

AUGUST 2007

**EXAMINATION OF THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE
(OPEN AND CLOSED BOOK)**

MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

WHAT IS BEING EXAMINED

This examination shall assess the candidate's capacity to make effective use of the classical theological disciplines and of the confessional documents of the church in relating the Gospel to the faith and life of the church in the contemporary world. [*Book of Order* G-14.0310d(3)]

The Examination of Theological Competence seeks to determine the candidate's readiness for ministry in the use of biblical, classical, and/or contemporary theological insights within the Reformed heritage of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The examination may deal with questions of confessional, doctrinal, historical, and/or ethical significance. Accordingly, questions intend to test a candidate's ability to discern the theological issues inherent in a situation and to address them competently as follows:

1. Interpreting a confessional stance faithfully in context. An open book question utilizing *The Book of Confessions* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will be included on this examination. The purpose of this question is to explore the candidate's capacity to articulate the contemporary relevance of the Reformed tradition as it is embodied in the confessional documents.
2. Showing that Christian doctrines as expressed in the Reformed tradition illuminate Christian faith and life.
3. Applying Reformed theology in the practice of ministry in relation to questions of ecclesiastical, political, social, economic, and personal ethics.

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AUGUST 2007
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 2 of 7

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

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AUGUST 2007
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 3 of 7

SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

(*THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS* ONLY)

The third article of the Nicene Creed states:

- 1 We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
- 2 who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
- 3 who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
- 4 who has spoken through the prophets.
- 5 We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
- 6 We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
- 7 We look for the resurrection of the dead,
- 8 and the life of the world to come. Amen.

A theologian has recently written:

The third article of the Nicene Creed . . . may give the impression of being a few general affirmations about the Holy Spirit followed by a laundry list of disconnected doctrinal leftovers. The impression is a false one, however, for . . . the third [article] provides a coherent narrative of God's being and action.¹

REQUIRED RESPONSE:

Write an essay in which you *relate the Holy Spirit to the affirmations in lines 5 through 8 above*. Use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions* other than the Nicene Creed as you write your essay.

¹Quotation left anonymous by permission of the author.

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AUGUST 2007
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 4 of 7

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AUGUST 2007
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 5 of 7

SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

You are talking with some elders of the church you serve as pastor. They are discussing popular concepts of God.

Joanna: There's a support group that meets weekly at the restaurant where I work. They talk about their "Higher Power." Personally, I'm not comfortable calling God "my Higher Power." What do you think?

Toby: One of my favorite TV shows always ends with God helping some unfortunate character or another. I think it appeals to a broad audience because the writers simplify God.

Leah: My mentor calls God the Divine One. The name doesn't matter, as long as the Supreme Being helps me get in touch with my inner spirituality, and evolve along my personal spiritual path.

Chong Su: Our mayor says in her speeches that our city is blessed by God. I think she's right; the Master Builder is helping our local economy prosper.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay from a Reformed perspective about *limitations of popular concepts of God as one who helps us do good and feel better*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building upon your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to two (2) of the elders above.

AUGUST 2007
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 6 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

Young adult members regularly gather for coffee and conversation at the church you serve as pastor. One week you join them and hear this discussion:

Ophelia: Spirituality is so personal, so individual. Each person has to figure out his or her own spirituality. It doesn't matter what it is, as long as it feels right. Religion is just one option for being spiritual.

Teresa: I'm not sure about that. I think it's more mystical; you have to have some sort of radical experience to be really in touch with God.

Grace: I suppose it might be mystical, but really, being a spiritual person demands discipline and patience, even when you don't feel close to God.

John: I think we forget that the light of Christ is always in us. We just have to let it shine through us, so that it flows from God through us to others.

Solomon: I don't hear any of you saying anything about the church. We have a duty to go to church. That's how we are spiritual and that's how we have fellowship with God.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay articulating the *importance of Christian community for the way Reformed Christians understand spirituality*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building upon your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to at least three (3) of the people above.

– OR –

AUGUST 2007
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 7 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

Recently, a man in your state was convicted of murder and sentenced to death. The wife of the victim, as an expression of Christian faith, says she has forgiven the murderer. One Sunday after the trial, members of the church you serve as pastor are having a conversation. Among their comments you hear:

Petra: Even after I forgive people, I still get angry and want them to pay. And then I feel like I have to forgive all over again. Aren't there limits on forgiveness?

Helene: My mother always told me, "forgive and forget," but isn't it more likely that we will prevent bad things if we remember the bad things people have done?

Raphael: I'm not even sure forgiveness is a good idea; it gets in the way of pursuing justice.

Walter: I think forgiveness can be a form of justice because it makes people feel guilty and obligated to you.

Anna: I know that we should forgive people for what they do to us, but we don't have the right to forgive people for what they do to others.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay on the *implications that forgiveness has for society*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to at least two (2) of the persons above.

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JANUARY 2008
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 2 of 7

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

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**JANUARY 2008
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 3 of 7

SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE

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(THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY)

It is recorded in the Scriptures that a Jew from Nazareth named Jesus was executed outside Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago with the assent of the religious leaders of the Jews and by the legal authority of the governing powers of the Roman Empire.

It is further asserted in the Scriptures that this execution had profound and far-reaching effects:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

(Romans 5:6-9, English Standard Version)

REQUIRED RESPONSE:

Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *how this death accomplished forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to God*. Use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000), from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*.

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JANUARY 2008
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

PAGE 4 OF 7

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JANUARY 2008
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 5 of 7

SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

As you are driving to the church you serve as pastor, the onslaught of slogans on the radio becomes overwhelming:

“Shouldn’t you get the best to protect your family?”

“You deserve a break today.”

“Isn’t it time for an upgrade?”

“Because you’re worth it.”

Then, somehow, you hear a still small voice:

You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (Exodus 20:17, New Revised Standard Version)

When you arrive at the office, you consult *The Book of Confessions* to expand upon what this means:

Q. 80. What is required in the Tenth Commandment?

A. The Tenth Commandment requireth full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbor and all that is his. (Westminster Shorter Catechism, 7.080)

REQUIRED RESPONSE:

Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *what the tenth commandment says to Christians in an economy that depends on convincing people that they want more than they need*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

JANUARY 2008
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 6 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

You, as pastor, are leading an adult education class on growing in the Christian faith. The following discussion takes place:

Abe: I'm frustrated because I feel like I'm not growing in faith. I spend so much time preparing meals and sharing transportation duties for the kids. With so much to do for my family, when is there time for God?

Jordan: I used to attend prayers at church every morning, but now I feel guilty that I can't.

Lakisha: I'm busy too. Even though I live alone, I work long days, have a long commute, and when I get home I'm the only one to do chores.

You are concerned enough about this conversation to refer to *The Book of Confessions* after the class. There you read the following affirmation of Christians' home life: activities when done

in truth faith by way of domestic duties and the management of their households are in God's sight holy and truly good works. They are no less pleasing to God than prayers, fasting, and almsgiving.

