

SUMMARIES OF SOME OF THE DOCTRINES OF THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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THE BIBLE

Scripture, the saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ, addresses us with full divine authority in its total extent and in all its parts, and therefore the CRC speaks of the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God. The authority of Scripture is inseparable from the historical reality of the events recorded in it. Interpreted historical events are presented in Scripture not simply as isolated events but for their revelational meaning. Scripture is self-authenticating; it is not dependent on the findings of science, but these findings may lead to a better understanding of Scripture and must be developed within a Christian community faithful to the authority of Scripture.

Biblical studies must be done carefully, with emphasis on what Scripture itself says and without the use of interpretive methods that exclude or question the event character or revelational intent of biblical history and thereby compromise the full authority of the Word of God. Freedom of interpretation within the bounds of Scripture and of the creeds is to be respected. The authority of Scripture is to be believed and confessed as an article of faith and is to be consistently applied and practiced in the life and ministry of the church.

Reformed believers summarize this biblical story in four major chapters:

Creation - In the beginning God created a world where everything was in perfect harmony. Relations between God and humans and the creation were good and whole.

Fall - Through pride, humans were enticed by Satan into rebelling against God. Their disobedient act opened the door for the "sin virus" to enter the world. This virus contaminates everything: no person, no creature, no institution, no relationship or individual action is free from the totality of this contamination. The results of sin are evident in such things as greed, violence, and oppression as well as pollution, sickness, death, and weeds. The most devastating effect of sin is alienation from God. Still, sin cannot obliterate the "image of God" in us that longs for God and for wholeness.

Redemption - But God did not allow sin have the last word in this story. Because of his great love for humans and for the whole creation, God set out to redeem the world from its sinful condition. God called Abraham and Sarah and their descendants, the people of Israel, to be his partners in blessing the whole world. Finally, he sent his only Son, Jesus the Messiah, to live a

fully human life and then die, thus paying the price for humanity's sinful actions. But death could not defeat Jesus. God raised him from the dead to show that he had conquered sin and death. Now God's kingdom is growing and spreading in this world, and Christians are part of that great work.

New Creation - One day, Jesus is coming back again to extend God's reign on earth completely. He will do away with any traces of sin and its effects. There will be no more sickness, no more suffering, no more alienation from God, no more death. Evil will be eradicated. God himself will dwell with humans and all creation will be fully restored. Praise God!

REVELATION OF GOD

Belgic Confession Article 2

We know God by two means:

First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: God's eternal power and divinity, as the apostle Paul says in [Romans 1:20](#). All these things are enough to convict humans and to leave them without excuse.

Second, God makes himself known to us more clearly by his holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for God's glory and for our salvation.

ORIGINAL SIN AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY

Canons of Dort, 3rd and 4th Points, Articles 1 and 2:

Article 1: The Effect of the Fall on Human Nature

Human beings were originally created in the image of God and were furnished in mind with a true and sound knowledge of the Creator and things spiritual, in will and heart with righteousness, and in all emotions with purity; indeed, the whole human being was holy. However, rebelling against God at the devil's instigation and by their own free will, they deprived themselves of these outstanding gifts. Rather, in their place they brought upon themselves blindness, terrible darkness, futility, and distortion of judgment in their minds; perversity, defiance, and hardness in their hearts and wills; and finally impurity in all their emotions.

Article 2: The Spread of Corruption

Human beings brought forth children of the same nature as themselves after the fall. That is to say, being corrupt they brought forth corrupt children. The corruption spread, by God's just

judgment, from Adam and Eve to all their descendants—except for Christ alone—not by way of imitation (as in former times the Pelagians would have it) but by way of the propagation of their perverted nature.

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION.

Canons of Dort, 1st Point, Article 7:

Election is God's unchangeable purpose by which he did the following:

Before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to the free good pleasure of his will, God chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race, which had fallen by its own fault from its original innocence into sin and ruin. Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery. God did this in Christ, whom he also appointed from eternity to be the mediator, the head of all those chosen, and the foundation of their salvation.

And so God decreed to give to Christ those chosen for salvation, and to call and draw them effectively into Christ's fellowship through the Word and Spirit. In other words, God decreed to grant them true faith in Christ, to justify them, to sanctify them, and finally, after powerfully preserving them in the fellowship of the Son, to glorify them. God did all this in order to demonstrate his mercy, to the praise of the riches of God's glorious grace.

As Scripture says, "God chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, so that we should be holy and blameless before him with love; he predestined us whom he adopted as his children through Jesus Christ, in himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, by which he freely made us pleasing to himself in his beloved" ([Eph. 1:4-6](#)). And elsewhere, "Those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also glorified" ([Rom. 8:30](#)).

LIMITED ATONEMENT

Canons of Dort, 2nd Point, Article 8:

For it was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of his Son's costly death should work itself out in all the

elect, in order that God might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation. In other words, it was God's will that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which he confirmed the new covenant) should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father; that Christ should grant them faith (which, like the Holy Spirit's other saving gifts, he acquired for them by his death). It was also God's will that Christ should cleanse them by his blood from all their sins, both original and actual, whether committed before or after their coming to faith; that he should faithfully preserve them to the very end; and that he should finally present them to himself, a glorious people, without spot or wrinkle.

