

C. COVENANT STATEMENT ON BELIEF AND PRACTICE

Introduction¹

The Reformation Canada Network (RCN) gives itself wholeheartedly to kingdom mission and vision, and, for that reason, we are convinced that we must defend those areas of faith and life which are being challenged in our day. This Covenant states clearly where we stand on the core faith issues involved, and we bind ourselves together to uphold whole-heartedly the evangelical truths presented herein.² The annual attestation of this *Covenant Statement* by RCN members, local church officers, and other ministry leaders, is viewed as another level of Scriptural compliance beyond that of the historic Reformed Creeds and Doctrinal Standards, namely, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort.

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1. Essential Christian Truth (Source Regent-College.edu)

- i. The sovereignty and grace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in creation, providence, revelation, redemption, and final judgement.
- ii. The divine inspiration of Holy Scripture and its consequent entire trustworthiness and supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
- iii. The universal sinfulness and guilt of human nature since the fall, bringing everyone under God's wrath and condemnation.
- iv. The substitutionary sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God as the sole ground of redemption from the guilt, penalty, and power of sin.
- v. The justification of the sinner by the grace of God through faith alone in Christ crucified and risen from the dead.
- vi. The illuminating, regenerating, indwelling, and sanctifying work of God the Holy Spirit in the believer.
- vii. The unity and common priesthood of all true believers, who together form the one universal Church, the Body of which Christ is the Head.
- viii. The expectation of the personal, visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Faith Issues Under Attack

a. The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture

- We CONFESS that the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is revelation given by God, and is therefore to be received as the authoritative Word of God.

- We CONFESS that the Bible is true and reliable in all matters it addresses, whether spiritual or secular.
- We REJECT the view that the Bible receives its authority from the church, or that the authority of the church can at any time and in any part supersede that of the Bible.
- We REJECT the view that some or much of the Bible is the result of fallible human insight, and therefore may need correction.
- We BELIEVE that we rightly follow in the footsteps of the Reformers when we seek to understand Scripture according to its literary genre, in its grammatical and historical context, and by drawing out any larger implications in light of the whole of Scripture.
- We BELIEVE, with the Reformers, that while God's revelation within the Bible unfolded gradually over time, it is always internally consistent because it comes from the same divine source.
- We REJECT the legitimacy of any method of interpretation that looks for themes, such as the love of God or the justice of God, which are then used as a master key to interpret the Bible, overriding Scripture teachings that seem to be in conflict with the master theme.
- We REJECT any treatment of the biblical text that leads to relativizing or discounting its plain meaning, or that denies the unity of Scripture and sets up one passage or theme of Scripture over against another, making the Bible contradict itself.
- We REJECT any practice of interpretation that denies the self-sufficiency of Scripture as the only rule of faith and life.

b. The Application of Scripture

- We CONFESS that the Bible, as God's authoritative Word, needs to be believed in all that it affirms, and obeyed in all that it requires. The truths of Scripture demand both doctrinal faithfulness and behavioral holiness. In this Covenant we will limit ourselves to those areas of faith and life that we perceive to be most compromised at this time.

i. The Creation and Uniqueness of Human Beings

- We CONFESS that human beings are created by God and are unique in having been made in His image.
- We CONFESS, therefore, that human life is sacred from conception to grave and therefore the taking of life, other than that which is biblically justified, is sin.
- We CONFESS that God's creation was good in every respect until the human race, represented by Adam and Eve, rebelled against God's authority and plan, and fell into sin.
- We REJECT the view that human beings are the product of a chance process of evolution. We deny every philosophy, worldview or understanding of the human predicament, nature and destiny that is based on the presupposition of chance evolution.

ii. The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour

- We CONFESS that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, of one substance with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the unique mediator between God and humankind.
- We CONFESS that for the sake of our fallen human race He emptied Himself and became human flesh in order to reveal the full nature of God, to destroy the works of the devil and to take upon Himself the punishment due to us for our sin by His death on the cross. We believe that He rose from the dead in a new and glorified body, that God appointed Him as the Head of the church, and that He will be revealed as Lord of all when He returns personally and visibly to establish the full manifestation of the Kingdom of God on a renewed earth. We believe that the church has been entrusted with the mandate of sharing the Good News of God's saving action in Jesus Christ with all peoples of the earth, regardless of race, creed, culture, or moral condition.

- We REJECT the view that there is salvation outside of Jesus Christ, or that there is saving knowledge of God in other religious traditions.

