ARTICLE 6

GOD WILL NOT PERMIT HIS ELECT TO BE LOST

For God, who is rich in mercy,¹ according to the unchangeable purpose of His election,² does not completely withdraw His Holy Spirit from His own even in their deplorable fall.³

Neither does He permit them to sink so deep that they fall away from the grace of adoption and the state of justification,⁴ or commit the sin unto death⁵ or the sin against the Holy Spirit⁶ and, totally deserted by Him, plunge themselves into eternal ruin.

¹ Eph 2:4,5

² Eph 1:11.

³ Ps 51:13.

⁴ Gal 4:5.

⁵ 1 Jn 5:16-18.

⁶ Mt 12:31-32.

ARTICLE 7

GOD WILL AGAIN RENEW HIS ELECT TO REPENTANCE

For in the first place, in their fall, He preserves in them His imperishable seed of regeneration, so that it does not perish and is not cast out.¹ Further, through His Word and Spirit He certainly and effectually renews them to repentance.² As a result they grieve from the heart with a godly sorrow for the sins they have committed;³ they seek and obtain through faith with a contrite heart forgiveness in the blood of the Mediator; they again experience the favour of a reconciled God and adore His mercies and faithfulness.⁴ And from now on they more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.⁵

¹ 1 Pet 1:23.

² 1 Jn 3:9.

³ 2 Cor 7:10.

⁴ Ps 32:5; 51:19.

⁵ Phil 2:12.

ARTICLE 8

THE GRACE OF THE TRIUNE GOD PRESERVES

So it is not through their own merits or strength but through the undeserved mercy of God that they neither totally fall away from faith and grace nor remain in their downfall and are finally lost. With respect to themselves this could not only easily happen but would undoubtedly happen. But with respect to God this cannot possibly happen, since His counsel cannot be changed,¹ His promise cannot fail, the calling according to His purpose cannot be revoked,² the merit, intercession, and preservation of Christ cannot be nullified,³ and the sealing of the Holy Spirit can neither be frustrated nor destroyed.⁴

¹ Ps 33:11.

² Heb 6:17; Rom 8:30,34; 9:11.

³ Lk 22:32.

⁴ Eph 1:13.

ARTICLE 9

THE ASSURANCE OF THIS PRESERVATION

Believers themselves can be certain of this preservation of the elect to salvation and the perseverance of true believers in the faith.¹ And they are indeed certain according to the measure of their faith,² by which they firmly believe that they are and always shall remain true and living members of the church, and that they have forgiveness of sins and life eternal.³

¹ Rom 8:31-39.

² 2 Tim 4:8.

³ 2 Tim 4:18.

ARTICLE 10

THE SOURCE OF THIS ASSURANCE

This assurance is not produced by a certain private revelation besides or outside the Word, but by faith in the promises of God, which He has most abundantly revealed in His Word for our comfort; by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit that we are children and heirs of God;¹ and, finally, by the serious and holy pursuit of a clear conscience² and of good works. And if the elect of God did not have in this world the solid comfort of obtaining the victory³ and this unfailing pledge of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable.⁴

¹ Rom 8:16-17; 1 Jn 3:1-2.

² Acts 24:16.

³ Rom 8:37.

⁴ 1 Cor 15:19.

ARTICLE 11

THIS ASSURANCE NOT ALWAYS FELT

Scripture meanwhile testifies that believers in this life have to struggle with various doubts of the flesh and, placed under severe temptation, do not always feel this full assurance of faith and certainty of perseverance. But God, the Father of all comfort,¹ will not let them be tempted beyond their strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, and by the Holy Spirit will again revive in them the certainty of perseverance.²

¹ 2 Cor 1:3.

² 1 Cor 10:13.

ARTICLE 12

THIS ASSURANCE IS AN INCENTIVE TO GODLINESS

This certainty of perseverance, however, so far from making true believers proud and complacent, is rather the true root of humility, childlike reverence,¹ genuine godliness, endurance in every struggle, fervent prayers, constancy in suffering and in the confession of the truth, and lasting joy in God.² Further, the consideration of this benefit is for them an incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works,³ as is evident from the testimonies of Scripture and the examples of the saints.

¹ Rom 12:1.

² Ps 56:12-13.

³ Ps 116:12; Tit 2:11-14; 1 Jn 3:3.

