

FEBRUARY 2005

**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.

The word "Reformed," wherever it is used in this examination, means a theological perspective in broad agreement with the theology of John Calvin, the confessional literature of the Reformed churches, and *The Book of Confessions*.

WHAT IS NOT BEING EXAMINED

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GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (Continued)

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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Papers that cannot be understood by the readers because of poor syntax and/or grammar shall be graded accordingly.

The final grade for the examination will be the average of grades received on all three sections. Rounding up or down shall be determined by the reader on the basis of the examination's overall merit. All three sections must be answered. The paper must receive a grade of 3 or higher on at least two of the three sections to be considered Satisfactory.

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SECTION I. CONFSSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

(THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY)

You have stopped by a coffee shop in the community you serve as pastor. A number of patrons talk with you, making these comments:

- Fred: Weak people need religion. The church is a good thing for them, that is, if you can call enabling weakness “good.”
- Georgia: As long as the church is willing to admit that it is historically conditioned, I can live with it. But it has no right to claim absolute truth.
- Peter: God has established the church, and I believe it is eternal.
- Joanna: When church leaders act immorally or teach a bunch of lies, then what they call “the church” is just a sham.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay, articulating a Reformed understanding of the *nature and purpose of the Church*. Use and discuss at least one (1) citation from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions* (e.g., 0.000).
2. Based on your answer in required response 1, respond to the points of view of two (2) of the persons above.

NOTE: Section I must be completed in one hour. A clean, unmarked, printed copy of *The Book of Confessions*, 2002 or later, must be used. (The Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms will be considered one document for the purposes of this examination.) When you complete Section I, give your copy of *The Book of Confessions* to the proctor, who will then give you Sections II and III of the examination (pp. 5-7).

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SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

Consider the following two quotations:

Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it 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.

John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 3.2.7

[This kind of knowledge] is not apprehended by the understanding and memory alone, as other disciplines are, but it is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds a seat and resting place in the inmost affection of the heart. ... We have given the first place to the doctrine in which our religion is contained, since our salvation begins with it. But it must enter our heart and pass into our daily living, and so transform us into itself that it may not be unfruitful for us.

Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.6.4

REQUIRED RESPONSE:

In response to the quotations above, discuss a Reformed understanding of *faith*. Base your discussion on at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

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SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

CHOOSE ONE: A or B

A.

You are attending a meeting of the Church Growth Task Force of the church you serve as pastor. The following conversation takes place:

Richard: I read a wonderful book about church growth. It guarantees that if we build a bigger parking lot, have a clean nursery, and stop passing offering plates, then our church will definitely grow by 20% next year. Let's do it!

Alice: I thought that people can plant and water, but that God provides the growth. We should spend our meetings praying that we get more members.

Johann: Should we be concerned about numbers? I think we need to form Bible study groups and prayer groups so that the members we have can grow deeper in their spirituality.

Zelda: We need to teach members about witnessing to their neighbors and co-workers, so that they will make decisions for Christ. It doesn't matter if they join our church or any church.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay, articulating a theological understanding of *church growth and evangelism*. Base your discussion on your knowledge of the Reformed tradition, 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 people above.

- OR -

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SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (Continued)

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

CHOOSE ONE: A or B

B.

You are the pastor leading adults in a discussion of *God alone being Lord of the conscience*. At one point, the following remarks are made:

- Lou: Personal freedom is important to me, and I like how people in our church have so many different points of view about everything.
- Martha: Christians should be more in agreement with one another, and I like that Presbyterians have such a strong form of government.
- Toby: Well, we should be subject to church authorities and not resist them. I say we look to our leaders for direction and trust their judgment.
- Rhonda: I wonder how much freedom of thought I should have. When in humility should I put my own point of view aside for the sake of others?

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Discuss a Reformed understanding of *God alone being Lord of the conscience*. Use in your answer 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 people above.

AUGUST 2005

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GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (Continued)

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SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

(THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY)

A group of four seminarians has regularly visited the church where you are the pastor. They are meeting with you in order to ask about the principles of biblical interpretation that you use in developing your sermons. They offer their own opinions:

- Cal: Preachers should never distract from the plain sense of Scripture. People would be better off if ministers simply read the Bible for twenty minutes instead of preaching.
- Freda: The Bible is filled with timeless truths, but they need to be distilled from the historical circumstances that obscure them. To do that, a preacher needs to know Hebrew and Greek.
- Jack: Our tradition has used the Bible as an instrument of power by the strong against the weak. To restore justice, the Bible must be deconstructed and then reconstructed, releasing people from the oppression of hierarchy.
- Karla: Every passage has to do with Jesus' love for us. Love and Jesus should be the main point of every sermon.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay about Reformed principles of *biblical interpretation* as found 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*.
2. Building upon your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to at least two (2) of the students.