(Second Helvetic Confession, 5.250)

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *the connection between Christian faith and everyday home life*. Base your essay on your understanding of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building upon your answer in Required Response 1, briefly describe the next two sessions you will plan for the class.

– OR –

JANUARY 2008
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 7 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

As pastor of a church, you are planning a retreat to help the congregation experience the goodness of God in the beauty of creation. You have provided the following two quotations for participants to read before the retreat:

Has the Lord clothed the flowers with great beauty that greets our eyes, the sweetness of smell that is wafted upon our nostrils, and yet will it be unlawful for our eyes to be affected by that beauty, and our sense of smell by the sweetness of that odor? Did he not render many things attractive to us, apart from their necessary use?

(Calvin, *Institutes*, III.x.2)

The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

(Westminster Shorter Catechism, 7.001)

REQUIRED RESPONSE:

Write an essay in preparation for the retreat reflecting theologically on *the goodness of God made manifest in the extravagant beauty God created*. Base your essay on your understanding of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

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AUGUST 2008
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 2 of 7

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

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Page 3 of 7

SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

(THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY)

Recent events in your town and in the life of your church members leave you struggling to help them understand the providence of God in a world that seems incoherent. A minister colleague points you to two resources:

Q. 27. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. The almighty and ever-present power of God whereby he still upholds, as it were by his own hand, heaven and earth together with all creatures, and rules in such a way that leaves and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and unfruitful years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, and everything else, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand.

(Heidelberg Catechism, 4.027)

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Romans 8:38-39, New Revised Standard Version)

REQUIRED RESPONSE:

Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *how the doctrine of providence is illuminated by God's love*. Use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*. You may not use the quotation from the Heidelberg Catechism given above as one of the three. You may use other quotations from the Heidelberg Catechism.

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PAGE 4 OF 7

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Page 5 of 7

SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

You, as pastor, are leading the weekly confirmation class. You are explaining the importance of the Prayer of Confession and the Declaration of Pardon in the Service for the Lord's Day. The following discussion ensues among the twelve- and thirteen-year-olds in the class:

Rick: When I confess sin and hear the Declaration of Pardon, I don't feel forgiven until I hear the person I hurt tell me, "I forgive you."

Sally: Are you ever on a guilt trip! We're all basically good people. You don't need to confess anything; just get on with life!

Jane: I went forward at a revival meeting at my friend's church. I told God I was sorry. I even cried. The preacher said repenting once was enough. That means I don't have to say I'm sorry anymore.

Mike: But when I feel guilty, how do I know that I'm forgiven? What if I'm not?

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *confession and repentance*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to two (2) of the students in the class.

AUGUST 2008
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Page 6 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

You, as pastor of a Presbyterian church, are on the planning committee for a joint worship service among Christian churches in your community. The committee has chosen the theme of “Christian unity and diversity.” The committee has selected two quotations to express the theme.

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come.

(Revelation 1:4a, New Revised Standard Version)

One, then, is the River, but many the channels of the gifts of the Spirit.

(Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit*)

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of *relations among Christian churches*. Include reflection on the above quotations. Base your discussion on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, state at least two (2) particular theological emphases Presbyterians bring to ecumenical dialogue and discuss how those emphases could be expressed in the ecumenical worship service.

– OR –

AUGUST 2008
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 7 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

Ray, a member of the congregation you serve as pastor, comes to you and says:

I met Tom while working at the local homeless shelter. It was clear by just looking at him that he was not the average homeless person. When I took him out to dinner the next night I discovered that he's a graduate student.

I think God's telling me to help. I have an old garage in my backyard and feel like I should allow Tom to sleep there until he gets his feet on the ground. I remember Jesus' words, "I was a stranger, and you took me in."

He asks you what you think.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *hospitality*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, guide Ray theologically and pastorally.

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JANUARY 2009
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 2 of 7

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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JANUARY 2009
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 3 of 7

SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

(*THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY*)

The news has been covering a report from another part of the world where one ethnic group is seeking to kill all members of another ethnic group. You, as pastor of a local church, participate in the following conversation with members of your congregation:

- Mary: I think God will judge our country for not responding to this horrible situation.
- Adam: I don't think God judges countries. I think Christ will judge the heart of each person when he returns.
- Ruth: But God's judgment can have an impact on our current actions. Regardless of Christ's return, the threat of judgment motivates us now to do what God wants.
- Samuel: All this talk of judgment makes me nervous. The Christian God is a merciful God. Judgment is just for unbelievers; Jesus already took our judgment upon himself.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *God's judgment*. Use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions* as you write your essay.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to two (2) of the members' comments above.

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JANUARY 2009
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

PAGE 4 OF 7

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JANUARY 2009
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 5 of 7

SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

A member in your congregation asks to meet with you and says, “Pastor, I’m really struggling with my faith. I know that I am baptized. But how can I really know that God loves me and has chosen me to belong to God forever?”

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay, from a Reformed perspective, on the *relationship between baptism and election*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, describe briefly how you would respond theologically to the member.

JANUARY 2009
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 6 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

The session of the church that you serve as pastor is studying The Theological Declaration of Barmen and comes to the following passages:

The Christian church “has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely [Christ’s] property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance.” (8.17)

“We reject the false doctrine, as though the church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions.” (8.18)

The session is especially interested in the notion that the church makes a theological testimony through its order—that is, through the way it organizes its life. Moreover, the session decides that it would like to apply these words to the way it will organize its *own* life.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay, from a Reformed perspective, on theological principles that should guide a session as it seeks *to order its life as a testimony to its identity in Jesus Christ, thereby resisting temptations to order its life according to prevailing ideological and political convictions*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Identify and discuss at least three (3) practical steps a session could take to order its life according to the theological principles you have articulated in Required Response 1.

– OR –

JANUARY 2009
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 7 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

You, as pastor, are leading the church youth group in a discussion of the relationship between marriage and the Christian life. The young people are especially interested in your comment that, for Christians, marriage is a “calling.” They pose the following questions:

- Rashad: How can you know if you are called to marry a particular person?
- Alicia: Isn't marriage first of all a matter of getting my needs met?
- Samuel: Why do Christians take marriage vows if they can't be sure that they will fulfill them.
- Barbara: What does marriage have to do with our Christian calling to discipleship?

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of *Christian marriage as a calling*. Base your discussion on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to each of the four (4) young people.

AUGUST 2009

EXAMINATION OF THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE

(OPEN AND CLOSED BOOK)

MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS

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AUGUST 2009
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 2 of 7

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

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AUGUST 2009
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 3 of 7

SECTION I. CONFSSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR

OPEN BOOK

REQUIRED

(*THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS* ONLY)

Several members of the congregation you serve as pastor have been discussing a popular television documentary on the historical Jesus. One of these members drops by your office and says, “The church worships Jesus as God. But scholars in the documentary said that even though he was a great religious leader, he was just a human. I’m not sure what to believe.”