iii. Marriage and Sexual Morality

- We CONFESS that marriage is between one man and one woman. Jesus affirmed this view when He quoted from Genesis 2:24, saying, “*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh*” (Matthew 19:5).
- We CONFESS that any understanding, form, or expression of marriage other than what God has instituted is outside of God’s revealed will.
- We DENY that a male and female are to be defined beyond the natural, biological, and genetic distinctions found in Scripture and natural revelation.
- We CONFESS that all Christians, regardless of cultural conditioning or alleged genetic causation are called to holy living according to all the explicit standards of Scripture and need to resist the desires of body and mind that are contrary to God’s revealed will. In the area of sexual morality this means that Christians are called to fidelity within marriage, and to chastity before and after marriage.
- We DENY that the church may lower God’s standards of sexual morality for any of its members, or that those standards themselves can be modified in any way on the basis of changing perspectives or the demands of a dominant culture.
- We CONFESS that our primary and ultimate identity is as a new creation in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17).
- We DENY that Christians can base their identity on anything outside of the biblical norm (I Corinthians 6:9-11), that is, we name our sins, but are not named by them.⁴

c. Confessional and Scriptural Integrity

- We CONFESS our faith as a confessional church, guided by the Reformed Confessions, yet owing a higher allegiance to the Scriptures than to the Confessions. We are an *Ecclesia Reformata* - a Church Reformed, according to the Word of God. We are also *sed semper reformanda* - always reforming according to the Word of God. While we acknowledge a tradition of vigorous theological inquiry, we are limited to reforming only according to the Word of God if we are to maintain confessional and Scriptural integrity. This is nonnegotiable.
- We REJECT any doctrinal change or alleged reform which undermines our confessional and scriptural integrity and introduces ambiguity into our theological heritage. We resolve to maintain and defend our heritage of faith vigorously, in humble dependence upon the Word of God, and, in a spirit of openness, praying that God will yet cause “more truth to break forth from His Holy Word” (John Robinson, 1620).

3. Pastoral Considerations

As we have, in this *Covenant Statement*, confronted beliefs that impact people struggling with these matters, we observe the following.

- i. We are all broken people living in a broken world in need of the grace of God.
- ii. God hates sin precisely because He loves sinners; that is why He sent His Son to bear sin and save sinners.
- iii. What God commands expresses His nature, and we are made in His image; therefore, to approve of sin is to promote misery, and to urge repentance is to pursue the wholeness God desires for all.
- iv. For that reason, we purpose to deal with all people in gracious and respectful ways, so as to be used by the Holy Spirit to draw people through conviction into repentance, rather than in a spirit of self-righteous legalism to repel people through condemnation into further rebellion.

4. Implications for Office Bearers

This *Covenant Statement* has implications especially for our office bearers. As Pastors and elders, we have been entrusted with guarding the purity of the church. We are identified as a Reformation Church because we believe that the marks of a true church can be known: the pure preaching of the Gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ, the exercise of church discipline in punishing of sin; and the rejection of all things in the church that are managed contrary to the pure Word of God (Belgic Confession, Art. 29). We are not at liberty limiting ourselves to the pure preaching of the Word while refraining from rejecting what is false, and from exercising proper church discipline. Nor are we at liberty limiting ourselves to our local churches while refraining from speaking out when we see our confessional integrity compromised, either within the RCN itself or in designated ecumenical association.

5. The Commitments as Office Bearers

- We AFFIRM that all present and future office bearers (Pastors, elders, and deacons) within our churches are bound by the application of these words as found in this *Covenant Statement*.
- We COMMIT to presenting this *Covenant Statement* to all incoming office bearers, new ministry staff, and students coming under supervision, in order that they may also affirm it together with us.
- We COMMIT ourselves to an annual reaffirmation of this *Covenant Statement*, both at our first General Meeting of the year, and in our Church Councils prior to that meeting.
- We COMMIT ourselves individually, should we come to believe differently than what we have bound ourselves to herein, to submit ourselves to the counsel, admonition, and discipline of the RCN, always ready to give an account of our understanding of the Christian faith.
- We COMMIT ourselves corporately to the exercise of proper church discipline regarding the matters addressed in this *Covenant Statement*. We will, as warranted, exercise pastoral discipline through admonishment or rebuke, and further steps of judicial discipline through suspension, deposition from office, or excommunication.

I AGREE TO THE SHARED STATEMENTS AND THE EVANGELICAL TRUTHS PRESENTED IN THIS *COVENANT* AND WILL FULFILL MY MINISTRY IN ALIGNMENT WITH THEM AND WILL ONLY HIRE OR PLACE A LEADER IN MINISTRY WHO WOULD ALSO AFFIRM THIS *COVENANT*.

Signature

Name

Role

Date

COVENANT FOOTNOTES:

¹ Historical background: The original version of this Covenant was created in 1999 to address underlying core issues of Scripture interpretation and confessional integrity.

² We take to heart the challenge given by Martin Luther, the Reformer, in a statement drawn from his correspondence: *“If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point that the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be confessing Christ. Where the battle rages fiercely is where the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.”*

³ For further study see the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* – 1978

⁴ Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality (Presbyterian Church in America, 2021) by a committee of seven leaders including Timothy Keller and Kevin DeYoung. STATEMENT 9: IDENTITY (p. 13) *“To juxtapose identities rooted in sinful desires alongside the term “Christian” is inconsistent with Biblical language and undermines the spiritual reality that we are new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Nevertheless, being honest about our sin struggles is important. While Christians should not identify with their sin so as to embrace it or seek to base their identity on it, Christians ought to acknowledge their sin in an effort to overcome it. There is a difference between speaking about a phenomenological facet of a person’s sin-stained reality and employing the language of sinful desires as a personal identity marker. That is, we name our sins, but are not named by them.”*
<https://pcaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/AIC-Report-to-48th-GA-5-28-20-1.pdf>