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THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

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SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

Consider the following quotation:

Q. 167. How is our Baptism to be improved by us?

- A. The needful but much neglected duty of improving our Baptism,
is to be performed by us all our life long,
especially in the time of temptation ...
by being humbled for our sinful defilement,
our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of Baptism...
by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin...
by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ,
into whom we are baptized...
and by endeavoring to live by faith...
and to walk in brotherly love,
as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.

The Westminster Larger Catechism, 7.277

REQUIRED RESPONSE:

Write an essay on the *implications of baptism for the Christian life* that reflects your consideration of this quotation. Base your discussion on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

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THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

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SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

CHOOSE ONE: A or B

A.

You are the pastor leading an adult class discussing human bodily existence in light of the incarnation of Christ. The following conversation occurs:

Reta: Pastor, you just said, “The Word became flesh and lived among us.”
 That must mean something for my body.

Ben: I watch what I eat, exercise regularly, and keep track of my health
 because my body is my temple.

Lucia: But your body is only temporary. God cares more about our eternal
 souls.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay discussing *human bodily existence in light of the incarnation of 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 upon your answer in Required Response 1, respond to Ben and Lucia.

– OR –

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THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

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SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (Continued)

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

CHOOSE ONE: A or B

B.

You are moderating a session meeting of the church you serve as pastor. In preparation for endorsing a member who is moving from being an inquirer to becoming a candidate for the ministry, the session is discussing a Reformed understanding of the calling of persons to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. The following points are raised.

First, there is an inner sense of God's calling on the part of the one being called.

Second, there is the affirmation of the people of God, expressed through a call to a particular ministry in the church and through approval by some appropriate body of the church, such as a presbytery.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay on the relationship between the *inner sense of God's calling* to the ministry of Word and Sacrament and the *affirmation of the people of God*. 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 upon your answer in Required Response 1, identify and discuss one (1) or more problems that might emerge if either the inner sense of calling or the affirmation of the people of God were emphasized to the exclusion of the other.

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GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (Continued)

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SECTION I. CONFSSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

(THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY)

Consider the following quotation:

The new life does not release a man from conflict with unbelief, pride, lust, fear. He still has to struggle with disheartening difficulties and problems. Nevertheless, as he matures in love and faithfulness in his life with Christ, he lives in freedom and good cheer, bearing witness on good days and evil days, confident that the new life is pleasing to God and helpful to others.

The Confession of 1967, 9.23

REQUIRED RESPONSE:

Write an essay articulating a Reformed understanding of the *new life of Christ*. In your essay discuss the quotation above and at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of two (2) different documents in *The Book of Confessions* other than the Confession of 1967.

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SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

Daniela, an elder in the church you serve as pastor, comes to you for advice:

When I think of all the injustices in the world, I pray “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” But sometimes I feel like the kingdom won’t come unless I do something. And then other times I feel that Jesus is already Lord and doesn’t need my help.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay on the *relationship of the coming reign of God to its present manifestation*. 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 Daniela’s concern about injustice.

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SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

CHOOSE ONE: A or B

A.

Gail is a member of the church you serve as pastor. Gail shows you a letter from her sister Mary, a Presbyterian elder, who lives across the country. It reads:

I feel that other people are constantly trying to tell me who I really am. Sometimes it seems like my kids think of me as only a mother, and my husband views me as only a wife. At work, I get the feeling that I'm not worth anything unless I make money for the company. I turn on the TV and see advertisers who tell me I'm "worth it" and deserve the very best. Some friends tell me that someone like me should vote for one party; others say another. And the hardest part is I'm not sure who I really am anymore.

Gail says, "It makes me sad that she doesn't know who she is."

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Articulate an understanding of *identity as given by God*. Base your answer 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, discuss how Mary's God-given identity could help her respond to two (2) of the other identities that people want to give her.

– OR –

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SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (Continued)

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

CHOOSE ONE: A or B

B.