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay from a Reformed perspective in which you discuss *the divinity and humanity of Jesus*. Use and discuss citations from *The Book of Confessions* (e.g., 0.000), at least two (2) citations for Jesus’ divinity and at least two (2) citations for Jesus’ humanity. Citations must come from at least four (4) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, explain at least one (1) way in which the doctrine of the two natures of Christ makes a difference for Christian belief.

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AUGUST 2009
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 5 of 7

SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR

CLOSED BOOK

REQUIRED

During a training session for newly elected officers you, as pastor, read aloud the third ordination question:

Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God? (W-4.4003c)

In the discussion that ensues, you hear the following comments:

David: I like some of the more recent confessions, but the older ones seem out of date to me. Why does our denomination have so many confessions from the past?

Olivia: I'm uncomfortable promising to be led by the confessions. The freedom of my conscience is important to me.

Matt: Most of the people in our congregation have never even heard of *The Book of Confessions*. What difference do these confessions really make for our church?

Theresa: I've noticed that on Sundays we use one of the confessions in worship. I've never quite understood why we do that.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay in which you explain from a Reformed perspective *the purpose and authority of the church's confessions of faith*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to two (2) of the officers above.

AUGUST 2009
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 6 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR

CLOSED BOOK

REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

You, as pastor, are teaching the youth class on Sunday morning. In one session, you introduce the topic of creation using the following passage from the Westminster Confession:

It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create or make of nothing the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.

(Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.022)

Jeremy, a young man in the class, responds, "I learned in biology class that life forms began in the ancient seas and evolved over millions of years into human life. How can the church believe that God created the world? Do I have to believe this? It doesn't make any sense."

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of *God's creation of the world*. Base your discussion on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, discuss how you would respond theologically to Jeremy.

OR

AUGUST 2009
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 7 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

ONE HOUR

CLOSED BOOK

REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

You are pastor of a church whose elders review the session's duties each year at a retreat. During the retreat, one of the elders reads the following passage from the *Book of Order*:

When persons baptized as infants reach an age when they are ready to make public their profession of faith and accept their responsibility in the life of the church, the session should invite, encourage, and help them prepare for their responsibility as active church members. (G-5.0101c)

Elders note that in the past many teenagers have left the congregation before their public profession of faith. The elders agree that something better should be done to bring young adolescents into the active membership of the church.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay articulating a Reformed understanding of the *public profession of faith for adolescents baptized as infants*. Base your essay on your understanding of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, identify and discuss at least three (3) practical ways the session can "invite, encourage, and help [adolescents] prepare for their responsibility as active church members."

JANUARY 2010

**EXAMINATION OF THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE
(OPEN AND CLOSED BOOK)**

MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

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JANUARY 2010
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 2 of 7

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

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SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

(*THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY*)

Richard is a new Christian and is now attending the church you pastor. One week you preach about the grace we receive in Jesus Christ. After the service, Richard asks you to explain what you meant by saying that grace helps us “to work out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). He asks, “I thought Jesus just forgives our sins. Isn’t that what salvation is all about?”

As you think about how to respond, you remember that Calvin referred to justification and sanctification as two aspects of one act of grace.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *how Christ’s one act of grace is at work in both justification and sanctification*. Use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, respond briefly to Richard’s question.

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THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

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JANUARY 2010
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 5 of 7

SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

You, as pastor, are leading an adult class on the way worship shapes people's theology.

Because you will baptize an infant in worship next Sunday, the class asks you to focus on baptism. You decide to emphasize how the church's practice of baptizing infants makes a profound theological statement about how Christians understand who God is.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay in which you explain from a Reformed perspective *how the church's practice of baptizing infants makes a theological statement about the character of God*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, write a prayer to be used at a baptism, reflecting these aspects of God's character.

JANUARY 2010
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 6 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

Members of your congregation have recently returned from a mission trip to rural Mexico where they helped construct a church building. They are making a presentation to the session and recommend that the congregation begin a partnership with the Mexican congregation.

Members of the session make the following comments:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Joseph: | I think we should invite some members of the Mexican church to come here for a week next year instead of our going there. They may be able to learn from observing our church. |
| Monica: | I'm not sure sending our members on mission trips is good stewardship. Wouldn't it be more help to the Mexican church if we just sent them money? |
| Sandra: | How can we really be in meaningful partnership with people hundreds of miles away when just a few of us spend time with them for only a week? |
| Klaus: | Jesus tells us to go into all the world to make disciples. We should do mission in places where people need to hear the gospel, instead of visiting Christians in other countries. |

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay articulating a Reformed theological understanding of *Christian mission, engaging some of the issues raised by the members of session*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to three (3) of the elders.

- OR -

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

You are a pastor teaching an adult class on God's self-revelation. The following comments are shared:

- Isaac: I really like what the Psalmist says about creation: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). If we just meditate on the beauty of nature, we can know so much about God.
- Nan: Nature is not enough. We call the Bible the Word of God; we never call nature the Word of God.
- Robert: That's a good point. We learn about God through Christ and not through creation. Since the Bible tells us about Christ, all we need is the Bible.
- Mary: But the Bible is often hard to understand. I agree with Isaac: nature speaks to me more powerfully and clearly about God. Remember what Romans says: "Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made" (Romans 1:20).

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay articulating a Reformed understanding of *the relationship between Scripture and nature as means of God's self-revelation*. Base your discussion on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of the following resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to two (2) of the class members.

AUGUST 2010

**EXAMINATION OF THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE
(OPEN AND CLOSED BOOK)**

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GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

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You are encouraged to use a computer. You may bring your own equipment or, at some exam sites, you may use equipment provided by the proctor. You must confirm with the proctor in advance of the testing date what equipment (power strips, computers, printers, etc.) is available at the testing site.

If you use a computer:

- You may not consult or copy from personal notes or any other resource on the computer or a network during the exam.
- A printed copy of the exam must be turned in before you leave the test site. Not turning in a printed copy will result in failure. You are strongly urged to make sure that all the necessary equipment and software are properly working and coordinated.
- Number the pages.
- Include your candidate number on each page of the exam, **but not your name.**
- Print responses using double spacing and 12-point font size.
- When finished, staple the printed copy to the first few pages of the exam book.

Syntax or grammar will not be evaluated. However, the evaluation of papers may be affected if they cannot be understood because of poor syntax or grammar.

Maintaining the candidate's anonymity is of fundamental importance to assure fair evaluation of examination papers. Failure to comply with any of the following instructions will result in the paper being found as unsatisfactory:

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- **Do not include the name of your congregation or presbytery**
- **Do not identify the seminary you attend or have attended**
- **Do not identify professors with whom you have studied**
- **Do not indicate whether you have taken this or other senior ordination exams before**

All three sections must be answered. The paper must receive a "Satisfactory" evaluation on at least two of the three sections to be considered "Satisfactory."

