

## Fall 2023 Theology Exam

### Section I: Reformed Confessional Heritage

You serve as pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church. Several nearby congregations of other denominations are talking about closing. At a session meeting, an elder suggests recruiting some members from these congregations, which prompts the following discussion:

- Dick: I'm not sure recruiting from those congregations is a good idea. Some denominations don't believe or worship like we do, and differences are important. I don't want to lose our Presbyterian identity here.
- Martha: I think it would be great if some of them became Presbyterian. We'd be correcting their misunderstanding of the faith, offering them a true spiritual home, and helping our church grow at the same time.
- Riley: Aren't we all one in Christ? Our common ground is obviously more important than our differences.

**REQUIRED RESPONSES:** (*Total responses in this Section not to exceed 1,200 words.*)

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of the **catholicity of the church**. In the essay, you must identify 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 in Required Response 1, respond directly to Dick, Martha, and Riley.

## Section II: Constructive Statement of Christian Doctrine

You are the pastor of Unity Presbyterian Church. At your annual session retreat, you read the following quotations from the Second Helvetic Confession:

- 5.146 ... Therefore, as God gave unto his ancient people the patriarchs, together with Moses and the prophets, so also to his people of the New Testament he sent his only-begotten Son, and, with him, the apostles and teachers of the Church.
- 5.147 ... Furthermore, the ministers of the new people are called by various names. For they are called apostles, prophets, evangelists, bishops, elders, pastors, and teachers....

You invite the session members to reflect on what you read.

Tom:	The confession mentions “ancient” and “new” people of God. If Christians are the new people of God, does that mean that Jews are no longer the people of God?
Karena:	Well, I think the people of God are not only Jews or Christians but all those who live a good life.
Ana:	You mean I can consider Buddhists or Muslims people of God? I thought we become part of God’s people when we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior. I’m confused!

**REQUIRED RESPONSES:** *(Total responses in this Section not to exceed 1,200 words.)*

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of **the people of God**. In the essay, you must use at least two (2) of the following resources: the Scriptures, classical theology (sources before 1900), modern theology (sources since 1900). Sections 5.146 and 5.147 from the Second Helvetic Confession may be used in the essay but will not count as one of the required resources.
2. Building on the essay in Required Response 1, respond directly to Tom, Karena, and Ana.

### Section III: Application to Ministry

You are the pastor of Providence Presbyterian Church. You are leading an adult Bible study on Hebrews 11:1 (NRSV): “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” You ask, “If faith is the assurance of something you hope for and have not seen, does it mean that reason and knowledge have no bearing on our faith?” Your question prompts the following discussion:

Esther:	Using reason to discover evidence of God in the world can lead you to faith. My faith in God has grown as I’ve studied and learned about the world.
Juan:	How can you reason your way to a transcendent God? Faith has nothing to do with reason.
Daniel:	I agree with Juan that faith and reason are distinct, but the things we believe have to be compatible with reason, or we can’t believe them.

**REQUIRED RESPONSES:** *(Total responses in this Section not to exceed 1,200 words.)*

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of **the relationship between faith and reason**. In the essay, you must use at least two (2) of the following resources: the Scriptures, classical theology (sources before 1900), modern theology (sources since 1900). Hebrews 11:1 may be used in the essay, but it will not count as one of the required resources.
2. Building on the essay in Required Response 1, respond directly to Esther, Juan, and Daniel.