

## WHERE WE FIT WITHIN THE FAMILY OF CHURCHES

The CRC calls itself *Reformed* because it stands in the tradition of the Reformed churches. These churches follow the teachings of the sixteenth-century church reformer John Calvin. Calvin struggled valiantly to return Christianity back to its biblical roots. CRC teachings are closely akin to Presbyterian and other reformed churches, and it enjoys solid relationships with many of them.

## DISTINCTIVE TEACHINGS WE HOLD DEAR

The CRC shares some distinctive teachings and emphases with the other churches in the Reformed tradition. Here's a list of five important ones.

### OUR GOD REIGNS

The CRC teaches that nothing in this world happens outside of God's will. Our Creator is in control of all things. No forces in heaven, earth, or hell can frustrate what God promises to do for us (Ps. 2). That does not mean that everything that happens *is* God's will. We do many things God does not want. Our disobedience sets into motion many disastrous events that are our own doing. In spite of that, we may still exercise our human freedom. But our actions and decisions are under our heavenly Father's restraining, providing care. Nothing we do can spoil God's wondrous plan for us (Rom. 8:28). This gives us the confidence to do our Lord's work in this world. Our Provider's loving, guiding hand will sustain us in good times and in hard times as well.

### PARTNERS WITH GOD

Believers belong to God. Our Creator receives us as Members of his family and grants us the precious promise of eternal life (Eph. 1:35). In this way we may live in partnership with God. The Bible calls this relationship the covenant. It's God's agreement with us to fulfill his promises if we accept them with a repentant, believing heart (Heb. 8:6). Because we can fulfill our part only when he gives us the Holy Spirit, God takes the initiative in this agreement. We celebrate our partnership in baptism and in the Lord's Supper. Through the cleansing water of baptism God shows us we belong to the family. The bread and the cup we share in the Lord's Supper remind us of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross by which he draws us into fellowship with God and with each other (Matt 26:27-28).

The Bible teaches that God also includes our children in this partnership. They also receive the promise (Acts 2:39). Therefore we baptize them, even while they are still infants. To be able to accept and benefit from that promise, they need the Holy Spirit. The Spirit alone can give them the faith in Christ that will let them inherit eternal life. To confirm that they accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord, we ask children and new believers, when they are ready, to make a public profession of their faith (Rom. 10:9-10). By doing so they confess and accept their partnership with God. They also commit themselves to joining with all believers to fulfill the task God gives us: to take the Good News of Jesus Christ everywhere (Math 28:18-20).

### JESUS IS LORD

The CRC emphasizes Christ's authority over all creation. Jesus is not only our crucified Savior. He is also our Lord. He not only rose from the dead but he also ascended into heaven. From there he now rules the whole world (Eph. 1:22). He will not only rescue our souls from hell but also raise us from the dead and give us eternal life. There's more. When he returns, Jesus will restore this spoiled creation. He will make it truly good and glorifying to God. Through God's Word and Spirit Jesus has already begun this work and claims our lives as his own. In our worship, work, relationships, and recreation, our Lord calls us to be disciples, to live our whole lives under his leadership (Col. 3:1-17). To help us do that, the CRC promotes Christian day Schools, universities, and organizations that allow us to live out our confession that Jesus is Lord.

### GOD GIVES US ASSURANCE

The CRC teaches that we can be sure that we belong to God and confident that we shall inherit eternal life. Of course we do not base this certainty on our own ability or strength. We know ourselves too well for that! We base our conviction on God's faithfulness. Our heavenly Father has chosen us and rescued us through Christ. (Rom. 8:29-30). God assures us that we are safe in the protecting, sheltering care of our Good Shepherd. No one can tear us from Jesus' hand (John 10:27-29), not even our own failings or the weakness of our faith (Luke 22:31-32). This teaching does not make us complacent about living our lives in God's service. It fills us daily with deep gratitude and an earnest desire to live as God's joyful, obedient children (Rom. 8:12-17).

## GOD WITH US

The CRC believes that our Lord speaks to us through the faithful preaching and teaching of God's Word. He confirms what is spoken through baptism and the Lord's Supper. Unlike some Christians, we do not believe that the elements of the Lord's Supper turn into Jesus' actual body and blood. But we do believe that this celebration is more than just a reminder of Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus is present with us through the Holy Spirit in our hearts (John 14:15-18). Christ, our host, strengthens our faith as we participate, remember, and believe.

## STATEMENTS OF FAITH WE HAVE ADOPTED

Christians often confess their faith in simple, elegant ways: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28); "Jesus Christ . . . is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36). Such confessions or creeds summarize the heart of our faith. They also safeguard the truth of the Bible against false teachings. For these reasons many churches adopt creeds to show clearly where they stand.

The CRC has done that as well. It does not adopt creeds to add teachings that are not in the Bible, but rather to give a clear summary of what God's Word teaches. While the CRC expects its members and leaders to affirm the teachings of these creeds, it does not ask for rigid agreement with how they formulate them. Confessions are human works, always open to improvement. The CRC commits itself to revise the creeds if there is anything in them that goes beyond Scripture.

- *The Nicene Creed* comes from the fourth century, when some people taught that Jesus was only a creature. This creed boldly emphasizes the biblical message that Jesus is truly, fully God.
- *The Apostles' Creed* also comes from the fourth century. It elegantly expresses our faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- *The Athanasian Creed* affirms the biblical teaching that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, but in such a way that there is only one God. It then goes on to confess that Jesus Christ is at the same time fully God and fully human.

There are also three confessions that the CRC shares with other churches of the Reformed faith. These distinguish its teachings from that of other denominations.

- *The Belgic Confession* was written as a defense against accusations that the Reformed churches promoted false teachings. It summarizes what the Bible teaches about itself, our fall into sin, Christ, salvation, the church, civil government, and our Lord's return.
- The *Heidelberg Catechism* provides an excellent tool for teaching the Reformed faith. It emphasizes that our rescue from sin is a free, unearned gift of God through Jesus Christ. Responding to that gift, we show our gratitude to God by living in faith and obedience to our Lord.
- *The Canons of Dort* assert that we cannot save ourselves because sin has affected every part of our nature. We cannot even come to faith by ourselves. God must break through our stubborn rejection. God takes the initiative, choosing us in Christ without consideration of any good in us, not even foreseen faith. God's Spirit alone can work in us the miracle of saving faith that gives us new life in Christ.

In 1986 the CRC adopted a new statement of its faith to counter modern secularism. Secularism is the widespread belief in our culture that our faith in God is limited to our private lives. It denies that it has any real influence in the marketplace, the classroom, the office, or the legislative assembly. The contemporary testimony *Our World Belongs to God* reasserts the claim of our Lord over every area of life. Being Jesus' disciples means that we serve God everywhere, all the time.