**AUGUST 2010
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 3 of 7

SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

(*THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS* ONLY)

Several people in the congregation you serve as pastor have recently asked about the passing of the peace during the worship service. In response, you and the session decide that peace will be the subject of the next adult education series.

In preparation, you turn first to John 14:27 (New Revised Standard Version), in which Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

As you consider the many different types of peace, you turn to *The Book of Confessions*.

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Write an essay in which you identify and discuss *different aspects of a Christian understanding of peace* from a Reformed perspective. Use and discuss four (4) citations (e.g., 0.000) from *The Book of Confessions*. Citations must come from four (4) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*.

NOTE: You must use a clean, unmarked, printed copy of *The Book of Confessions*, copyright 2002 or later, for Section I. For the purposes of this examination, the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms will be considered one document. Turn in your copy of *The Book of Confessions* to the proctor by the end of the first hour of the examination. The proctor will then give you Sections II and III (pp. 4-6) of the examination.

AUGUST 2010
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 4 of 7

UPON COMPLETION OF SECTION I
TURN IN YOUR COPY OF *THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS*.

THE PROCTOR WILL THEN GIVE YOU SECTIONS II AND III
OF THE EXAMINATION.

**AUGUST 2010
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 5 of 7

SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

As pastor, you are leading the worship committee of the session in a discussion of the concept of Sabbath. You share the following section from The Heidelberg Catechism:

Q. 103. What does God require in the fourth commandment?

A. First, that the ministry of the gospel and Christian education be maintained, and that I diligently attend church, especially on the Lord's day, to hear the Word of God, to participate in the holy Sacraments, to call publicly upon the Lord, and to give Christian service to those in need. Second, that I cease from my evil works all the days of my life, allow the Lord to work in me through his Spirit, and thus begin in this life the eternal Sabbath. (4.103)

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Write an essay reflecting on *the theological meaning of Sabbath for life today*, from a Reformed perspective. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

**AUGUST 2010
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 6 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

Linda, a member of the congregation you serve as pastor, comes to see you the week after Easter. Her husband has been struggling with Alzheimer's disease. She says,

Pastor, it was so hard for me to listen to the Holy Week services this year. So much of our faith is about remembering: Jesus telling us to share the Lord's Supper in remembrance of him; the thief on Good Friday asking Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom; and then on Easter you asked us to remember our baptism.

My husband can't even remember who I am, let alone that he was baptized, or anything about Jesus or the church. I had to put him in a nursing home, where he doesn't know or recognize anyone. We have loved each other for fifty years. I think about him every day. What does his faith mean when he can't remember anything?

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay in which you identify and discuss *two (2) theological issues* important in the Reformed tradition that underlie Linda's concern about her husband. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, describe how you would respond *theologically* to Linda's question.

- OR -

AUGUST 2010
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 7 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

You are pastor of a church and post a sign-up sheet for a trip to a local art exhibit. Members begin the following conversation with you.

Lois: Pastor, I am surprised that you would suggest this trip. I thought that, given the Reformation, Presbyterians were against art.

Tim: My former church had an artist-in-residence who helped us understand God through the use of sculpture and painting.

Bruce: I think the arts are a bridge to help us understand our culture and bring the gospel to culture.

Abby: But some particular works of art today are just anti-Christian.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay articulating a Reformed understanding of *the place of the arts in Christian life*. Base your discussion on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your essay in Required Response 1, respond *theologically* to three (3) of the comments above.

JANUARY 2011

**EXAMINATION OF THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE
(OPEN AND CLOSED BOOK)**

MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

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1. Articulating the contemporary relevance of the Reformed tradition as it is embodied in the confessional documents.
2. Showing that Christian doctrines as expressed in the Reformed tradition illuminate Christian faith and life.
3. Applying Reformed theology in the practice of ministry in relation to questions of ecclesiastical, political, social, economic, and personal ethics.

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WHAT IS NOT BEING EXAMINED

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It is to be recognized, however, that in becoming a candidate or officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek or hold office in that body. [*Book of Order* G-6.0108b]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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Sections II and III of the examination are **CLOSED BOOK**.

JANUARY 2011
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 2 of 7

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

You must use a computer to prepare your responses. **Handwritten papers or those that are illegible for any reason will be returned without being evaluated.** Identify every answer by the number and letter assigned to it (e.g., III. B). You may bring your own equipment or, at some exam sites, you may use equipment provided by the proctor. You must confirm with the proctor in advance of the testing date what equipment (power strips, computers, printers, etc.) is available at the testing site.

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JANUARY 2011
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 3 of 7

SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED
(THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY)

During a class for prospective members, you, as the pastor, introduce a familiar definition of faith from Calvin's Institutes for discussion:

...a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

(Institutes of the Christian Religion, 3.2.7)

In response, the class starts to comment on the definition:

Mark: This is great. I've never thought about faith having to do with both heart and mind.

Ruth: I agree that it sounds good, but don't "mind" and "heart" mean about the same thing?

Luke: No, to me they're very different. Faith should be more a matter of the heart; the mind has more to do with logic and science.

Esther: I don't think faith is a matter of the heart. I'm a rationalist who knows that emotions and feelings can be misleading.

REQUIRED RESPONSE

From a Reformed perspective, write an essay on *how faith involves both the mind and the heart*. Use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*.

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**JANUARY 2011
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

PAGE 4 OF 7

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UNPON COMPLETING SECTION I

TURN IN YOUR COPY OF *THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS*.

THE PROCTOR WILL GIVE YOU SECTIONS II AND III.

JANUARY 2011
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 5 of 7

SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

The news has reported recent incidents of hateful speech and violence against immigrants in your area. The next Sunday, you, as pastor, are leading an adult education class on I Corinthians, and read: "And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." (I Corinthians 13:13, New Revised Standard Version)

You mention the view that these three theological virtues, faith, hope, and love, must be given to us by God; we cannot develop them by our own human power. You also point out that Aquinas wrote, "Love is friendship first with God and secondly with all who belong to God." (*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 25, 4)

The following discussion takes place in the class:

Matt: That sounds so theoretical. Considering the recent news, I want practical advice about how to love the immigrants at my work place when others ridicule them.

Jonah: Maybe in heaven we will be able to love perfectly, but right now, I'm worried I will lose my job to a new worker.

Chloe: I feel torn. It seems like I have to be *against* the people who hate in order to be *for* the immigrants who are hated. I thought I was supposed to love everyone.

Deb: It's not so complicated. Why can't we just love people as Jesus did?

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *love of neighbor*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, describe how you would respond *theologically* to three (3) members of the class.

JANUARY 2011
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 6 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

During a session meeting at the church you serve as pastor, the elders are struggling with a decrease in giving that has strained the church's budget. In order to keep up with increasing utility costs, some elders suggest eliminating the church's annual contribution to The House of Bread, a local mission that provides food and services to poor and homeless people. Others add their opinions:

Adam: As much as I'd rather not say it, we do have to deal with our church's needs. I'm sure losing our donation won't make a big difference to The House of Bread.