An oil tanker has run aground offshore, near the community where you are pastor, spilling oil on miles of coastline. The following Sunday the focus of the worship services is on Christian life as a life of gratitude. After the service, you find yourself in the following conversation:

- Joleen: When we sang “Lord of all to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise,” all I could think of was the dead seabirds littering the beach. It makes me weep. The church should say something!
- Robert: This isn’t about seabirds! Accidents happen. It’s part of the price we pay for doing business, and it doesn’t have anything to do with God.
- Mi Yoon: We should be thankful for oil as a resource and for the jobs it creates. We can’t put nature above the needs of people.
- Pedro: If we were really grateful to God, we wouldn’t behave in ways that risk killing life on the planet.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay articulating a theological understanding of *the relationship between gratitude to God and ecological responsibility*. Base your answer 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 people above.

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GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

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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THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

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SECTION I. CONFSSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

(THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY)

A Bible study class is reading the following text from Romans:

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Romans 8:31-34, NRSV

The class asks questions about the relationship of Christ's intercession to our own prayers.

REQUIRED RESPONSE:

Write an essay discussing how *Christ's role as intercessor shapes a Reformed practice of prayer*. 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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SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

A group of elders from the congregation you serve as pastor is talking before a meeting. Recently the news has been covering terrible killings in another country.

Mikala: I think that all this evil starts with the moral choices individuals make. We need to convert people to Jesus one at a time, and the world will be less evil.

Gavin: I disagree. It's not about individuals and their choices. The Evil One captures the hearts of people, the way Satan entered Judas. God is the one who does battle with principalities and powers.

Helena: I don't like all this talk about how the Devil made me do it. Anonymous corporations, systems, and governments are the root of evil. The church needs to live prophetically, transforming evil social organizations and systems.

Eun-Joo: I believe that since God created everything good, all the things we think are evil are just our misunderstanding of what God is doing.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of *evil*. 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, briefly identify at least one (1) thing that is wrong or incomplete in each of three (3) of the comments above.

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THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

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SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

CHOOSE ONE: A or B

A.

You are visiting Pat, one of the older members of the church you serve as pastor. During the conversation, Pat says to you:

As I get older, there is less and less I can do for the church. I can't witness door-to-door anymore because I can't climb steps. I can't drive at night, so I can't come to evening meetings. Sometimes I'm so sick I can't even make it to Sunday worship. How can I serve anyone? I hear in my mind "faith without works is dead," so if I can't work, it feels like my faith is dead. And if that's the case, I wonder if grace is gone too. I'm afraid that I'm becoming passive, doing nothing, instead of glorifying God by being an active Christian. I know I'm not saved by my works. But I don't know if simply having faith is enough.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay discussing the *significance of justification by grace through faith for someone in declining health*. 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 Pat's concern.

– OR –

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SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

CHOOSE ONE: A or B

B.

The church you serve as pastor is considering how to tell non-believers who God is. The following discussion takes place before a session meeting:

Priscilla: I'd tell people to add up the biblical data: the prophets, the resurrection, and the growth of the church. I can prove with certainty from the Bible that God exists and that Jesus is the Savior.

Thomas: The Bible doesn't prove anything. Priscilla, to be human is to doubt. None of us can see God. We bear witness to a God we never really know.

Kesia: I feel I can explain God best to non-believers if I take them hiking and let them see God's handiwork in nature.

Stephen: People don't need any evidence. I know in my heart that God loves me. God's Spirit speaks to my spirit. And God will speak to others, too.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *how Christians can help non-believers know who God is*. 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 three (3) of the people above.

JANUARY 2007

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

MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

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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.
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**JANUARY 2007
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 2 of 7

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

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THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 3 of 7

SECTION I. CONFSSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

(THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY)

REQUIRED RESPONSE:

Write an essay articulating continuities and changes in the understanding of the *catholicity of the church* throughout the centuries as evidenced in *The Book of Confessions*.

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

- at least one (1) from either the Nicene Creed or the Apostles' Creed,
- at least one (1) from the Reformation-era or Puritan-era documents, and
- at least one (1) from the twentieth-century documents.

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THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

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SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

You are leading an adult class on the Trinity. This leads into a conversation about how relationships among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit illuminate human relationships.

- Gregory: This talk about relationships makes me nervous. I think good personal boundaries are important. We need to be our own selves.
- Martha: Relationships are strained in our church. There's no sense of mutuality here. A small group runs everything.
- Twyla: I'm really frustrated with our world mission relationships, because our daughter churches aren't following our lead.
- Sang: We can't relate to each other if we can't even talk to each other. I couldn't believe how rude we were during the last election campaign.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay on *how relationships among the three persons of the Trinity illuminate human relationships*. 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 theological to two (2) of the class members above.