ARTICLE 13

THIS ASSURANCE DOES NOT LEAD TO CARELESSNESS

Neither does this renewed confidence produce carelessness or neglect of godliness in those who have been restored after their fall;¹ rather, it produces in them a much greater concern to observe carefully the ways of the Lord, which He prepared beforehand.² They observe these ways in order that by walking in them they may retain the certainty of their perseverance. Then shall the face of their gracious God not turn away from them again³ because of their abuse of His fatherly goodness, with the result that they would fall into still greater anguish of spirit. Indeed, to those who fear God the contemplation of His face is sweeter than life, but its withdrawal is more bitter than death.⁴

¹ 2 Cor 7:10.

² Eph 2:10.

³ Ps 63:4; Is 64:7.

⁴ Jer 33:5.

ARTICLE 14

THE USE OF MEANS IN PERSEVERANCE

Just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the preaching of the gospel, so He maintains, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of His Word,¹ by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises,² and by the use of the sacraments.³

¹ Deut 6:20-25.

² 2 Tim 3:16-17.

³ Acts 2:42.

ARTICLE 15

THIS DOCTRINE IS HATED BY SATAN BUT LOVED BY THE CHURCH

This doctrine of the perseverance of true believers and saints, and of their assurance of it,¹ God has most abundantly revealed in His Word for the glory of His Name and for the consolation of the godly, and He impresses it on the hearts of believers. It is something which the flesh does not understand, Satan hates, the world ridicules, the ignorant and the hypocrites abuse, and the heretics attack. The Bride of Christ, on the other hand, has always loved this doctrine most tenderly and defended it steadfastly as a treasure of inestimable value;² and God, against whom no counsel can avail and no strength can prevail,³ shall see to it that she will continue to do so. To this God alone, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honour and glory forever.⁴ Amen.

¹ Rev 14:12.

² Eph 5:32.

³ Ps 33:10-11.

⁴ 1 Pet 5:10-11.

REJECTION OF ERRORS

Having explained the true doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, Synod rejects the following errors:

1

Error: The perseverance of the true believers is not a fruit of election or a gift of God obtained by the death of Christ, but a condition of the new covenant, which man before his so-called decisive election and justification must fulfil through his free will.

Refutation: Holy Scripture testifies that perseverance follows from election and is given to the elect by virtue of the death, resurrection, and intercession of Christ: The elect obtained it. *The others were hardened* (Rom 11:7). Also: *He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all — how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* (Rom 8:32-35).

2

Error: God does indeed provide the believer with sufficient strength to persevere, and is ready to preserve this in him if he will do his duty. But even with all those things in place which are necessary to persevere in faith and which God will use to preserve faith, it still always depends on the decision of man's will whether he will persevere or not.

Refutation: This idea contains outright Pelagianism. While it wants to make men free, it makes them robbers of God's honour. It conflicts with the consistent teaching of the gospel, which takes from man all cause for boasting, and ascribes all the praise for this benefit to the grace of God alone. It is also contrary to the testimony of the apostle: *It is God who will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*, (1 Cor 1:8).

3

Error: True regenerate believers not only can fall completely and definitely from justifying faith and also from grace and salvation, but indeed they often do fall from them and are lost forever.

Refutation: This opinion nullifies the grace of justification and regeneration and the continuous preservation by Christ, contrary to the clear words of the apostle Paul: *God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!* (Rom 5:8, 9). And contrary to the apostle John: *No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God* (1 Jn 3:9), and also to the words of Jesus Christ: *I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand* (Jn 10:28, 29).

4

Error: True regenerate believers can commit the sin that leads to death or the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Refutation: The same apostle John, after speaking of those who commit the sin that leads to death and forbidding prayer for them, immediately adds: *We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin* (namely, with that kind of sin); *the One who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him* (1 Jn 5:16-17).

5

Error: Without a special revelation we can have no certainty of future perseverance in this life.

Refutation: By this doctrine the sure comfort of true believers in this life is taken away, and the doubting of the followers of the pope is again introduced into the church. The Holy Scriptures, however, always deduce this assurance, not from a special and extraordinary revelation, but from the marks peculiar to the children of God and from the very constant promises of God. So especially the apostle Paul declares that nothing in all creation *will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Rom 8:39). And John writes: *Those who obey His commands live in Him, and He in them. And this is how we know that He lives in us: We know it by the Spirit He gave us* (1 Jn 3:24).

6

Error: By its very nature the doctrine of the certainty of perseverance and salvation causes false security and is harmful to godliness, good morals, prayers, and other holy exercises. On the contrary, it is praiseworthy to doubt.