Ellen: I can't believe what I'm hearing! We should eliminate other things before we stop helping the poor people in our area!

Jim: Exactly! Jesus told us to give money to poor people and we will have treasure in heaven. What would Jesus do?

Mary: What would Jesus do? Didn't he also say that we would always have the poor with us? The gospel is about the salvation of souls, not social work.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. From a Reformed perspective, write an essay on *how the church is called to respond to poverty and poor people*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, describe how you would respond *theologically* to two (2) of the session members.

JANUARY 2011
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 7 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

Elizabeth, a deacon in the church you serve as pastor, does regular hospital visitation. She begins a conversation with you.

Pastor, before my mother-in-law died she shared her favorite Bible verses, received communion, and seemed at peace with God. But even though my father was a devoted church member, he fought his death every step of the way, didn't want any family around him, and was even angry at God. Because of my work as a deacon, I need help in understanding what it means to die in Christ.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of *dying in Christ*. Base your discussion on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, respond *theologically* to Elizabeth's concern.

AUGUST 2011

**EXAMINATION OF THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE
(OPEN AND CLOSED BOOK)**

MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

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WHAT IS NOT BEING EXAMINED

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It is to be recognized, however, that in becoming a candidate or officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek or hold office in that body. (*Book of Order* G-6.0108b)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A clean, unmarked, printed copy and/or a PDF version of *The Book of Confessions* (copyright 2002 or later) will be needed as a resource for Section I of the examination. These resources may not be used on other sections of the exam. (*The Shorter Catechism* and *The Larger Catechism* of the Westminster Standards will be considered one document for the purposes of this examination.) No additional books, notes, outlines, or other outside resources may be used.

Sections II and III of the examination are **CLOSED BOOK**.

**AUGUST 2011
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 2 of 7

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

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- Include your candidate number on each page of the exam, **but not your name**.
- Double-space your responses and use a 12-point font.
- Staple the printed copy inside the exam cover on the right-hand side when finished.
- **The completed exam packet must be turned in before you leave the testing area or it will not be accepted.**
- **Papers that cannot be read for any reason shall be returned without being evaluated.**

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- **Do not identify professors with whom you have studied.**
- **Do not indicate whether you have taken this or other ordination exams before.**

**IMPORTANT: READ THE ENTIRE QUESTION BEFORE
BEGINNING TO WRITE YOUR ANSWER.**

**AUGUST 2011
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 3 of 7

SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE

**ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED
(THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY)**

As pastor of a church, you are leading an adult church school series on the Jewish Holocaust. While talking about the role of the church in Germany during World War II, you read a few excerpts from The Theological Declaration of Barmen. The following discussion ensues:

- Jeff: I really appreciate what you've been saying about the Barmen Declaration and think we should remove the American flag from the sanctuary.
- Barbara: As a veteran, I must say that the flag has never conflicted with my faith. As a Christian citizen, I have duties to both God and country, right?
- Seth: I agree. After all, we're a Christian nation founded on biblical principles of freedom and justice.
- Matthew: But aren't we called to be *in* the world without being *of* the world?
- Leah: Yes, we are called to be *in* the world, therefore the church should advocate for specific government policies.

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Write an essay from a Reformed perspective in which you discuss *the relationship between the church and the civil government*. Use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*. One of the documents must be The Theological Declaration of Barmen.

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**AUGUST 2011
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

PAGE 4 OF 7

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UPON COMPLETING SECTION I

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OF THE EXAMINATION.**

AUGUST 2011
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 5 of 7

SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

You have recently been installed as the new pastor of a church that is in decline. There is serious pessimism about the church's future, but people are hoping the new pastor will turn things around. The congregation longs for the "good old days" when both the pews and the nursery were full.

You have been asked to give a presentation at the church's 100th anniversary dinner. With the congregation's situation in mind, you consult *The Book of Confessions* as a resource. You find the following:

Biblical visions and images of the rule of Christ, such as a heavenly city, a father's house, a new heaven and earth, a marriage feast, and an unending day culminate in the image of the kingdom. The kingdom represents the triumph of God over all that resists his will and disrupts his creation. Already God's reign is present as a ferment in the world, stirring hope in [people] and preparing the world to receive its ultimate judgment and redemption. (The Confession of 1967, 9.54)

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay discussing how a Reformed understanding of *eschatology* is relevant to *congregational decline*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, briefly describe at least two (2) key points for the presentation that relate eschatology to the congregation's situation.

**AUGUST 2011
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 6 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

At a session meeting, you lead a devotion on the following verse:

“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”
(Ephesians 4:29, English Standard Version)

After the meeting, Elder Lydia comes to you, her pastor, asking for advice. She says:

I saw Elder Virginia at a restaurant with her male neighbor when her husband was out of town. I was concerned that she might be heading toward an affair. When I brought up my concern to her, Virginia said I should stop gossiping and mind my own business. Pastor, what is the difference between gossip and legitimate Christian concern for Virginia?

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay discussing *Christian ethical issues related to the way we talk with and about other people*. Include reflection on both the verse from Ephesians and the situation. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology. Ephesians 4:29 cannot be the only resource used.
2. Building on Required Response 1, describe how you would respond to Elder Lydia.

- OR -

**AUGUST 2011
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 7 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

While you are on a retreat with fellow pastors, you are part of a conversation about a national news story: a certain pastor has been taking sermons from the Internet and preaching them as if the sermons were this pastor's own work. Several additional issues about preaching come up in the conversation, including the need for prayer, study of the text, and attention to the context in which you are preaching. You and some of your colleagues realize how important it is to honor the proclamation of the Word of God and make a commitment together to encourage one another in the practice of faithful preaching.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay on the *work of preaching* from a Reformed perspective. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Describe and discuss the practices that you and your colleagues will engage in to encourage one another in the practice of faithful preaching.

JANUARY 2012

**EXAMINATION OF THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE
(OPEN AND CLOSED BOOK)**

MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

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**JANUARY 2012
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 2 of 7

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

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- Include your candidate number on each page of the exam, **but not your name**.
- Double-space your responses and use a 12-point font.
- Staple the printed copy inside the exam cover on the right-hand side when finished.
- **The completed exam packet must be turned in before you leave the testing area or it will not be accepted.**
- **Papers that cannot be read for any reason shall be returned without being evaluated.**

Syntax or grammar will not be evaluated. However, the evaluation of papers may be affected if they cannot be understood because of poor syntax or grammar.