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

Canons of Dort, 3rd and 4th Points, Article 12

[Regeneration] certainly does not happen only by outward teaching, by moral persuasion, or by such a way of working that, after God's work is done, it remains in human power whether or not to be reborn or converted. Rather, it is an entirely supernatural work, one that is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing, a marvelous, hidden, and inexpressible work, which is not less than or inferior in power to that of creation or of raising the dead, as Scripture (inspired by the author of this work) teaches. As a result, all those in whose hearts God works in this marvelous way are certainly, unfailingly, and effectively reborn and do actually believe. And then the will, now renewed, is not only activated and motivated by God, but in being activated by God is also itself active. For this reason, people themselves, by that grace which they have received, are also rightly said to believe and to repent.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Canons of Dort, 5th Point, Articles 4-6

Article 4: The Danger of True Believers' Falling into Serious Sins

The power of God strengthening and preserving true believers in grace is more than a match for the flesh. Yet those converted are not always so activated and motivated by God that in certain specific actions they cannot by their own fault depart from the leading of grace, be led astray by the desires of the flesh, and give in to them. For this reason they must constantly watch and pray that they may not be led into temptations. When they fail to do this, not only can they be carried away by the flesh, the world, and Satan into sins, even serious and outrageous ones, but also by God's just permission they sometimes are so carried away—witness the sad cases, described in Scripture, of David, Peter, and other saints falling into sins.

Article 5: The Effects of Such Serious Sins

By such monstrous sins, however, they greatly offend God, deserve the sentence of death, grieve the Holy Spirit, suspend the exercise of faith, severely wound the conscience, and sometimes

lose the awareness of grace for a time—until, after they have returned to the right way by genuine repentance, God’s fatherly face again shines upon them.

Article 6: God’s Saving Intervention

For God, who is rich in mercy, according to the unchangeable purpose of election does not take the Holy Spirit from his own completely, even when they fall grievously. Neither does God let them fall down so far that they forfeit the grace of adoption and the state of justification, or commit the sin which leads to death (the sin against the Holy Spirit), and plunge themselves, entirely forsaken by God, into eternal ruin.

ESCHATOLOGY (END TIMES)

Although the Christian Reformed Church generally holds to an amillennial understanding about the end of time, it has never made this the official position of the denomination.

Amillennialism or “realized millennialism” holds that the 1000 years (millennium) spoken of in Revelation 20 is not exclusively in the future but refers to the kingdom of God which is currently in the process of realization. The millennium began with the death and resurrection of Jesus and will continue until the tribulation. After the tribulation, believers in Jesus will be raptured to meet Jesus in the air, and then return with Him to earth, where God makes His dwelling place with humanity forever.

While not making this position official, the denomination has made statements that indicate difficulty with dispensationalism and some parts of premillennialism. In response to a dispensationalist understanding, the CRC believes in the unity of the church of all ages, with ancient Israel not being excluded. The church of all ages is one essence. In response to a dispensational position, the CRC believes that while God has a plan for the Jewish people, the true Israel are all those who have died and risen with the one true Israelite, Jesus. The true Israel is made up of both Jews and Gentiles.

CREEDS AND THREE CONFESSIONS

Creeds:

The Apostle’s Creed

The Nicene Creed

The Athanasian Creed

Confessions:

The Heidelberg Catechism

The Belgic Confession

The Canons of Dort

SACRAMENTS

Baptism

The sacrament of baptism reminds and assures us that “as surely as water washes away dirt from the body, so certainly [Christ’s] blood and his Spirit wash away . . . all [our] sins” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. 69). And because “infants as well as adults are in God’s covenant and are his people,” they, “no less than adults, are promised the forgiveness of sin” and thus “by baptism . . . should be received into the Christian church. . . . This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. 74).

In the Christian Reformed Church, baptism is performed by an ordained minister of the Word or commissioned pastor. The usual method of baptism is by the sprinkling of water on the forehead of the person to be baptized, but other methods (such as immersion) may also be used. The CRC employs infant baptism (for children of believing parents) as well as adult baptism (for adults who join but have not previously been baptized in a Christian church); an adult who is baptized is also called upon to make a public profession of his or her faith in Christ. (From CRCNA website)

The Lord’s Supper

Jesus ordained The Lord’s Supper as a sacrament that provides spiritual nourishment and strengthens faith. The Lord’s Supper represents a "real presence" where believers, through the Holy Spirit, feed on Christ's body and blood by faith. All baptized members who trust in Christ are welcome to the table, including children.

The Christian Reformed Church does not believe that the bread and wine/juice are literally the body and blood of Jesus, or that Jesus is physically present in the elements. Instead we believe that Jesus is spiritually present, where believers are spiritually united with Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

The Supper is a sign and a seal of God’s covenant, reminding and convincing us that our sins are forgiven through the body and blood of Jesus and that we are nourished by the life of Jesus, through faith.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

All congregations in the Christian Reformed Church in North America may allow women to serve in the office of minister, elder, deacon, or commissioned pastor. The CRC recognizes that there are two different perspectives and convictions on this issue, both of which honor the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God (for the biblical-theological argumentation undergirding the CRC’s approach to this issue, *see Agenda for Synod 2000*, pp. 355-73)

Classes may also, in keeping with their understanding of the biblical position on the role of women in ecclesiastical office, declare that women officebearers may not be delegated to their classis. All duly elected and ordained officebearers—men and women—may be delegated to synod, but officebearers will not be asked to participate against their convictions on this matter. (from www.crcna.org)