



ECO

A Covenant Order
of Evangelical
Presbyterians

**Understanding the Confessions
The Second Helvetic Confession**



"Let [the magistrate] hold the Word of God in his hands, and take care lest anything contrary to it is taught. Likewise let him govern the people entrusted to him by God with good laws made according to the Word of God." — *Second Helvetic Confession*

Heinrich Bullinger

Theodore Beza

The Second Helvetic Confession

The Reformation of Switzerland.



The Historic Background

- Written by Heinrich Bullinger in 1562 as a statement of faith intended to be attached to his will,
- Used by Frederick III, the Elector of the Palatinate, in 1565 in his defense against charges of heresy,
- the Second Helvetic Confession was soon adopted by the Swiss cantons in 1566 as a catholic and Reformed statement of beliefs.
- The Reformed churches of Scotland (1566), Hungary (1567), France (1571), and Poland (1578) also subsequently adopted it.

Key Features

- The ordering of its chapters points to several key features
- The doctrine of predestination is placed after an explication of human sinfulness and prior to a declaration of salvation in Jesus Christ.
- In this way, the doctrine of predestination is offered as the bridge between humanity and God.
- Predestination is only described in terms of election; no reprobation is ever mentioned

Key Features

- Nearly half of the Second Helvetic Confession is devoted to the life of faith as lived in Christian community
- Sacraments are understood as signifying symbols of grace as well as our means of sacramental union with Christ.
- Provides us some of our strongest statements on the appropriateness of infant baptism and the rejection of re-baptism.
- Provides very useful instructions on the interpretation of Scripture:
 - interpret Scripture from Scripture,
 - embrace the study of language and historical context, so long as such study results in understandings that “agree with the rule of faith and love” and contribute “much to the glory of God and man’s salvation.”

Chapter Topics

- Holy Scripture and its interpretation (ch. 1-2),
- Doctrines of God, His intentions for right worship, and His providence, including admonitions against idolatry (ch. 3-6),
- Creation (ch. 7),
- Humankind, sin, and free will (ch. 8-9), ‘
- Predestination (ch. 10),
- Jesus the mediator (ch. 11),
- God’s law and its completion in Christ (ch. 12),

Chapter Topics

- The Gospel of Jesus Christ (ch. 13),
- Repentance and conversion (ch. 14),
- Justification (ch. 15),
- Good works as proceeding from faith (ch. 16),
- The church and its ministers (ch. 17-18),
- The sacraments (ch. 19-21),
- Worship (ch. 22-24),

Chapter Topics

- Religious instruction and ministry to the sick and dying (ch. 25-26),
- Church ceremonies (ch. 27),
- Church property (ch. 28),
- Marriage (ch. 29),
- Civil engagement and the justifiability of warfare (ch. 30).

References for the Essential Tenets in the Book of Confessions

- **The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the infallible and inspired Word of God, teaching all that is necessary for faith and life. 5.001–003**
- **God is Triune, that is, one being, three persons. 5.015–018**
- **The Son is eternally begotten of the Father. 5.016**
- **The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. 5.016**
- **The three persons are consubstantial, coeternal, and coequal. 5.017**
- **God is infinite, eternal, immutable, impassible, ineffable, undivided, the source of goodness, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. 5.015**
- **Creation continues to be maintained by God’s sovereignty and providence. 5.029**

References for the Essential Tenets in the Book of Confessions

- **Jesus will return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead. 5.074**
- **The Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to confess Jesus as Lord and God. 5.005**
- **God made the world good. 5.032**
- **Our free rebellion against God's will is the source of the world's present misery, disorder, and evil. 5.036–037**
- **Sin poisons all of human life. 5.037**
- **We are born dead in our sin; therefore, salvation must be at God's initiative. 5.037**
- **We are each deserving of eternal condemnation. 5.038**

References for the Essential Tenets in the Book of Confessions

- **Human beings are made in God's image. 5.034**
- **Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human. 5.062, 064**
- **Jesus' two natures are distinct and distinguishable. 5.066**
- **His divine nature is not limited, impaired, or changed by assuming our human nature. 5.066**
- **Jesus is ascended in his resurrected body and remains truly human. 5.073–074**

References for the Essential Tenets in the Book of Confessions

- **Jesus offered Himself for us on the cross, saving us from sin and death by bearing our punishment and by offering God the perfect obedience due to Him. 5.108**
- **We are declared justified because of God's grace. 5.107–110**
- **Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father. 5.077**
- **We lost true freedom of the will in the Fall and cannot turn to God on our own. In Christ, our freedom is restored. 5.043, 047**
- **God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world, not because of any merit on our part, but only because of His love and mercy. 5.052–053**

References for the Essential Tenets in the Book of Confessions

- **We are called to live out our faith within the covenant community of the church. 5.136**
- **God's grace is extended through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and the faithful practice of mutual discipline. 5.169**
- **Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the word preached may become God's direct speech to us. 5.004–007**
- **Infant baptism signals that we believe in salvation by God's gracious initiative, not by our decision or work. 5.192**

References for the Essential Tenets in the Book of Confessions

- **In the Lord's Supper, the Spirit unites us to the ascended Christ and nourishes us with His resurrection life. 5.198–201, 205**
- **Church discipline is how we help one another to grow in grace. 5.165**
- **Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, made possible by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. 5.093**
- **We must worship God humbly, aware of the dangers of images and ideas of God that can become idolatrous, keeping preaching and sacraments central. 5.020–021**

Discussion Questions – How Does:

- **the system of doctrine in the 2nd Helvetic Confession accurately and faithfully reflect the theological teaching of the Scriptures?**
- **the 2nd Helvetic Confession reflect the grace, love, and joy of the gospel?**
- **it enable the church to confess what it believes and hold the church to believe what it confesses?**
- **Is it clear, and does it speak in a concise, accessible, and warm manner to the whole church?**

Discussion Questions – How Does:

- **it call for both affirmation and rejection?**
- **it represent merely the interests of one group in the church, or does it take responsibility to speak from and to the one universal Church?**
- **it speak only to its own temporal context or does it speak of the eternal truths of Scripture?**
- **it allow the eternal truths of Scripture to speak into our context?**

An Added Resource

“The Second Helvetic Confession”

from Interlink Media on Vimeo.

The video is available for your viewing pleasure at

<https://vimeo.com/41031825>