Maintaining the candidate's anonymity is of fundamental importance to assure fair evaluation of examination papers. Failure to comply with any of the following instructions will result in an unsatisfactory exam:

- **Do not include your name.**
- **Do not include the name of your congregation or presbytery.**
- **Do not identify the seminary you attend or have attended.**
- **Do not identify professors with whom you have studied.**
- **Do not indicate whether you have taken this or other ordination exams before.**

**IMPORTANT: READ THE ENTIRE QUESTION BEFORE
BEGINNING TO WRITE YOUR ANSWER.**

**JANUARY 2012
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 3 of 7

SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

(*THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS* ONLY)

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay articulating both the continuities and the changes in the concept of *obedience to Christ* throughout the centuries as evidenced in *The Book of Confessions*.

Use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000), from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*, including:

- at least one (1) from the Reformation-era documents, and
- at least one (1) from the twentieth-century documents.

2. Building on Required Response 1, provide a brief theological reflection on the ordination question: “Will you fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ...?” (W-4.4003d)

NOTE: You must use a clean, unmarked, printed copy and/or a PDF version of *The Book of Confessions* (copyright 2002 or later) for Section I of the examination. These resources may not be used on other sections of the exam. For the purposes of this examination, *The Shorter Catechism* and *The Larger Catechism* of the Westminster Standards will be considered one document. Turn in your copy of *The Book of Confessions* to the proctor by the end of the first hour of the examination. The proctor will then give you Sections II and III (pp. 5-7) of the examination.

**JANUARY 2012
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

PAGE 4 OF 7

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UPON COMPLETING SECTION I

TURN IN YOUR COPY OF *THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS*.

**THE PROCTOR WILL GIVE YOU SECTIONS II AND III
OF THE EXAMINATION.**

JANUARY 2012
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 5 of 7

SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

It is Communion Sunday at the church where you serve as pastor. As you say, “This is the joyful feast of the people of God,” you notice the somber faces of the congregation. In fact, many members of the congregation don’t seem to take much joy in the Christian life.

You and the session decide to focus on Christian joy for a new adult education series. In your preparation, you reflect on the following quote:

What is Christ's joy in us, but that He deigns to rejoice on our account? And what is our joy, which He says shall be full, but to have fellowship with Him? ... And this joy we rightly call our own, this joy wherewith we shall be blessed; which is begun in the faith of them who are born again, and shall be fulfilled in the reward of them who rise again. (St. Augustine, Tractate 83 on John 15.11-12)

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Write a talk on *Christian joy* to be used during the first class of the series, which will occur on a Communion Sunday. Base your talk on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

**JANUARY 2012
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 6 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

The communications committee invites you as pastor to attend its meeting to discuss the use of social media (e.g., email lists, Facebook, Twitter) in the congregation's ministry. The committee members believe that you can provide important theological reflection, and they offer three quotations that can focus the discussion.

The church disperses to serve God wherever its members are, at work or play, in private or in the life of society. Their prayer and Bible study are part of the church's worship and theological reflection. Their witness is the church's evangelism. Their daily action in the world is the church in mission in the world. The quality of their relation with other persons is the measure of the church's fidelity. (Confession of 1967, 9.37)

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.... (John 1:14, English Standard Version)

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. (Matthew 18:20, New Revised Standard Version)

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Write a presentation for the committee reflecting theologically on *community and incarnation in relation to social media* from a Reformed perspective. Refer to each of the quotations provided by the committee and use at least one (1) additional resource from: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

— OR —

JANUARY 2012
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 7 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

After a presbytery meeting, you, a pastor, carpool home with a group of teaching elders and ruling elders. Your colleagues make the following comments:

Ben: I can't believe the presbytery even considered that overture to General Assembly. Just bringing it up seems divisive and threatens the unity of the church.

Esau: Oh, disagreeing is part of being church—always has been, always will be. I revel in the diversity God created. No one can expect us to agree on much of anything.

Naomi: Diversity is overemphasized. Singing the closing hymn in languages that we don't understand was pointless.

Marta: I enjoyed that hymn. It reminded me that the church is not just here but all over the world. I wish our local ecumenical agency would remember that. All it ever does is deal with the city's civil rights issues.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of *church unity*. Base your discussion on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to two (2) issues the carpoolers raised.

AUGUST 2012
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE

OPEN BOOK

REQUIRED

Julia, a member of the congregation you serve, has been trying to deepen her prayer life. She comes to you excited and says, “Pastor, I just came across this quotation in my reading:

‘... the whole threefold life of the three-personal being is actually going on in that ordinary little bedroom where an ordinary Christian is saying his prayers.’ (*Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis)

I’m so eager to see how all three persons of the Trinity are involved in my prayer life.”

REQUIRED RESPONSE

In light of the C. S. Lewis quotation, write an essay reflecting a Reformed understanding of *the relationship of the Trinity and prayer*. In the essay, discuss at least three (3) citations from *The Book of Confessions* (e.g., 0.000), drawing from at least three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*.

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1943), 143.

AUGUST 2012
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

OPEN BOOK

REQUIRED

As pastor, you are planning an adult Sunday school class about the meaning of church membership. You base your preparation on the following section of The Westminster Confession:

All saints being united to Jesus Christ their head, by his Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as to conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man. (6.146)

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of what *communion with Christ teaches us about living in Christian community*. In addition to the quotation above, use at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Based on your work in Required Response 1, write an outline of the topics to be covered during the class (approximately 150-200 words).

AUGUST 2012
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

Lydia and Brad, a couple in the congregation you serve, make an appointment to see you about some personal financial difficulties they are experiencing. As pastor, you know that Brad lost his job last month.

The couple tells you, “We are getting by on one income, but we wanted you to know that we won’t be able to meet our pledge for this year. In fact, given the circumstances, we are struggling with whether we can afford to give to the church at all.

“We have friends who told us they don’t give money to the church because they volunteer so much of their time. We started wondering, with our financial difficulties and all the time we give to the church, is it really okay if we stop giving money, too?”

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Offer a Reformed theological response to the couple, discussing the *significance of different types of giving to the church*. Base your response on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

-- OR --

AUGUST 2012
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

A local ministry group has asked you to speak about the soup kitchen run by the church you serve as pastor. The soup kitchen is named Strength for the Journey, based on 1 Kings 19:4-8:

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. (New Revised Standard Version)

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Write the portion of your speech that addresses a Reformed understanding of *the need for and gift of food*. In addition to 1 Kings 19:4-8, use and discuss at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

JANUARY 2013
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE

OPEN BOOK (*The Book of Confessions* only)

REQUIRED

One of the adult classes at the church you serve is discussing eternal life as part of an Easter season study. You are asked, “Does an understanding of eternal life speak to our lives in the here and now, or is it all about life after death? What does the Church think about eternal life?”

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Write an essay articulating *the concept of eternal life in Christ* as evidenced in *The Book of Confessions*. Use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000), from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*, including:

- at least one (1) from the Reformation-era documents, and
- at least one (1) from the twentieth-century documents.

JANUARY 2013
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

OPEN BOOK (*The Book of Confessions* only)

REQUIRED

As pastor, you are leading a Bible study. One week you teach from Acts 2:1–4:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (New Revised Standard Version)

The following discussion takes place in the class:

Mary: My friend told me the most important benefit of receiving the Holy Spirit is the power to speak in tongues. Do we believe that?

