



“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

A COVENANT FOR INTEGRITY IN THE RCA

Preamble

This Covenant was written in hope and humility—in hope that God will protect the Reformed Church in America from moral and theological error; and in humility, asking God to continue the much needed work of sanctification in our own lives. For the holiness and happiness of God’s people, we write to define and defend the marvelous truth about grace and the full graciousness of truth. This Covenant is not meant to replace the Bible or our Confessions. At times in the life of the church, however, it becomes necessary to clarify doctrinal boundaries and re-establish cherished truths in order to preserve and strengthen the foundation. This Covenant was written for such a time as this.

Our commitment to Christ and His Word compels us to affirm . . .

Article 1: The Glory of God

God’s chief purpose in all that He wills, thinks, and does is the glory of His name.¹ Moreover, every person, indeed all creation, exists for this same purpose: to glorify God.² God is sovereign, such that there is nothing unseen, unknown, or undetermined by God in all of creation, time, or eternity.³

Article 2: The Authority of Scripture

The Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is the ultimate authority, without error in all that it intends to teach, and altogether sufficient for Christian faith and practice.⁴ The Bible reveals universal truths which are true for all people at all times and can be known with certainty and clarity. The authority of Scripture should not be made subject to or equal with other writings or human experience.⁵ As divine revelation, Scripture accurately describes who God is and how He wishes to be addressed, including the trinitarian language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁶

1Isaiah 48:9-11; Habakkuk 2:14; Romans 11:34-36; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 2:10

2Psalm 86:9; Ecclesiastes 12:13; Isaiah 43:6-7; Revelation 14:6-7

3Genesis 50:20; Job 14:5; Psalm 139:1-4, 16; Isaiah 46:10; Daniel 2:21, 4:35; Matthew 10:29-31; Acts 4:27-28, 17:25-27; Romans 8:28; Ephesians 1:11; HC 27, 28; BC 1, 13

4Psalm 12:6, 18:30; John 10:35, 17:17; Acts 24:14; Romans 3:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; BC 3, 4, 5, 6

5BC 7

61 Timothy 6:15; Malachi 1:6; Isaiah 54:5; Revelation 21:2; Romans 11:33-36; Matthew 6:9; John 16:7-15; Matthew 28:19; HC 24; BC 8

Article 3: The Gospel of God

Humanity's greatest need is to be reconciled with God.⁷ The gospel is compromised when the grace and love of Christ are expressed without the ultimate objective of calling sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.⁸ The appropriate response to sin is one that believes in the power of God to change lives, hopes in the mercy of God to forgive sins, and loves enough to call sinners to confession and transformation.⁹ God is inclusive in that He calls all to come to Him in faith and repentance.¹⁰ God is exclusive in that only those who believe in Jesus Christ and seek to keep His commands can be assured of salvation.¹¹ The gospel is the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and should not be equated with or reduced to mere good deeds, humanitarian relief, or societal reform.¹²

Article 4: The Uniqueness of Christ

Jesus Christ is unique among the so-called gods of this world. Only in Jesus can we have salvation, fellowship, and a true understanding of God.¹³ Jesus Christ died on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for sins, and in so doing absorbed God's wrath and eternal judgment upon our sin.¹⁴ We are counted righteous before God based on the imputed righteousness of Christ.¹⁵ Justification is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.¹⁶ No one will be saved apart from the atoning sacrifice of Christ.¹⁷ Salvation is received through personal hearing of and conscious believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁸ The unrepentant and unbelieving will not be saved, either in this life or after physical death.¹⁹ Apart from Jesus, who is the eternal Son of God incarnate, we cannot see, know, or glorify God as He is.²⁰

Article 5: The Confessional Church

We recognize six doctrinal Standards: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort. Although authored by humans and imperfect, these Standards are nevertheless faithful and trustworthy expressions of the doctrines of Holy Scripture. Our common commitment to these Standards is the critical component of our denominational identity and unity.²¹ Calls to church unity should not be made at the expense of truth and purity.²²

Article 6: The Covenantal Church

Members of the RCA have entered into a covenantal relationship with God and one another which obligates each one of us to be accountable to others in the community. This obligation may at times require the exercise of church discipline, one of the marks of the true church.²³ Any judicatory which fails to exercise pastoral oversight and church discipline for those who have strayed from the truth of

72 Corinthians 5:18-20

8Matthew 28:19-20; BC 29; CD 1.2, 1.3, 2.5

9Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20; 1 Corinthians 13:13

10Matthew 11:28-30; John 6:37; CD 1.4, 3/4.8

11Matthew 7:13-23; John 3:18, 6:53, 8:24; CD 1.12, 1.13

12Isaiah 49:6; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

13Isaiah 45:18; John 1:18, 14:6; Acts 4:12

14Isaiah 53:4-5; Romans 3:25; Galatians 3:13; 1 John 2:2; BC 21; CD 2.2, 2.3

152 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9; BC 22, 23

16Romans 3:23-24, 5:1; Galatians 2:16; HC 61; BC 22, 23

17John 6:53-58; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:1-2 HC 14, 17, 29, 30

18Romans 10:14-15; see CD 1.17 for related counsel

19Luke 16:26; John 3:18; Revelation 20:11-15; HC 10; BC 37; CD 1.15

20John 1:14; Colossians 1:15-20; BC 26

21The Liturgy: Reception into Communicant Membership

22Ephesians 4:1-32

23Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; BC 28, 29

Scripture or the doctrines of our Standards is remiss in its duties.²⁴ Establishing, upholding, and defending the truth of the gospel is not antithetical to church health and evangelism, but is essential to the ministry, mission, and unity of the church.²⁵

Article 7: The Gift of Sexuality

Marriage is a joyful covenanting between one man and one woman.²⁶ All sexual intimacy is divinely designed for and should be expressed solely within the covenant of marriage.²⁷ Any teaching or practice which blurs gender distinction, such as homosexuality, bisexuality, or trans-sexuality is contrary to Scripture.²⁸ Same-sex “marriages,” even in committed and consensual relationships, are contrary to Scripture.²⁹ Ordination to the offices of the church for any person who unrepentantly practices or promotes any form of sexual sin, whether fornication, adultery, homosexuality, or the like is to be prohibited.³⁰

Article 8: The Dignity of Human Life

All human life is to be treasured as a gift from God.³¹ Any practice which demeans human dignity, such as pornography,³² racism,³³ abuse,³⁴ exploitation,³⁵ persecution,³⁶ abortion,³⁷ and euthanasia³⁸ is immoral and unjust.

24Revelation 2:14-16, 20; BC 32

25Galatians 1:8; Titus 1:9; Jude 3; John 17:17; Galatians 2:11; Ephesians 4:3, 13-16

26The Liturgy: Order of Worship for Christian Marriage

27Genesis 2:18-25; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5; Ephesians 5:22-33

28Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:10; Jude 7; HC 87

29Matthew 19:5

301 Timothy 5:22; Titus 2:7-8; James 3:1; HC 109

31Genesis 1:27; Psalm 8:3-8; BC 14

32Matthew 5:27-30; HC 109

33Ephesians 2:14-16

34Ephesians 5:28-29

35Amos 5:10-13; HC 110

36Matthew 23:29-36

37Psalm 139:13-16

38Exodus 20:13; HC 105, 107