**JANUARY 2007
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 6 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

CHOOSE ONE: A or B

A.

During the first several months of your ministry as a pastor, people have shared their criteria for either joining or leaving the church. Three instances are memorable:

Donald: Some of my best friends are here, but before I join I need to shop around to make sure this church is just the right fit for my interests in music, community outreach, and physical fitness.

Milton: My family and I cannot attend here anymore because we no longer feel like the programs of this church meet the needs of our children the way they used to.

Suzy: I attend Sunday school here because this church has the best adult Christian education in town. But since the best preaching is at the church across the street, I worship there. And after worship I head across town to another church where they have the best coffee hour.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay on the *practice of ministry in a consumer 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 upon your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to one (1) of the people above.

– OR –

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THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

Page 7 of 7

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

CHOOSE ONE: A or B

B.

The church you serve as pastor has a successful job skills training ministry that includes Christian prayers and inspirational messages. The program director approaches you, suggesting that the church apply for funding through a government grant. In a meeting to discuss this proposal, you hear the following comments:

Johanna: We shouldn't accept government money. Between the politics and the red tape, they'll end up corrupting our ministry.

Marty: We've wanted this ministry to grow for years. The government can do good things, and now that they've realized what we do is important, I think we should take advantage of this opportunity.

Steena: If we work with the government, we'll have to give up the things that make our ministry distinct and valuable—like the fact that we can share the good news of the gospel with the trainees.

Rennie: But we already take advantage of government benefits: they don't tax us, they've re-zoned our land, and they regularly hire our trainees. We're connected to the government up to our necks, so I don't think it's a big deal that we take advantage of this opportunity.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *civil government*. 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 to at least two (2) of the persons above about the relationship of church to civil government.

AUGUST 2007

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

MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

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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**

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SECTION I. CONFSSIONAL 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 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**

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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.

JANUARY 2008

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

MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

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THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

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GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

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**JANUARY 2008
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 3 of 7

SECTION I. CONFSSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

(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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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.

AUGUST 2008

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

MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

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**AUGUST 2008
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 2 of 7

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

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**AUGUST 2008
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 3 of 7

SECTION I. CONFSSIONAL 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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THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

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AUGUST 2008
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION

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
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 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

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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.

JANUARY 2009

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

MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS

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**JANUARY 2009
THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

Page 2 of 7

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

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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**

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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**

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GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

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- **You may not consult or copy from personal notes or any other source on the computer or a network during the exam.**
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- **Include your candidate number on each page of the exam.**
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Syntax and grammar will not be graded. However, the grades of papers that cannot be understood because of poor syntax or grammar may be affected.

The final grade for the examination will be the average of grades received on all three sections. Rounding up or down shall be determined by the reader on the basis of the examination's overall merit. All three sections must be answered. The paper must receive a grade of 3 or higher on at least two of the three sections to be considered Satisfactory.

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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.

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. 5–7) of the examination.

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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.

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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.

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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

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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

WHAT IS BEING EXAMINED

The Examination of Theological Competence seeks to determine the candidate's readiness for ministry in the use of biblical, classical, and contemporary theological insights within the Reformed heritage of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The examination may deal with questions of confessional, doctrinal, historical, 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. 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.

The word "Reformed," wherever it is used in this examination, means a theological perspective in broad agreement with the theology of John Calvin, the confessional literature of the Reformed churches, and *The Book of Confessions*.

WHAT IS NOT BEING EXAMINED

This examination does not seek to examine personal faith or to determine the acceptability of the candidate's views within Presbyterian confessional standards. That determination rests with the presbytery. Rather, this examination seeks to determine the candidate's competence to work within the Reformed theological heritage. There is some latitude within this heritage, and an answer will not be graded down for taking one position rather than another within the heritage. However, answers outside the scope of the Reformed heritage would tend to demonstrate lack of readiness for Presbyterian ministry.

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]

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THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE EXAMINATION**

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GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A clean, unmarked, printed copy of *The Book of Confessions* (copyright 2002 or later) will be needed as a resource for Section I of the examination. (The Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms 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**.

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SECTION I. CONFSSIONAL 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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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.

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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 -

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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.

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