Greg: And, I thought that when I became a member of the church the Holy Spirit would come over me, my life would be better, and I would be happy every day. Why hasn't that happened?

Darnell: The Holy Spirit is a gift to the Church, not us personally.

Tracy: Does the Holy Spirit do anything any more? I thought Pentecost was just a one time thing. We're the ones who make the church work.

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of the *Holy Spirit's work in the life of the Church*. As part of the essay, identify and discuss at least two (2) theological issues raised by the class. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

If you use Acts 2:1-4 for the essay, you must use at least two (2) additional resources.

JANUARY 2013
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

OPEN BOOK (*The Book of Confessions only*)

REQUIRED (CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

As pastor, you have invited the youth group to help plan and lead a Sunday morning worship service. As part of their preparation, they worshiped at several different churches. They offer these ideas:

Lina: When it's time for the Gospel reading, let's ask everyone to stand while I carry the Bible to the middle of the sanctuary and read it there. We saw that at two different churches. It shows special respect for the Gospels, which contain Jesus' words.

Pam: At one church we sang songs that really made me think about asking Jesus into my life. It was so inspiring!

Dave: And worship should be inspiring. That's why we should skip the confession of sin. God forgives us anyway.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Choose two (2) of the youth group's comments. For each comment, identify one (1) theological issue it raises and discuss a Reformed understanding of that issue. Base your discussion on at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Based on Required Response 1, explain to the group how Reformed theology informs our worship practices.

-- OR --

JANUARY 2013
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

OPEN BOOK (*The Book of Confessions* only)

REQUIRED (CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

A teenager in your community was the target of a hate crime at school. The community is in an uproar. Some members of the session of the church you serve as pastor would like to find ways to minister to the community.

The following discussion ensues.

April: Isn't the school going to sort it out? I think that's something the school's social worker should do, not the church.

Rochelle: Hate crimes are not a secular issue. Jesus talked about hate, so the church should take the lead.

Conan: Maybe we should have a prayer service, because there is nothing else we can do. God has to take care of it.

DeAndre: We are God's hands and feet in the world. There's no reconciliation without us.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of the *Church's role in Christ's reconciling work*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, discuss three (3) ways that the church could minister to the community.

Presbyterian Church (USA) Standard Ordination Exam
Theological Competence
August 2013

Section I

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED
THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY

As pastor, you build the annual training for new session members around the great themes of the Reformed tradition as listed in F-2.05 in the *Book of Order*. The first theme is “the election of the people of God for service as well as for salvation.” You decide to begin the discussion of election by reading Ephesians 2:8-10:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God--not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (New Revised Standard Version)

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Write an essay based on *The Book of Confessions* articulating a Reformed understanding of the *doctrine of election*. Identify and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents. Include discussion of the Ephesians passage cited above.

Section II

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED
THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY

The session and the mission committee of the congregation you serve as pastor have discerned that the congregation is called to prison ministry at the local juvenile correctional facility. Several members of session express nervousness about how the congregation will react when the ministry begins. They wonder out loud:

“Will some members think they're better than the kids who are behind bars?”

“Will we be gracious in conversation with the kids if they decide to tell us that they did something wrong?”

“Shouldn't we focus more on our kids? They deserve it.”

The session takes you up on your offer to write a newsletter article to go with the session's announcement of the new ministry. You decide to focus on how awareness of our own sin leads us to humility and compassion.

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Write a newsletter article in which you discuss ways in which a Reformed understanding of the *doctrine of sin* can lead to humility and compassion. Draw on at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

Section III, A

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED
THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY
(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

You facilitate a sermon reflection group at the congregation you serve as pastor. The group is comprised of adults of different ages. After preaching a sermon on “The Spiritual Life,” you hear this discussion.

| | |
|---------|---|
| Jewel: | Spirituality is so personal, so individual. No one can tell me what my spirituality is, and it doesn't matter, as long as it feels right. Being spiritual is so much more important than being religious. |
| Ron: | I agree with the personal part. No one has any business in my faith, but don't we need traditions for learning about spirituality in the first place? |
| Gina: | If we didn't have the institution of the church, we would never learn about what it means to be a community. There's no spirituality without the institution. |
| Nathan: | I don't care about the institution. Isn't it the moment that's sacred whether I'm by myself or at church? |

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay articulating a Reformed understanding of the *importance of Christian community for the spiritual life of Christians*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on Required Response 1, respond theologically to at least three (3) of the people above.

-- OR PROCEED TO NEXT PAGE FOR OPTION B --

Section III, B

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY (CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

Ralph and Ed are neighbors and members of the congregation you serve as pastor. They have always been friends, but recently they have had a falling out over a property line dispute. Ralph explained it to you this way:

“Pastor, it all started when Ed built that new garage. It seemed like it was a bit too close to my house. I mentioned it to him a couple of times, and he brushed it off. Well, I finally had a property survey done, and it turns out he built that thing on my property! I told him this is a matter for the civil courts, and he said if I sue him he will sue me because our daughter keeps a couple of chickens in the back yard. Now I can't even stand to see him in church.”

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed theological understanding of *how disputes are resolved between Christians*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on Required Response 1, respond theologically to Ralph.

-- OR RETURN TO PREVIOUS PAGE FOR OPTION A --

Theology
January 2014

Section I

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED
THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY

During a retreat with the session of the congregation you serve as pastor, you are leading an orientation to the *Book of Order*. In the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, you come to a list of great themes of the Reformed tradition, including:

The recognition of the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny, which calls the people of God to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God. (F-2.05)

The following conversation ensues:

| | |
|---------|--|
| Sarah: | I think it is a sin the way we worship sports figures as though they are gods. I hate the way sports teams hold cities hostage, demanding money for a new stadium. |
| Phoebe: | I think idolatry has more to do with where we put our trust. It seems to me we put our trust in money instead of God. I know I often let money instead of God control my decisions about things. |
| David: | I wonder if we have allowed idolatry to creep into our politics. We put ourselves at the mercy of our politicians and expect them to save us. |

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Write an essay from a Reformed perspective in which you discuss *the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny*. Use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*.

Section II

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY

Young adults in the congregation you serve as pastor are struggling to understand their lives as service to God. Some are doubtful about their jobs, and some can't find work. They are eager to respond to God's call, whatever it may be, whether it's their job or other service. Some of them come to you for advice on how they might discern the life to which God is calling them.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of *the doctrine of vocation*, particularly as it places emphasis on a life of gratitude. Use at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Drawing on Required Response 1, identify and briefly discuss two (2) spiritual practices the young adults could use to help them discern the life to which God is calling them.

Section III, A

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED
THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY
(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

In the past, the congregational care committee of the congregation you serve as pastor has received mixed reactions when they have tried to console members with statements like:

It's God's will.

She's in a better place.

