

Reformed Theological Seminary Diversity Statement

J. Ligon Duncan III, Chancellor and CEO

Robert J. Cara, Provost and CAO

December 2022

At RTS, we believe that there is a godly, biblical diversity that we want students to experience during their seminary studies. The following constitutes RTS's position on unity and diversity, and these principles are regularly communicated to students, faculty, and constituents.

Theological Foundations of Diversity

The first thing to be said is that RTS's approach to diversity is different from that of the world's. Our standard is the inspired, inerrant, unchanging word of God and the faith once-delivered. We care as much about unity as we do diversity, and we have a firm theological foundation for talking about unity and diversity that relativism and materialism completely lack. Our unity is grounded in the eternal purposes of God; he is redeeming one people for himself, meant to be one family, united to himself. Our diversity is also grounded in his eternal purposes as expressed in the Abrahamic covenant—that this one family will come from men and women, boys and girls, from every tribe, tongue, people and nation, and their diversity of gifts, experiences, and perspectives will enhance the life of the whole.

Further, our experience and expression of unity and diversity in relation to non-Christians is also theologically grounded. We believe that all people are created in the image of God and that our relation to all people is to be governed by Jesus's command to love our neighbors. Our interactions with unbelievers will be informed by a sincere and practical concern for their well-being, and a recognition that by virtue of the *imago Dei* and common grace, they too are uniquely gifted by God and endowed with dignity.

Theological and Denominational Diversity

Within RTS, students will experience an overarching theological unity from our faculty, with relatively minor (but important and appropriate) diversity. This is deliberate. We are a convictionally confessional Reformed institution. We are emphatically and unconditionally committed to the plenary verbal inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility, and sole final authority of the Scriptures, which are the word of God written. There is no allowed diversity on that point among the faculty of RTS. Furthermore, Reformed theology, as expressed in the Westminster Standards, will be reflected in the teaching of every professor and course throughout the institution.

That said, confessional Reformed theology is a broad, robust, and magnanimous thing, not a narrow, fragile, and meagre tradition. We do not encourage being fixated on intramural Reformed debates, especially when our professors agree on an overwhelming majority of theological issues. Further, we also encourage a Reformed catholicity that charitably engages with biblical expressions of the Christian faith outside of the Reformed tradition proper. These views are reflected in our purpose statement, "to serve the church in all branches of evangelical Christianity, especially the Presbyterian and Reformed family."

It should be noted that there is proper and edifying diversity within the Kingdom of God, and even within the Reformed world. While our faculty joyfully signs a strong statement affirming both biblical inerrancy and the Westminster Standards on an annual basis, students will see our faculty differ with grace and love, in the bonds of friendship and shared theological conviction, on certain issues. We think this is a good, healthy, and important thing in our polarized age. The deliberate denominational diversity within our faculty also positively contributes to this.

Our student body manifests an even greater diversity: theological diversity, denominational diversity, and ethnic and national (including linguistic and cultural) diversity. Almost half of our students come from non-Reformed church traditions. At any given time, our student body is usually made up of more than forty denominational backgrounds. Over the years we have had seminarians from eighty countries and every continent. While our constituency is generally from the historic Christian tradition in which the ordained pastoral ministry and eldership of the church is composed of qualified men, our student body has long had a large number of women preparing for various aspects of Christian service. We think this kind of an environment is a positive and edifying context for preparation for Christian vocation.

Social, Ethnic, and International Diversity

We live in a world of racial tension and oppression, but, by God's grace, RTS has long been a place of healthy, mutual Christian edification and affection among people of a wide variety of ethnic, national, and cultural backgrounds. The Lord in his kindness has used RTS to spread the Reformed faith among the nations and into a diversity of social, economic, and ethnic settings in our own land. RTS students of varying ethnicities, cultures, languages, and backgrounds, have studied and served side-by-side from the beginning of this institution. The Lord has used RTS in the resurgence of Reformed theology among African American Christians in the U.S., in and through multi-ethnic congregations, as well as in Asian and Hispanic/Latino contexts, here and abroad. We believe that our students are enriched by the experience of this diversity at RTS. Our desire that all the nations and peoples be made glad in God through Christ is reflected and expressed in this diversity.

RTS affirms the historic Christian position on marriage, sexuality, gender identity, and attendant issues. We recognize that our students come to us from a world in which these things are thought to be in flux, and we seek to express the beauty of Christian orthodoxy compellingly, in doctrine and life, faith and practice.

Conclusion

RTS's theological convictions provide the basis for a biblical appreciation for unity and diversity. Our understanding that all are made in the image of God, as well as the scope of God's redemptive work across every tribe and tongue and nation, demands that we love all of our neighbors. Further, our knowledge of the grace of God shown to us in Christ Jesus demands a "winsomely Reformed" approach to theological diversity—that is, holding with conviction a robust biblical and Reformed theology and practice while engaging charitably with those with whom we disagree in faith and practice.

In all this, we draw encouragement from the Apostle Paul's words in Ephesians 4:15–16: "speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held, together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (ESV).