Refutation: This error ignores the effective power of God's grace and the working of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. It contradicts the apostle John, who teaches the opposite with these clear words: *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure* (1 Jn 3:2, 3). Furthermore, it is refuted by the example of the saints in both the Old and the New Testament who, although they were certain of their perseverance and salvation, nevertheless continued in prayer and other exercises of godliness.

7

Error: The faith of those who believe for a time does not differ from justifying and saving faith except with respect to its duration.

Refutation: In Mt 13:20-23 and Luke 8:13-15 Christ Himself clearly indicates, besides this duration, a threefold difference between those who believe only for a time and true believers. He declares that the former receive the seed on rocky ground, but the latter in good soil, or in a good heart; that the former are without root, but the latter have a firm root; and that the former are without fruit, but the latter bring forth fruit in varying measure, constantly and steadfastly.

8

Error: It is not absurd that one, having lost his first regeneration, is again and even often born anew.

Refutation: This doctrine denies that the seed of God, by which we are born again, is imperishable, contrary to the testimony of the apostle Peter: *You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable* (1 Pet 1:23).

9

Error: Christ did not pray anywhere that believers should unfailingly continue in faith.

Refutation: This contradicts Christ Himself, who says: *I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail* (Luke 22:32). It also contradicts the apostle John, who declares that Christ did not pray only for the apostles, but also for all who would believe through their word: *Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name, and, My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one* (Jn 17:11, 15, cf. 17:20).

CONCLUSION

This is the clear, simple, and straightforward explanation of the orthodox doctrine with respect to the five articles in dispute in the Netherlands, as well as the rejection of the errors by which the churches have for some time been disturbed. The Synod judges this explanation and rejection to be taken from the Word of God and to be in agreement with the confessions of the Reformed churches. Hence it clearly appears that some have acted very improperly and against all truth, fairness, and love in wishing to persuade the public of the following:

- The doctrine of the Reformed churches concerning predestination and related subjects, by its very character and tendency, turns the hearts of men away from all godliness and religion.

- It is an opiate for the flesh administered by the devil, and a stronghold of Satan, where he lies in wait for all, wounds multitudes, and mortally pierces many with the darts both of despair and false security.
- It makes God the author of sin, an unjust tyrant and hypocrite; and is nothing more than a renewed Stoicism, Manichaeism, Libertinism, and Mohammedanism.
- It leads to sinful carelessness, since it makes people believe that nothing can prevent the salvation of the elect, no matter how they live, and that, therefore, they may safely commit the most atrocious crimes. On the other hand, it would not in the least contribute to the salvation of the reprobate, even if they had performed all the works of the saints.
- The same doctrine teaches that God has predestined and created the greatest part of the world for eternal damnation by a mere arbitrary act of His will, without taking into account any sin.
- In the same manner in which election is the source and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and ungodliness.
- Many innocent children of believers are torn from their mothers' breasts and tyrannically thrown into hell, so that neither the blood of Christ nor their baptism nor the prayers of the church at their baptism can be of any help to them.

And there are many more teachings of this kind which the Reformed churches not only do not confess but even detest wholeheartedly.

Therefore, this Synod of Dort adjures, in the Name of the Lord, all who piously call upon our Saviour Jesus Christ not to judge the faith of the Reformed churches from the slander gathered from here and there. Neither are they to judge from personal statements of some ancient or modern teachers, often quoted in bad faith, or taken out of context and explained contrary to their meaning. But one ought to judge the faith of the Reformed churches from the public confessions of these churches themselves and from the present explanation of the orthodox doctrine, confirmed by the unanimous consent of the members of the entire Synod, one and all.

Moreover, the Synod warns the slanderers themselves to consider how severe a judgment of God awaits those who bear false witness against so many churches and their confessions, disturb the consciences of the weak, and try to make many suspicious of the community of true believers.

Finally, this Synod exhorts all fellow ministers in the gospel of Christ to conduct themselves in a God-fearing and reverent manner when they deal with this doctrine in schools and churches. In teaching it, both in speaking and writing, they ought to seek the glory of God's Name, the holiness of life, and the consolation of afflicted souls. Their thinking and speaking about this doctrine should be in agreement with Scripture according to the analogy of faith. And they must refrain from all those expressions which exceed the prescribed limits of the true meaning of the Holy Scriptures and which may provide shameless sophists with a good opportunity to scoff at the doctrine of the Reformed churches, or even to slander it.

May Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is seated at the Father's right hand and gives gifts to men, sanctify us in the truth, lead to the truth those who err, silence the slanderers of the sound doctrine, and equip the faithful ministers of His Word with the Spirit of wisdom and discretion, that everything they say may tend to the glory of God and the building up of those who hear them. Amen.