God won't give you more than you can handle.

This may be a blessing in disguise.

The committee invites you to its next meeting. They want help in thinking through their ministry with members of the congregation facing hard times, disaster, tragedy, or grief.

REQUIRED RESPONSE

In response to the committee's request, write a presentation discussing a Reformed understanding of *God's providence and presence in the midst of human suffering*. Base your presentation on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

-- OR PROCEED TO NEXT PAGE FOR OPTION B --

Section III, B

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED
THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY
(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

Jim, a member of the congregation you serve, comes to you for pastoral counseling. He confesses that he harbors some doubts when he joins in the corporate confession of faith during Sunday worship. He says, “I don’t know if anyone else feels this way, but there are some things we say that I’m not sure I believe. I feel like I’m lying when I say them. Do you think I’m a hypocrite?”

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay discussing *faith and doubt in the Christian life*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on Required Response 1, describe how you would respond theologically to Jim’s concerns.

-- OR RETURN TO PREVIOUS PAGE FOR OPTION A --

Theology, Summer 2014

Section I

The Historic Principles of Church Order (F-3.01) begin with the importance of the freedom of conscience:

That “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.” (F-3.0101a)

In contrast, the Apostle Paul emphasizes unity of spirit among Christians in Philippians 1:27:

Most important, live together in a manner worthy of Christ’s gospel. Do this, whether I come and see you or I’m absent and hear about you. Do this so that you stand firm, **united in one spirit** and mind **as you struggle together to remain faithful to the gospel**. (Common English Bible, emphasis added)

REQUIRED RESPONSE:

Write an essay from a Reformed perspective on the **relationship between freedom of conscience and Christian unity**. In the essay, use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*.

Section II

Julie, a member of the youth group at the congregation you are serving as pastor, is hospitalized with life-threatening injuries received in a traffic accident. The youth have been asked to offer their personal prayers, and requests for additional prayers are circulating through the various social media.

Three of Julie's friends come to you with questions:

Aaron: Pastor, what difference does it make to God if one person or a hundred people offer a prayer for Julie?

Rebecca: I thought that God was unchangeable. Can prayer change God's mind?

Joseph: Doesn't God already know what we want? Why do we need to pray at all?

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of **the efficacy of prayer**, taking into account the above scenario. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on the essay, respond theologically to two (2) of Julie's friends.

Section III

This year the theme for Vacation Bible School (VBS) is “The Fruit of the Spirit,” based on Galatians 5:22-26:

By contrast the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. . . . If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another. (New Revised Standard Version)

As pastor, you are leading a study of the passage as part of the training for the VBS staff. The following discussion ensues:

Faye: That’s quite a list. How do we teach the children to act like this?

Jim: No human being can possibly be that good. I’m not very patient. Does that mean I don’t have the Spirit?

Alberta: My neighbor isn’t Christian, but he sure has a lot of those qualities. How can that be?

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of **the work of the Holy Spirit in human life**. In the essay, use at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology. Any biblical references must be in addition to Galatians 5:22-26.
2. Building on your essay, describe how you would respond theologically to two (2) members of the VBS staff.

Theological Competence

Fall 2014

Section I: Confessional Heritage

Ellie, a member of the congregation where you serve as pastor, comes into your office. She is troubled, saying, "Since I became a Christian, I have tried to be a good person. In fact, every day I try to be a better person than I was the day before. But no matter how much better I become I never feel like I am good enough."

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay expressing a Reformed understanding of **the relationship between justification and sanctification**. In the essay, use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*.
2. Building on the essay, describe how you would respond theologically to Ellie's concern.

Theological Competence

Fall 2014

Section II: Constructive Statement of Christian Doctrine

As pastor, you are teaching the youth Sunday School class. The class has been learning about the parts of the worship service, and you are now discussing the sermon. The following comments and questions are voiced:

Alex: My uncle is a preacher in another denomination. He doesn't write his sermons. He just gets up and lets the Holy Spirit take over. Why do you write your sermons? Don't you want the Holy Spirit to speak through you?

Beth: I just love the stories you tell in your sermons, Pastor! Sometimes they make me laugh; sometimes they make me cry, but they always touch my heart, which is what a sermon should do.

Greg: I really like it when you teach us about what it was like in Bible times. I get a better understanding of the Bible when you explain what things were like back then.

Hannah: Do you ever wonder if your sermons really make a difference in people's lives? To be honest, even though I enjoy your preaching, sometimes I can't remember on Monday what you said on Sunday.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of **the efficacy of preaching**. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your essay in Required Response 1, describe how you would respond theologically to at least two (2) of the students in the youth Sunday School class.

Theological Competence

Fall 2014

Section III: Application to Ministry

The worship committee of the congregation you serve as pastor has received permission from the session to put together a new worship service that will be more contemporary than the traditional service on Sunday morning. As the committee begins its work, questions arise about what will be included in the order of service. Members of the committee are concerned that this service should be more upbeat and positive. Therefore, they believe the new service should not include a corporate prayer of confession of sin.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay giving a Reformed understanding of **corporate confession of sin**. Base your discussion on at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on Required Response 1, describe how you would address theologically the worship committee's concern about including a corporate confession of sin.

Theology, Winter 2015

Section I, Confessional Heritage

As you prepare for your ordination as a teaching elder, you have been reviewing the ordination questions. You read the second question:

Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you? (W-4.4003b)

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay articulating a Reformed understanding of **the Scriptures as the Word of God** as evidenced in *The Book of Confessions*. In the essay, use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*, including:

- at least one (1) from the Reformation-era documents, and
- at least one (1) from the twentieth-century documents.

2. Building on Required Response 1, provide a brief theological reflection on this ordination question.

Section II, Constructive Statement of Christian Doctrine

As associate pastor for youth at the congregation you serve, you are leading a confirmation class. You introduce the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers using 1 Peter 2:9-10 as your biblical text:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession. You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light. Once you weren't a people, but now you are God's people. Once you hadn't received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
(Common English Bible)

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of the **doctrine of the priesthood of all believers**. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology. Any biblical references must be in addition to 1 Peter 2:9-10.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, prepare a lesson outline for your class concerning the priesthood of all believers.

Section III, Application to Ministry

As pastor, you walk into the Current Events Sunday School class and find yourself in the midst of a heated discussion provoked by recent events:

Bill: I cannot believe all the horrible stuff in the news this week—people killing each other, corrupt politicians, callous business people, hypocritical religious leaders. It's depressing.

Jim: What do you expect? It's human nature. Human beings are born in sin. They are evil to their core.

Sandy: I cannot believe that! I think people are basically good and decent. They want to do the right thing. They just make mistakes sometimes.

Tom: Help us out here, Pastor. What does Christianity teach us about human nature? Are we basically good or bad?

You agree to come back the next week to lead a class on the topic.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of **human nature**. Base your discussion on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your essay in Required Response 1, provide an outline of the lesson you would offer the class the following week.